

"KEEPING QUELCH QUIET!" Amazing School Adventures of **Billy Bunter of Greyfriars!**

The Magnet^{2D}



The
UNSEEN WITNESS!

FROM NORTH, SOUTH, EAST and WEST—EVERYONE SAYS THE MAGNET'S BEST!



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.

DOESN'T this changeable weather get on your nerves, chums? I know it does on mine. As I sit down to write this Chat the wind is blowing at gale force and the rain is teeming down by the bucketful! A few moments ago, the sun was shining and it looked as though we were in for a fairly fine day. Now—

Never mind, let the weather change as it may. The MAGNET never changes, anyway! The Old Paper is going stronger than ever these days, and every week new readers are joining the happy band of "Magnetites." They all seem to write and tell me how pleased they are to read the ripping yarns of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars. Boys and girls know a good paper when they see it—what? It is for the special benefit of these new readers that I am printing on this page a list of the ages, heights, weights and study numbers of the juniors in the Greyfriars Remove. I advise you all to keep this list by you for future reference. You will find it very useful when reading subsequent yarns of Harry Wharton & Co.

Talking of subsequent yarns reminds me of the splendid treat in store for you all next week in:

"THE HEAVY HAND!"

By Frank Richards,

the next yarn in our present popular series featuring Harry Wharton & Co. and Frank Courtenay & Co., of Higheliffe. Ponsonby, the cad of the Higheliffe Fourth, is trying his very hardest to bring about trouble between the two Co.'s. Success has not attended his efforts so far, however. Whether or no he will succeed in his rascally venture remains to be seen. Anyway, the mysterious disappearance of Mr. Quelch's gold watch-chain is still the topic of conversation at Greyfriars.

Horace Coker, especially, takes a very serious view of the matter, and resolves to look into it and set things right. Minding his own business has never been one of Coker's habits. But once the great Horace gets going there's no holding him. High-handed as his methods are, however, they prove fruitful, as you will learn for yourselves when you read the final yarn in this remarkable series next Saturday.

"The Greyfriars Herald" is better than ever. You can count on a real good laugh in the next episode of Dicky Nugent's masterpiece. Doctor Birchmell's a cute card—what?

Donald Ogilvy is the subject chosen by our clever Greyfriars Rhymester in his series of poems. Be sure and order this bumper number, won't you, chums?

EVER heard of JACK-IN-THE-BOX ISLAND,

chums? I must confess I hadn't until one of my Australian readers, Harry Franks, of Melbourne, told me about it. This curious island makes a habit of bobbing up in Lake Victoria, in the south.

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west of that state, and then disappearing again. It was first seen in 1928, after which it sunk, reappeared later, and then vanished again under a foot of water. Some time ago it suddenly bobbed up again three and a half feet out of the water and, strange to say, it was twice as large as it was before. No one knows why it behaves in this peculiar manner. There is a theory that it is forced up by petroleum gas, but no one can get evidence that this is so. The mystery still remains.

Here's a rather curious paragraph concerning

THE HORSE WITH SIX SKELETONS!

Not quite fifty years ago, a famous British racehorse died. It was called Eclipse, owing to the fact that it was born just after an eclipse had taken place. Eclipse won so many victories on the Turf that whenever it ran the other horses never had a look-in, and Eclipse ran off with all the stakes and prizes. The curious thing is that, remarkable as the horse had been during its lifetime, Eclipse was even more remarkable after it died! The reason? Well, there happens to be six complete skeletons in England to-day, each one of which is claimed to be the "authentic" skeleton of this wonder horse!

Every now and again, along comes a story which proves that there is still

HIDDEN TREASURE IN ENGLAND!

A builder's labourer in Dorchester has just struck a windfall by unearthing some. While digging, he found a number of coins which proved to be two-denarii pieces, dating back to the third century. These proved to be the first of a buried hoard of 22,000. All the coins have a heavy silver coating, and they have been declared to be "treasure trove." This means that the lucky finder will get the full value of every coin sold, and those which are not sold will be returned to him.

A CORONATION SOUVENIR.

Here is an idea for your collection of Coronation Souvenirs. A handsome casket and medal combined is offered free in exchange for coupons from both Rowntree's Cocoa and Table Jellies. The metal casket, which is packed with two layers of Rowntree's delicious chocolates and confectionery, is beautifully shaped and printed in fine colours. A recessed circle in the centre of the lid contains a magnificent Coronation medal, made of gold-coloured metal, with a portrait of their Majesties embossed on one side and commemorative wording on the other. Actually, the medal is an additional gift, as it is detachable from the lid. When it is removed, another portrait of the King and Queen is revealed. Send to Rowntree &

Co., Ltd., Casket Department, York, mentioning MAGNET, for a new illustrated list of this and other gifts.

NOW for a few RAPID-FIRE REPLIES

to queries sent in by various readers:

Is Gold the World's Most Valuable Metal? (G. B., of Brixton). No. Platinum is much more valuable than gold. Russia possesses the largest platinum deposits in the world.

Do Wild Cats Still Exist in Britain? ("Naturalist," of Oxford). Yes, mainly in Scotland. A wild cat weighing 10 lb. was captured alive recently by a gamekeeper in Sutherlandshire.

Which European Ruler has been Longest on the Throne? ("Inquirer," of Tavistock). Queen Wilhelmina, of Holland. She has reigned for forty-seven years.

Is There an Animal with Three Eyes? (John Harrison, of Tynemouth). Yes, the tuatara, of New Zealand, which is half-lizard and half-crocodile has three eyes. But the third eye is sightless.

Before winding up this Chat let me remind you that there is a powerful story of your old favourites Harry Wharton & Co. in our companion paper—the "Gem." The title is: "THE MYSTERY RAIDER!" and deals with the amazing escapades of a midnight marauder who commits a daring robbery. It's a Remove junior, but who—well, that's for you to find out yourself. Ask for the "Gem," on sale now, 2d.

THE REMOVE FORM, OR LOWER FOURTH.

Form-master: Mr. Horace Henry Samuel Quelch, M.A.

NAME	Age		Height		Weight		Study
	y.	m.	ft.	in.	st.	lb.	
Wharton, Harry (Capt.)	15	4	5	6	7	12	1
Brown, Tom	15	2	5	3	7	9	2
Bolsover, Percy	16	2	5	5	9	4	10
Bull, Johnny	15	3	5	2	9	4	14
Bulstrode, George	15	9	5	4	8	1	2
Bunter, William George	15	1	4	9	14	12	7
Cherry, Robert	15	2	5	4	8	3	13
Delarey, Piet	14	10	5	3	7	10	12
Desmond, Micky	14	11	5	0	7	5	6
Dupont, Napoleon	15	0	4	11	7	0	10
Dutton, Tom	15	4	5	2	8	1	7
Field (Squiff), S. Q. I.	15	3	5	4	8	0	11
Fish, Fisher T.	15	4	5	1	7	4	14
Hazeldene, Peter	15	1	5	1	7	3	2
Hilary, Richard	15	4	5	3	8	1	5
Kipps, Oliver	14	11	5	0	7	2	5
Linley, Mark	15	7	5	5	8	2	13
Mauleverer, Herbert	15	3	5	1	6	12	12
Morgan, David	14	10	4	11	6	13	6
Newland, Monty	14	3	5	2	7	12	9
Nugent, Frank	14	10	5	2	7	7	1
Ogilvy, Donald Robert	15	0	5	5	7	12	3
Penfold, Richard	15	1	5	3	8	0	9
Rake, Richard	14	11	5	4	7	8	6
Redwing, Tom	15	8	5	5	8	12	4
Russell, Richard	14	11	5	4	7	10	3
Singh, Hurree Jamset Ram	14	11	5	3	7	5	12
Skinner, Harold	15	6	5	4	7	3	11
Smith (Minor), Robert	14	8	5	1	7	0	8
Snoop, Sidney James	15	5	5	3	7	13	11
Stott, William	15	7	5	4	8	4	11
Todd, Alonzo Theophilus	15	0	5	4	6	10	7
Todd, Peter	15	10	5	6	7	13	7
Treluce, Anthony	15	8	5	3	7	12	9
Trevor, Herbert	14	11	4	11	7	3	9
Vernon-Smith, Herbert	15	10	5	5	8	1	4
Vivian, Jimmy	14	4	4	11	7	0	12
Wibley, William Ernest	15	3	5	0	7	12	6
Wun Lung	14	3	4	5	6	0	13

YOUR EDITOR.

Billy Bunter, of Greyfriars, is not enjoying life these days! He's played a practical joke on his Form-master—and now he's suffering the consequences! Amazing, indeed, is his scheme for—

KEEPING QUELCH QUIET!



By
FRANK RICHARDS

A Super Long Story of Schoolboy Adventure, featuring **HARRY WHARTON & CO., of GREYFRIARS.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Short and Sweet!

"O H, good!" gasped Billy Bunter.

It was morning break at Greyfriars School.

Billy Bunter was blinking up at the letter rack with an eager blink through his big spectacles.

And at the sight of a letter there addressed to himself, his fat face was irradiated by a happy grin of satisfaction.

He grabbed that letter with an eager, fat hand.

A dozen fellows glanced at him, and most of them grinned.

That letter was addressed to the Owl of the Remove, in the hand of his father, Mr. William Samuel Bunter. Billy Bunter's look indicated that he expected to find something of a very gratifying nature therein.

Billy Bunter had a hopeful nature. Every time he received a letter from home he hoped to find in it the postal order he had long been expecting.

This time, however, he seemed more hopeful than usual. He seemed to have no doubts.

"I say, you fellows, this is all right!" he remarked, as he jabbed a podgy and rather grubby thumb into the envelope. "The pater's answered by return of post. All right, what?"

"Ripping—if there's anything in it!" grinned Skinner.

"If!" chuckled Smithy.

"Oh, I fancy it's all right, after the way I put it to the pater!" said Bunter confidently. "I explained to him that I simply had to have thirty bob. If the postal order isn't here, I—I'll eat the letter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll see," said Bunter.

He drew the letter out of the envelope.

Quite a number of fellows regarded him with interest.

If Billy Bunter's celebrated postal order had, at long last, arrived, it was undoubtedly a great occasion. It was, as Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh remarked, a day worthy to be marked with a white stone.

Under many eyes, Billy Bunter unfolded the letter.

He blinked at it.

A change came over his fat face.

He blinked—and blinked again—and yet again! His jaw dropped! And

to me!" said the bewildered Owl. "What can he have done that for? Just look at it!"

Bunter held up the letter.

The Remove fellows looked at it, grinning. Really, it was worth looking at. It ran:

"Dear Father,—Will you please send me thirty shillings by return of post? It is very important, because I may get into potherful trouble if I don't get it. I can't explain exactly, but it is frightfully important for me to have thirty shillings at wunce.

"Yore affectionate Sun,
"WILLIAM."

"P.S.—I am relying on this to save a potherful lot of trouble.

"N.B.—Please answer quickly by return of post."

On the margin of that urgent letter was written, in pencil, evidently in the parental hand:

"Nonsense!"

That was Mr. Bunter's reply—short, if not sweet! Instead of sending the thirty shillings so urgently requested, Mr. Bunter had not even taken the trouble to write a refusal. He had simply endorsed Billy's letter with the expressive word, "Nonsense," and returned it to him.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Removes, as they read.

"Poor old Bunter!" said Frank Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I—I—I say, you fellows," gasped Billy Bunter, "I—I—I say. d-d-do you think that means that the pater's not going to send the money?"

"Sort of!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Something to that effect, I should

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Billy Bunter's fatuous folly has led him into some wild escapades. But never before has the Owl of the Greyfriars Remove been in such a pickle as he finds himself in this week!

there was a chuckle among the Removes. This did not look as if the postal order had materialised.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Astonishment, as well as dismay, was writ large in his fat face. The other juniors saw nothing at which to be astonished. Billy Bunter was the only fellow who expected that postal order to arrive.

"Hard cheese, old man!" said Bob Cherry, with a grin.

"But, I—I say, you fellows, I can't understand this!" gasped Bunter.

"What does it mean? It's my own letter—"

"What?"

"The pater's sent my own letter back

think!" remarked Johnny Bull. "It gives a chap that sort of impression, anyhow."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But—but—but—" stuttered Bunter, in dismay. "But—I say, you fellows—but—but—but—"

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

"But—but—but I—I—I must have it, you know!" gasped Bunter. "I say, you fellows, you—you really think that means that I ain't getting it?"

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

Mr. Bunter's brief reply left no doubt in any mind—unless it was Billy Bunter's own. It was really hardly possible to mistake Mr. Bunter's meaning. But the dismayed fat junior seemed clinging to a lingering hope.

"Oh crikey!" he mumbled. "Oh lor! Oh dear! Oh scissors!"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked rather curiously at the fat Owl.

The number of times Billy Bunter had been disappointed about a postal order could not have been computed without going into very high figures.

So, really, there seemed no occasion, this time, for such overwhelming dismay.

But Bunter, evidently, was utterly dismayed and overwhelmed.

"Brace up, old fat bean!" said Bob Cherry. "It's happened before, you know."

"Oh! Yes! But—"

"Many a time and oft!" remarked Skinner.

"Yes—but—" Bunter groaned.

"Oh lor!"

Lord Mauleverer tapped him gently on a fat arm. Mauly generally gave the Owl of the Remove as wide a berth as practicable. But it was only necessary for a fellow to be down on his luck for Mauly's kindness of heart to banish all other considerations.

"Cheerio, old bean," murmured Mauly. "If five bob would be any use to—"

"Oh dear!" groaned Bunter. "No use at all!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

"My hat!"

Bunter's reply astonished the natives. For a fellow whose chief occupation was borrowing shillings and sixpences up and down the Remove, to say that five bob was of no use to him was rather astounding.

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter. "Oh lor! Oh dear!"

He rolled dismally away.

"Well, begad!" said the astonished Mauly, staring after him.

"What the dickens is the matter with the fat duffer?" asked Peter Todd. "What the dickens does he want thirty bob for, all of a sudden? Can't be tuck, or he'd have jumped at Mauly's five bob!"

"Goodness knows," said Bob Cherry. "He looks as if he wants it—bad! I'd lend it to him myself if it would come out of fourpence! But it won't!"

It was quite mysterious.

Billy Bunter, apparently, was up against trouble, which could only be barred off by the sum of thirty shillings. It was not, apparently, tuck—and Billy Bunter was not generally supposed to be interested in anything else.

But, whatever might be the "fearful trouble" referred to so feelingly in Bunter's letter home, it was clear that he was not going to be saved therefrom by any remittance from Bunter Court.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bumps for Bunter!

"WHAT the thump's going to be done?"

"Goodness knows!"

Harry Wharton asked the question; Bob Cherry made the answer. And the other three members of the famous Co. shook their heads.

After dinner, the Famous Five had adjourned to Study No. 1 in the Remove for a consultation. It was Wednesday, a half-holiday at Greyfriars; and on a half-holiday, the chums of the Remove were generally merry and bright. On this especial afternoon, bright spring-time as it was, they were very thoughtful, worried, and clouded—quite a contrast to the cheery sunshine that streamed in at the study window.

Wharton sat in the window seat, facing his friends. They could only shake their heads in response to his inquiry. They, no more than the captain of the Remove, knew what the thump was going to be done, in the peculiar circumstances.

From the study window, they could see Mr. Quelch, their Form-master, walking in the quadrangle. Quelch's face, always severe, was very grim.

That grim expression had hardly left it, so far as his pupils had observed, ever since the mysterious happening in his study a week ago—a mystery that was yet to be solved.

"Quelch looks shirty," remarked Johnny Bull, glancing down at the Remove master. "I dare say he's thinking about it now."

"The thinkfulness is probably terrific," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "It is a preposterous worry to the absurd Quelch."

"It was Bunter did it, of course!" said Harry. "I haven't the slightest doubt about that! But—"

"But—" murmured Frank Nugent.

"He won't own up, the fat frog!" Wharton knitted his brows. "And it looks now as if he mayn't be spotted! So what's going to be done? Now that Courtenay's name has been dragged into it, it's simply got to be cleared up. But—"

"Well, if Bunter pinched that dashed watch-chain from Quelch's study, he won't own up," said Bob. "It's the sack if he does!"

"But this can't go on!" said Harry.

"It can't!" agreed Bob. "But—looks as though it must! It's close on the end of the term now, and if it isn't cleared up, before we break up for Easter, most likely it never will be. We can't go to Quelch and tell him it was Bunter—even if we were sure—"

"I'm sure enough!" grunted the captain of the Remove.

"Well, yes, but there's no proof. It's a putrid problem," said Bob, wrinkling his brows. "Mauly said from the start that Bunter never pinched that chain—and I can't quite think that he did! But if he took it for any other reason to pay Quelch out for whopping him, what's become of it? Even if he chucked it away, and he's fool enough, he would know where he chucked it and would try to get it back. I can't make it out."

"I suppose we can't boot him into owning up!" remarked Johnny Bull, thoughtfully.

"Well, hardly," said Bob, with a grin, "especially as he may not have done it, after all."

"If Bunter didn't, who did?" demanded Wharton.

"Oh, ask me another! It was fright-

fully unlucky that Highcliffe man being over here last Wednesday, missing us, and waiting an hour till we came in. A rotten coincidence like that is bound to make fellows talk."

"Skinner's making the most of that!" growled Wharton. "He would—as Courtenay is a friend of ours."

"Well, yes; but lots of fellows are saying the same thing. The fact is," said Bob, "I should rather agree with Skinner, if—"

"If what?" asked Wharton sharply.

"If it had been anybody but Courtenay," said Bob. "There are a lot of shady rotters at Highcliffe. If it had been Ponsonby, for instance, who was hanging about the place that afternoon, I'd jolly well rather think he did it, than a Greyfriars man—even Bunter."

"But it wasn't Ponsonby—it was Courtenay—so you're talking rot!"

"Thanks!" said Bob.

And there was a silence.

It was broken by a fat voice, as a plump face and a large pair of spectacles glimmered in at the study doorway.

"I say, you fellows!"

The Famous Five glared round at Bunter.

Harry Wharton was assured, and his friends had little doubt, that Billy Bunter was the delinquent. Every man in the Remove had believed so, at first; until the name of Frank Courtenay, the captain of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe, came to be mixed up in the affair.

"You fat villain!" said Harry Wharton. "When are you going to own up?"

"Eh? Own up to what?" asked Bunter. "If Coker's been saying anything about his tarts, I never had them. I hope I'm not the fellow to touch a fellow's tarts."

"You frabjous frog!" roared Bob Cherry. "Do you think we're bothering about tarts?"

"Well, if you mean the pie—"

"Oh, kill him, somebody—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Quelch's beastly watch-chain, you fat villain!" hooted the captain of the Remove.

"Oh, that?" said Bunter. "That's just what I've come here to speak to you fellows about!"

"Oh!" said the Famous Five, all together.

They gave Bunter their concentrated attention, at that statement. So far, Billy Bunter had denied, categorically and emphatically, knowing anything whatever about the missing gold chain. If he was going to tell the truth, at last, the Famous Five were more than glad to give him a hearing.

"Go it, old fat man!" said Bob Cherry. "I feel sure you never meant to pinch it! But what did you do with it?"

"Eh? Nothing!"

"Look here, you frabjous owl—"

"Well, you look here," said Bunter, firmly. "I want it clearly understood, in the first place, that I never touched that chain. Never even saw it. Old Quelch hadn't got it in his hand, in two pieces, looking at the broken link, when I went to his study that Wednesday—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"And he never put it in his table drawer, when he was going to whop me," went on Bunter. "Besides, he whopped me for nothing—making out I was untruthful, you know. Not that I thought of hiding his watch-chain, or anything of the kind, because he

whopped me. The idea never entered my head."

The Famous Five gazed at him.

"And how was I to know, when he missed it, that he would think it had been pinched?" demanded Bunter. "Beastly suspicious, if you ask me!"

"What else was he to think, you blithering owl, when a gold chain worth twenty or thirty pounds was missing!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove. "What did you do with it, anyhow?"

"I never touched it, old chap! I want to make that clear, first go. My mind is an absolute blank on the subject of that watch-chain," said the fat Owl, impressively. "If you think I'm going to ask for the sack, you're jolly well mistaken! Quelch has said, quite plain, that the fellow who took that watch-chain out of his table drawer, is going to be taken straight to the Head, to be expelled. Think I want that?"

out as bad as he possibly can. Can't you see the harm you've done Courtenay?"

"I rather like that chap," said Bunter. "He chipped in when that cad Ponsonby was ragging me the other day, and made him chuck it."

"Well, if you like him, you fathead, do you want a rotten story like this to be hanging on to him?"

"Certainly not!" said Bunter, at once. "I can tell you, it's worried me a lot. That's why I'm going to clear it all up."

"It can be cleared up by the chain being found!" said Bob.

"That's it!" said Bunter. He nodded, and grinned. "It's going to be found all right! I mean to say, suppose Quelch found it in his study table drawer, after all, he would think he'd overlooked it, what?"

"He—he might!" murmured Bob.

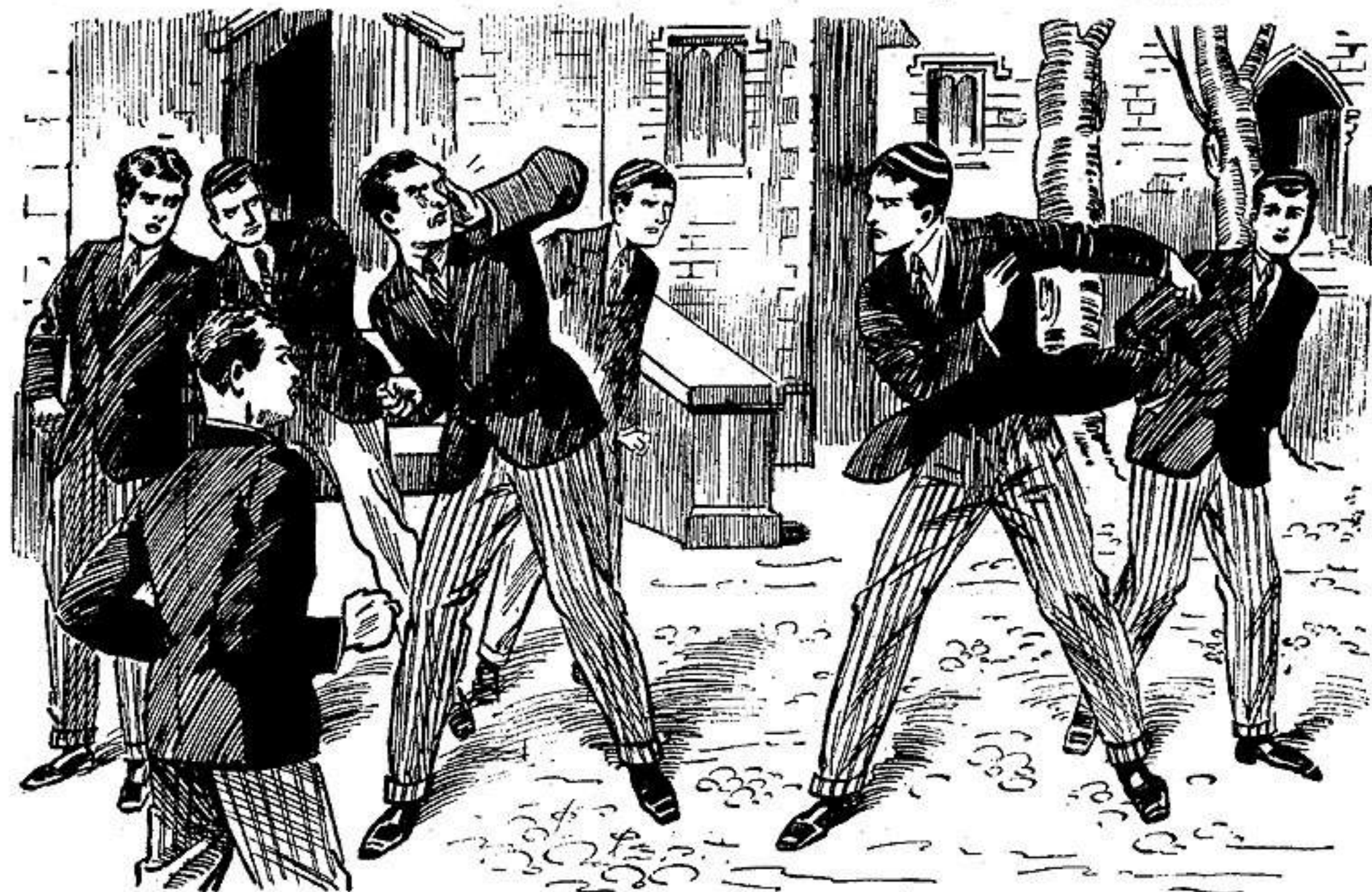
peevishly, "it makes a fellow jump. You see, I wrote to my pater, telling him that I wanted thirty bob specially, and, for some reason, I can't understand, he hasn't sent it. He can't have understood how awfully important it was. If you fellows can let me have thirty shillings—"

"You—you—" gasped Wharton.

"You needn't stutter at a chap. I've come here to do you a good turn," said Bunter warmly. "Old Quelch is like a bear with a sore head about that rotten chain, and making us sit up in Form. And your pal Courtenay, over at Highcliffe, is supposed to have pinched it, and I'm going to set the matter right, and I should think it was worth thirty bob. And I can jolly well say—Wow!"

Bump!

The Famous Five seemed to lose patience all of a sudden.



Smack! Ponsonby reeled under the open palm that smacked across his face. "Call me a thief, would you?" exclaimed Courtenay, his eyes flashing. "Any other man here going to repeat that cur's words—I'll knock them back down his neck fast enough!" There was no answer to the challenge.

"You pernicious porpoise!" said Bob Cherry. "If we can get the chain back, it will be all right. We shan't mention you. Where is it?"

"How should I know?" demanded Bunter. "I haven't seen it since last Wednesday, and to tell the exact truth, I never saw it then."

"Oh crikey!"

"Bunter, you awful ass!" said Harry Wharton, speaking as patiently as he could. "Do try to have a little sense! We're willing to believe that you never pinched that chain, but took it for some silly fatheaded reason, like the blithering idiot you are. But you know what's become of it—"

"Oh, no! Not at all!"

"And you know that Highcliffe chap, Courtenay, was here that Wednesday, waiting for us, and a lot of fools have mixed his name up with what happened. Ponsonby's got hold of the story, and spread it all over Highcliffe—making it

"The mightfulness is terrific!"

"You're going to find the chain—and you expect us to believe that you never snaffled it?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Exactly, old chap! I expect my pals to take my word, of course."

"Oh, scissors!"

"Well, never mind all that, so long as it's found, and given back to Quelch!" said Harry Wharton. "That will clear Courtenay all right—even that cur Ponsonby couldn't keep it up, after that. Get on with it, for goodness' sake."

"I'm going to—this very afternoon!" said Bunter. "But there's one thing—you saw me open that letter in break this morning?"

"What about that, fathead?"

"I mean, I've been disappointed about a postal order—"

"What?" roared the Famous Five.

"Don't yell at a chap," said Bunter

Billy Bunter had raised their hopes. And then the whole thing had boiled down, apparently, to a request that his celebrated postal order should be cashed—and for an unusually large amount. They grabbed Billy Bunter, heaved him off his feet, and bumped him on the study floor.

"Wow!" roared Bunter. "Ow! Wow!"

"Give him another!"

Bump!

"Yaroo!"

"And one more—"

Bump!

"Yoo-hoop! I say, you fellows—Yow-ow-ow-ow!" roared Bunter.

Feeling a little better, Harry Wharton & Co. walked out of the study, and left him to roar. Which Billy Bunter did for quite a considerable time.

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THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Big Idea!

"TODDY, old chap!"

"Shut up!" said Toddy old chap.

"But I say, Peter——"

"Lines!" yapped Peter. "Chuck it! Shut up! Cut off! Go and boil your head! Get out! Buzz! Disappear!"

Billy Bunter, thus adjured by his studymate in Study No. 7, did none of these things. He stood blinking at Peter Todd through his big spectacles, gasping a little as he blinked. The Owl of the Remove was always rather short of wind, and the bumping in Study No. 1 had left him shorter.

"It's rather important Toddy," he urged.

"As important as getting this impot done, and getting out on a half-holiday?" hooted Peter.

"More, old chap—ever so much more!" assured Bunter.

Peter gave him a glare, and reached for the inkpot. However, he needed the ink for his lines, so he refrained from whizzing it at Bunter. He dipped his pen instead and scribbled.

On a fine, bright sunny half-holiday no fellow liked grinding at lines, instead of getting out into the open spaces. Peter was almost sorry that he had dropped a Latin grammar from his study window on the head of Carne of the Sixth. It had led to lines from Quelch. Carne's head did not matter, but two hundred Latin verses from "Virgil" did—a lot.

"Oh, all right!" said Bunter bitterly. "If you're going to be a beast, like those other beasts, all right! Let Quelch go on raising Cain about his rotten watch-chain! I don't care! Yah!"

Peter Todd arrested his busy pen. Peter shared the strong suspicion of the Famous Five—that Billy Bunter knew more than any other fellow about that missing chain. It was very urgent to get those lines done, and get out; but if Bunter was going to let in light on that troublesome mystery, even the lines could wait.

"What's that?" asked Toddy. "If you're going to own up——"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Bunter. "How can I own up, when I know absolutely nothing about it? 'Tain't that! Wouldn't it be all right if Quelch got his chain back, Toddy? Suppose he found it in his table drawer, where he put it last week—what?"

"Then you've got it?"

"No!" roared Bunter.

"Then what do you mean, you burbling bloater?"

"I'll tell you, Toddy, if you'll keep it dark. I was going to tell those beasts in Study No. 1, but they got waxy for some reason, and pitched into a chap."

Billy Bunter shut the door of Study No. 7 cautiously. Then he came back to the table, across which Peter was staring at him.

"I say, Peter!" Bunter whispered, with great caution. "I say, you've seen that rotten old watch-chain of Quelch's, haven't you?"

"About a thousand times, as he wore it every day, till it busted a link," answered Peter. "I should know it again if you've got it, if that's what you mean."

"Oh, don't be an ass, Peter! Look here, that chain's gone! But suppose Quelch found one exactly like it in his table drawer?" breathed Bunter.

"Eh?"

"Exactly the same to look at—see? He would think it was the same chain, and leave off kicking up a fuss—see?"

Peter Todd could only stare at Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove leaned over the table, blinking at him eagerly. Evidently Bunter was greatly taken with this big idea.

"I've seen one in old Lazarus' shop in Courtfield," he went on. "Exactly the same as Quelch's—big, thick, old-fashioned gold watch-chain. If I'd seen them together, I shouldn't know the difference. Quelch won't either—See?"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Peter.

"He finds it in that drawer, thinks it's the same chain, and there's the whole thing, finished and done with," said Bunter. "The other fellows won't be able to make out that there's a pincher in the Remove after that. And that cad Ponsonby, at Highcliffe, will have to shut up about Courtenay. The whole thing comes to an end if Quelch thinks he's got his chain back!"

"You—you—you bloated bandersnatch!" gasped Peter. "Quelch's chain was worth twenty or thirty pounds—solid gold. Have you got twenty or thirty pounds to buy the one at Lazarus'—even if it would do?"

"I've only got tuppence," confessed Bunter.

"Are you going to offer old Lazarus twopence for it?" inquired Peter, with deep sarcasm. "I can see him jumping at the offer with both feet!"

"Do let a chap speak, Peter. I can get that chain for thirty bob."

"Oh!" gasped Peter.

He understood now why the sum of thirty shillings was so sorely needed by the fat Owl.

"It's second-hand," explained Bunter, "and it's exactly like Quelch's—same size, same design—everything. I could nip off two or three links at the end, and make it look broken like Quelch's—see?"

"Oh scissors!" gasped Peter. "And what's it made of?"

"Eh? Gold—same as Quelch's."

"You frightful idiot——"

"Oh, really, Peter——"

"Quelch's chain is worth a lot of money, fathead, because gold's gone up in price, idiot, and it would fetch money by weight, ass. And if that chain at Lazarus' was the same as Quelch's, it would be worth the same amount of money, dummy! Got that?"

"You keep on jawing," said Bunter peevishly. "I don't suppose Quelch would notice that it was rolled gold."

"Rolled gold!" shrieked Peter.

"Well, of course, you couldn't expect a great, big heavy watch-chain to be made of solid gold for thirty bob," said Bunter. "Have a little sense!"

"Oh crikey!"

"Quelch would never notice——"

"Oh crumbs!"

"And once he got his beastly chain back, or—thought he had, he would leave off glaring at a fellow as if he fancied a fellow was a thief," urged Bunter. "I don't believe he thinks that Highcliffe chap had it, you know. I can't help thinking he's got an eye on me, Peter. Mind, I'm not thinking of myself in this matter at all. You know I never do. I'm thinking entirely of that chap Courtenay at Highcliffe. I don't want to keep Quelch quiet because I'm afraid he may spot me, Peter. Nothing of that sort!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Peter.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle

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at!" hooted Bunter. "Mind you keep this dark. I don't want Quelch to hear anything about a rolled-gold chain, you know. It might make him suspicious when he found it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up!" roared Bunter. "Look here, the point is this—will you lend me the thirty bob? I've asked old Lazarus to let me have it on tick, and he refused. I don't know why. He actually grinned when I asked him. Cheeky old beast, you know! You lend me thirty bob, Peter."

"Ha, ha, ha!" bawled Peter.

"You silly ass! What are you sniggering at?" exclaimed the exasperated Owl. "Don't you think it's a jolly good idea, Peter? Bet you you'd never have thought of a dodge like that for keeping old Quelch quiet!"

"No!" gasped Peter; "hardly!"

"Well, I've got the brains, you know," said Bunter. "As soon as I saw that chain in old Lazarus' window, at Courtfield, I thought of the idea. Just brains, you know."

"Yes, that's your sort of brains!" gasped Peter. "Oh, crikey! Oh crumbs! Oh, jumping Jehoshaphat! Ha, ha, ha!" He wiped his eyes. "That's the big idea, is it? Oh, fan me! Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling ass, will you lend me thirty bob?" roared Billy Bunter.

"Yes, if you'll take it out of half-a-crown—"

"What?"

"And give me two-and-six change."

"You silly chump!" howled Bunter. "Look here, Toddy—"

"Chuck it!" gasped Toddy. "You're awfully, fearfully, funny, old fat man, but I've got these lines to do. You've done your funny turn—cut!"

"But look here, you silly beast—I mean dear old chap—"

"Where will you have it?" asked Peter, picking up the inkpot.

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Judging by the haste with which Bunter rolled out of Study No. 7, he did not want it anywhere!

The door slammed. Peter Todd, chortling, resumed his lines.

Billy Bunter, snorting, rolled away, disappointed for the second time, but still in hopeful search of the sum necessary for carrying out that big idea!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Pon Asks for It!

"COURTENAY!"

Mr. Mobbs, master of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe, rapped out that name from his study window.

Two juniors who had come out of the House glanced round at him. They were Frank Courtenay, captain of the Highcliffe Fourth, and his pal Rupert de Courcy, otherwise, the "Caterpillar."

"Yes, sir!" answered Courtenay, and he crossed to Mr. Mobbs' study window, his lips tightening a little.

The Caterpillar lounged after him.

Mr. Mobbs had a frown on his thin, meagre face.

He did not like that particular member of his Form—partly, perhaps, because a mean, nagging nature could not like a healthy, wholesome one. But the chief reason was that Ponsonby of the Highcliffe Fourth was "Snobby Mobby's" special favourite—and Pon was Frank Courtenay's enemy.

Mr. Mobbs did not, perhaps, realise that he liked Pon mainly because his father was a baronet and his uncle a marquis; and he did not even guess

that Pon & Co. called him "Snobby Mobby." But he knew that there was often trouble between Pon and Courtenay, and as it was practically impossible for a baronet's son and a marquis' nephew to do wrong in Mobby's eyes, he naturally laid most of the blame on the captain of the Fourth.

"You are going out, Courtenay!" said Mr. Mobbs acidly.

"We're allowed to trickle out of gates on a half-holiday, sir!" remarked the Caterpillar.

"If you are thinking of going to Greyfriars, Courtenay—"

"I was not, sir."

"Very good!" said Mr. Mobbs. "I am sorry to see, Courtenay, that you appear to desire to keep up your friendship with certain Greyfriars boys, in spite of the fact that a disgraceful accusation has been made against you at that school."

Courtenay's eyes gleamed.

"Wharton and his friends have nothing to do with that, sir," he answered, "and nothing will make any difference to my friendship with them."

"I am shocked to hear you say so, Courtenay! Dr. Voysey has placed Greyfriars out of bounds for all Highcliffe boys, in consequence of that disgraceful and iniquitous accusation—"

"No accusation has been made, sir!" said Courtenay, quietly. "There has been some tattle, because I happened to be over there, waiting for my friends to come in, on the day it is supposed that something was taken from Mr. Quelch's study. My friends will have nothing to do with it."

"That will do, Courtenay!" snapped Mr. Mobbs. "If you should disregard the order placing Greyfriars School out of bounds, I shall deal with you very severely."

"I was not thinking of disregarding it, sir. So long as that order is in force I shall go nowhere near Greyfriars."

"No doubt—no doubt," said Mr. Mobbs. "But as it is a half-holiday at Greyfriars, as well as at Highcliffe, doubtless you will expect to fall in with some of the Greyfriars boys whom you persist in calling your friends."

Courtenay did not answer that.

Mr. Mobbs wagged a bony finger at him from the study window.

"Take warning, Courtenay! You are to avoid all Greyfriars boys, as well as their school. If I find that you have been in communication with any of them I shall take a very serious view of the matter. I should be glad, Courtenay, to see you endeavour to model your conduct on that of Ponsonby, whose views in this matter are completely in accordance with my own."

Mr. Mobbs withdrew his head, and his acid face; and Courtenay, in silence, turned away from the window.

His brow was knitted as he walked down to the gates with his friend, while the Caterpillar smiled faintly.

The chums of the Highcliffe Fourth were walking down to Courtfield that afternoon, and certainly, a meeting with their Greyfriars friends would not have been unwelcome. Neither were they likely to avoid one, in spite of Mr. Mobbs.

A group of Fourth Form fellows stood near the gates as they came along—Ponsonby, Monson, Drury, Gadsby and Vavasour. They were talking together, and as the captain of the Fourth came up they all glanced at him, one or two of them grinned, and Vavasour shrugged his narrow shoulders. Courtenay, clearly, was the subject of their talk.

"Hold on a minute, Courtenay!" said Pon, stepping into the way.

Courtenay stopped—impatiently.

"Well, what?" he snapped. "If you're looking for more trouble, Ponsonby, you won't have to ask twice. I'm fed up!"

Pon's eyes glinted for a moment. His nose was still a little swollen from the punches Courtenay had landed there a few days ago. A faint dark shade still lingered under one of his eyes.

If Pon was looking for more trouble it was not in the fistic line. He had had more than enough of that.

"Nothin' of the sort," he said blandly, "I've been standin' up for you against those Greyfriars cads, as one Highcliffe man should for another. When I heard that they were accusin' you of stealin'—"

"Nobody has accused me of anything of the kind, and I will not allow you to say so! Stop it, here and now!" said Courtenay, with gleaming eyes. "You know as well as I do that nothing's been said, except tattle among some fellows who hardly know me over there. And not a word would have been heard of it here if you hadn't brought it over and spread it about Highcliffe."

"That's hardly fair, is it?" said Pon. "I got it from some Remove men over there, and I certainly thought that Mobby ought to know, and put his foot down on it at once."

Courtenay was silent. He had an unsuspicious mind, and he did not want to be unjust, even to a bitter and unscrupulous enemy like Ponsonby.

"Well, if you'd said nothing, nothing would have been heard here, at any rate," he said at last.

"Pon wasn't goin' to keep it dark," smiled the Caterpillar. "Not Pon! It was too good a chance to be lost—what? Didn't you know that Mobby would go off at the deep end and hike over to Greyfriars, an' make himself dashed unpleasant, and add fuel to the jolly old fire—what?"

"I suppose that was it!" said Courtenay contemptuously.

"You can think so if you like, of course!" said Pon airily. "As soon as I heard it I said at once that you'd had no hand in it—all the fellows heard me. I've said so again and again."

"Keepin' the jolly old topic alive—what?" asked the Caterpillar. "This is rather a windfall for you, Pon, isn't it?"

"What the dickens do you mean?"

"Well, look at it!" argued the Caterpillar. "You've been tryin' all you know how to make trouble with the Greyfriars chaps. Franky gave you a hidin', an' stopped you—how's your nose gettin' on, Pon? So you chucked that—and now this turns up and does the trick for you! Terrific row goin' on between the two schools, looking like gettin' worse, instead of better! Suits your book fine, old bean! One could almost imagine that you wangled that pinchin' at Greyfriars—it suits your game so well."

Ponsonby laughed.

"I've stood up for Courtenay all the time, anyhow, since this started," he said.

"Well, don't!" said Courtenay curtly. "Look here, if you've got anything to say, say it—I'm going out!"

"I was goin' to ask you somethin'," said Ponsonby. "You needn't answer, if you don't choose, of course. You went over to Greyfriars the day the pinchin' seems to have happened, and the fellows there are makin' out that you hung about the place a jolly long time. Well, I don't suppose you really did—I dare say it's all Greyfriars lies! You weren't haphing about the show a long time."

time on your own—I feel sure of that.” Monson and the rest looked very keenly and curiously at Courtenay. That, it seemed, was the matter they had had under discussion.

“You weren’t really there long?” asked Monson.

“And you weren’t alone there?” asked Drury.

“That’s what they seem to be makin’ out!” said Ponsonby. “A word from you will knock it on the head, Courtenay—this end, at any rate.”

“Clever!” grinned the Caterpillar. “You know perfectly well, Pon, that Franky had to hang about at Greyfriars that day, as his friends were out of gates. Make the most of it.”

“I know nothin’ about it, of course I—”

“Gammon!”

“If you don’t know, I’ll tell you,” said Frank Courtenay coolly and scornfully. “Wharton and his friends were out of gates, and I waited over an hour in the visitors’ room till they came in. A Remove fellow—Vernon-Smith—lent me a book to read, and after that I was alone in the room till my friends came in. It was only a step from that room to Mr. Quelch’s study, and I could have gone along and rooted through his things if I’d wanted to; there was hardly anybody about the House, as it was a half-holiday. They know all that at Greyfriars—and I haven’t the slightest objection to all Highcliffe knowing it, too.”

“Oh gad!” said Ponsonby.

“Phew!” murmured Monson.

The Highcliffe knuts exchanged glances.

“Is there anything more you’d like to ask, Ponsonby?” said the captain of the Fourth in the same scornful tone. “Make the most of it while it lasts; it can only last till they find out the thief at Greyfriars.”

The Caterpillar noted the peculiar gleam that came into Ponsonby’s eyes as Courtenay spoke. It made him wonder. Pon did not expect the thief to be found out at Greyfriars. Why?

“Well,” said Ponsonby slowly, “that alters the case a lot, Courtenay. We’ve all been thinkin’ that this was simply a Greyfriars slander; but from what you admit, it looks as if they had something to go on. Dash it all! If somethin’ was pinched here while a Greyfriars man was hanging about the place I shouldn’t say it was a Highcliffe man did it.”

“That’s so,” agreed Monson. “And the beaks over there refused to do anything when Mobby put it to them. Looks as if the beaks think the same as the fellows.”

“Absolutely!” said Vavasour.

“Oh, come on, Rupert!” said Courtenay impatiently; and as Ponsonby did not move out of his way he gave him a push and moved him.

The two chums walked on to the gates, leaving Pon tottering from the push.

Pon’s voice, in rather raised tones, was heard as they went out.

“By gad! What do you fellows think? It would be pretty rotten for us if it turned out, after all, that those Greyfriars cads were right and it was a Highcliffe man did the pinchin’. It begins to look like it.”

Frank Courtenay stopped in the gateway. His eyes burned as he heard those words from the cad of Highcliffe.

“Hold on, Franky!” murmured the Caterpillar. “Mobby’s stickin’ at his study window, you know—”

“Hang Mobby! Do you think I’m going to let that cur—” Without finishing the sentence, Frank Courtenay strode back at the group of knuts.

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Ponsonby breathed rather hard. More than a dozen fellows had heard his words—and Frank Courtenay had heard them, as he intended. But he rather wished that he had not uttered them as the captain of the Fourth came striding back with set lips and glinting eyes.

“What did you say, Ponsonby?” asked Frank Courtenay in a low, tense tone.

“Find out!” said Ponsonby sullenly.

“Well, I heard what you said. You won’t say anything like that without answering for it. Put up your hands!”

Ponsonby jumped back.

“Keep off, you cad!” he snarled. “I’ve scrapped with you once and gave you best. Keep your paws to yourself!”

“When you keep your lying tongue to yourself—not till then!” exclaimed Courtenay, and he followed up the retreating dandy of Highcliffe.

“You rotter!” panted Ponsonby.

“You—Oh!”

Smack!

Ponsonby reeled under the open palm that smacked across his face. Red with rage, he made a spring, but stopped and backed again. Monson & Co. made a move forward, and Courtenay’s eyes flashed round at them.

“Any man here going to repeat that cur’s words?” he exclaimed. “Get on with it; I’ll knock them back down his neck fast enough!”

There was no answer to that challenge. Neither did Ponsonby come on again; he stood with his hand to his face, panting, his eyes burning with hatred, but his courage failing. Once more the cad of Highcliffe had asked for trouble that he could not handle when it came.

Courtenay waited a long moment; then, with a curling lip, he turned away, rejoined the Caterpillar at the gates, and they went out together.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter in Search of Bobs!

“I SAY, you fellows, seen Mauly?” The Bounder chuckled and Tom Redwing smiled.

“Gone out!” answered Smithy.

“Oh crikey!” said Bunter dismally.

Bunter could have groaned.

Lord Mauleverer was often Bunter’s resource when he had been disappointed about a postal order. Mauly was not a good arithmetician, but had he been ever so good he could hardly have counted the number of shillings and half-crowns that the fat Owl borrowed of him during a term.

Certainly it was not shillings or half-crowns that Bunter wanted now; it was the rather unusual sum of thirty “bob.” He hoped that the long-suffering Mauly might exude that sum.

But alas for Bunter! While he had been trying his luck in Study No. 1, and then in Study No. 7, the bird, as it were, had flown. He wished now that he had tackled Mauly first, but it was too late to wish that. He blinked dismally at Vernon-Smith and Redwing through his big spectacles.

“I—I say, Smithy, if you’ve got thirty bob you don’t want—”

“Ha, ha, ha!” roared the Bounder.

“Well, you’re always splashing your mouldy money about!” yapped Bunter. “You’ve got lots, and you’re always showing it off. I say, Smithy, let me have thirty bob—only till I get a postal order.”

“You fat fool—”

“Beast! I say, Redwing, can you let me have it? I’ve been pretty decent to

you, you know—treating you as an equal and all that, though your father’s only a common sailorman. I say—”

Tom Redwing stared at him, laughed, and walked on with Vernon-Smith.

“Beasts!” groaned Bunter.

Possibly Bunter’s tactful way of asking for a loan did not make for success. Anyhow, there was evidently no hope from Smithy or Redwing.

The fat junior rolled back to the House—dismal, but still hopeful. He was greatly taken with his big idea for “keeping Quelch quiet.”

The outward appearance of that rolled-gold chain in the window of Mr. Lazarus’ shop, at Courtfield, was precisely that of Quelch’s lost watch-chain. Bunter had little doubt—or none—that if Quelch found that chain in his study he would think he had recovered his property, and all would be calm and bright.

It was simply sickening that a fellow with so masterly a scheme on hand should be hung up for want of a paltry sum like thirty shillings!

Mr. Quelch came out of the House as Bunter was going in.

His gimlet-eye turned on the fat junior.

Bunter felt it, rather than saw it. Quelch had questioned him once on the subject, and had not been wholly satisfied.

Bunter, he knew, had seen that chain in his hand, seen him put it into the table drawer. Nobody else, so far as Mr. Quelch knew, had known anything about it. He did not exactly suspect Bunter, but certainly he gave him more thought than any other Remove fellow in this connection.

The fat Owl’s podgy heart beat unpleasantly as he passed his Form-master, dreading to be called back.

However, Mr. Quelch did not call him back.

“Oh lor’!” breathed Bunter, as he escaped.

With a deadly secret on his mind, Bunter trembled under Quelch’s gimlet-eye, and as he was in Quelch’s Form he came very often under that gimlet-eye.

Every time that eye turned on him—as it often did—the fat junior quaked.

Bunter was not enjoying life these days. If at times he forgot the worry on his fat mind the sight of Mr. Quelch would recall it at once. He had never enjoyed classes in the Remove-room, but now they were a long-drawn-out terror to him.

From the bottom of his fat heart he repented that he had snaffled that broken watch-chain from Quelch’s table drawer.

Not for a moment had he foreseen the awful consequences. He had never even supposed that Quelch would think that the chain had been stolen.

He had taken it for a jape on Quelch—to hide in his Sunday hat. Quelch, unacquainted with Bunter’s extraordinary ideas of a practical joke, was not likely to guess that one.

Too late Bunter realised that even had he carried out that wonderful jape Quelch would not have supposed that it was a jape; he would have been much more likely to suppose that the thief had become frightened and dared not keep his loot.

Not that that mattered, as Bunter had not been able to carry it out owing to the loss of that wretched chain.

The fat junior rolled into the Rag. He found Skinner and Snoop and Bolsover major and Fisher T. Fish loafing and frowsting there.

They were discussing what was now a very live topic in the Remove—



"Bunter! What are you doing here?" asked Mr. Quelch, as he switched on the light and saw the fat Removite fumbling at his writing-desk. "Oh! N-n-nothing, sir!" stammered Bunter. "You have opened one of the drawers!" said the Form-master. "Oh, no, sir!" groaned the fat junior. "I found it open, sir!"

whether that Highcliffe man, Courtenay, had pinched Quelch's chain the day he was hanging about at Greyfriars.

Bolsover major took the view that a fellow was bound to stick up for his school. Sticking up for his school meant, to Bolsover, that he wasn't going to believe the thief a Greyfriars man, if it could possibly be a Highcliffe man. So he plumped, as it were, for Courtenay.

Skinner was still keener on it. Being up against Harry Wharton & Co., he found it amusing to take the view that their friend from Highcliffe was a doubtful character.

Billy Bunter blinked at them. His conscience was not very tender; but he did feel a pang of remorse whenever he heard Courtenay's name mentioned in such a connection. Bunter had the best of reasons for knowing that Frank Courtenay had never even seen that miserable chain. And Courtenay had chipped in to save him from Ponsonby's bullying, only a few days ago, which was rather decent of the chap!

"That Highcliffe man is the chap, all right!" Skinner was saying. "Wharton can get as ratty as he likes about it—but that's my opinion."

"Mine, too!" said Bolsover major.

"I—I say, you fellows—" stammered Bunter. "I—I wouldn't say that, if I were you! That chap Courtenay is all right."

"I guess it was Courtenay, if it wasn't Bunter!" remarked Fisher T. Fish. "But I'll say I ain't plumb sure that it wasn't Bunter."

"We all thought so at first!" grinned Snoop. "Wharton still thinks so—"

"He says he does!" sneered Skinner. "He knows jolly well what it looks like, all the same. Was it you, Bunter?"

"No, you beast!" hooted Bunter. "I

don't know anything about it, of course. But I know that Courtenay never touched it."

"How do you know that, if you don't know anything about it?" grinned Snoop.

"Beast! I—I mean, I—I say, you fellows, c-c-can you let me have thirty bob? I'll settle to-morrow out of a postal order I'm expecting."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Skinner & Co.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" howled Bunter. "What are you, sniggering at, you silly idiots?"

"Your little joke!" chuckled Skinner. "I wasn't joking, you ass—"

"You were, old man—one of your best!" assured Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled out of the Rag again. Hope springs eternal in the human breast; but even the hopeful Owl was getting rather hopeless now. His search for "bobs" was very discouraging.

"That beast Pon!" groaned Bunter. "Oh, the beast! Wouldn't I like to punch him! Wouldn't I like to bung up his eye!"

As he thought of Pon, another idea came into his mind. He started for Mr. Quelch's study. Quelch had gone out, and a fellow could get at his telephone.

It was possible to ring up Highcliffe. Mr. Mobbs allowed his dear Ponsonby to use his telephone, as if it were his own.

Hopeful once more, Billy Bunter shut the study door, rolled across to the telephone, and rang up Highcliffe School.

That unspeakable beast, Ponsonby, had taken the chain from him, and refused to give it back. It had dropped from Bunter's pocket when Pon and Gadsby were ragging him, and the

awful rotter had pounced on it—and kept it!

Why, Bunter could hardly tell, unless the brute found amusement in keeping him in a state of terror and torment—it was rather like Ponsonby to play with a victim, like a cat with a mouse!

Instead of giving him Quelch's chain, at Bunter's earnest and almost tearful request, Pon had only given him a booting!

The fat Owl's only consolation was that Pon had, for some reason of his own, no intention of letting Mr. Quelch know that he had found the chain on Bunter.

He would gladly have made another appeal to Pon; but he did not want to risk another booting! But Pon could not boot him along a telephone wire! If only that indescribable beast would let him have the chain back! He had kept it for a week—and he could not intend to keep it permanently.

"Hallo!" came through the telephone.

It was the squeaky voice of Mr. Mobbs, master of the Fourth at Highcliffe.

"I—I say, c-c-can I speak to Ponsonby?" gasped Bunter.

"Who is speaking?"

"B-bub-Bunter."

"Bunter!" repeated Mr. Mobbs. "I think I have heard that name. Is it a Greyfriars boy speaking?"

"Yes, you see—it's rather important—"

"Is it possible that, in the present circumstances, any Greyfriars boy has the audacity—the insolence—the unexampled impudence—to ring up this school?" yapped Mr. Mobbs.

"Oh crikey!"

"You impertinent young rascal—"

"Oh lor'!"

"I shall complain of this to your headmaster—"

"Oh crumbs!"

Billy Bunter jammed the receiver back on the hook. He did not want any more of this genial conversation from Mr. Mobbs. Evidently he was not going to get through to Ponsonby!

"Beast!" hissed Bunter.

He rolled out of Mr. Quelch's study. There was nothing doing—either in the way of getting back the real chain, or raising the necessary sum to replace it with the rolled gold chain from Mr. Lazarus!

Billy Bunter gave it up. On a dismal horizon, there was only one gleam of light—very likely that beast Mauleverer had gone to tea at the bunshop in Courtfield, and it might be possible to catch him there—and that would mean tea, at least.

That hope comforted Bunter as he rolled away over the common to Courtfield. And when he reached the bunshop, and discovered that Lord Mauleverer was not there, no words in any known language could have expressed Bunter's feelings!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Discovery!

"**W**HAT about the Three Fishers?"

"Eh?"

"Or the Cross Keys!" said the Caterpillar imperturbably.

Frank Courtenay stared at his chum.

He had been walking for some time, with his hands driven deep into his pockets, his eyes on the ground, in a deep reverie. De Courcy glanced at him several times, smiling whimsically but not speaking. Courtenay seemed to have forgotten that his friend was with him, in that mood of deep and troubled thought.

But the Caterpillar spoke at last as they were coming into Courtfield; and what he said was quite sufficient to make the captain of the Highcliffe Fourth fix attention on him.

"The Three Fishers!" repeated Courtenay. "The Cross Keys!"

"Yes, old bean, whichever you like! Got any preference?" asked the Caterpillar amiably. "Pon, I understand, frequents both—the Three Fishers chiefly for billiards and glove-fights; the Cross Keys mainly for banker and nap with Lodgey and his aristocratic circle. Like either?"

"Is that a joke?" asked Courtenay, mystified.

His pal could hardly be supposing, seriously, that Courtenay could, or would, drop into any of the low resorts in the neighbourhood, which were patronised by Pon & Co.; but he looked quite grave.

"Not at all, old bean! Didn't you hear what Mobbs said at his window? Isn't it our duty to follow the jolly old precepts of our jolly old beak?"

"What did he say, fathead?"

"Didn't he warn you to model your conduct on Ponsonby's?" asked the Caterpillar. "Well, Mobbs's advice ought to be good! Let's! What? If we're takin' Pon for a model, it's either the Three Fishers or the Cross Keys, on a half-hol—unless you'd like a car out and a trip to the Jolly Bird at Lantham!"

Frank Courtenay laughed.

"Mobbs doesn't know Pon as we do!" he remarked.

"He doesn't choose to, at all events!" said the Caterpillar shrewdly. "If Pon

was sacked, Mobbs wouldn't be able to brag in Common-room any longer that a marquis had given him three fingers to shake in the hole. Or is it two that Pon's uncle gives him when he barges in there? I went home with dear old Pon once, you know, before you happened, old bean, and saw the performance. Can't remember whether it was two or three fingers that the marquis gave Mobbs. But I know he could hardly let them go again, he was so bucked! No, he will never see anythin' to report to the Big Beak about jolly old Pon!"

The Caterpillar chuckled.

"Snobby little beast, ain't he?" he remarked. "If Pon's uncle the marquis kicked him, Franky, I believe he would never change his trousers afterwards—he would be so proud of them!"

Courtenay smiled, but it was a brief smile. To his thoughtful and serious nature, a Form-master whom he could not respect did not seem amusing, as to the airy and cynical Caterpillar.

They had an easier time in the Highcliffe Fourth than in the Greyfriars Remove; but Courtenay would gladly have exchanged "Snobby Mobbs" for Mr. Quelch, severe and rather grim as he was.

"However," drawled the Caterpillar, "I gather that you're not actin' on Mobbs's excellent advice—so that washes out the Three Fishers and the Cross Keys! What about droppin' in at the bunshop for a ginger-pop, to wash the taste of Pon out of our mouth!"

Courtenay nodded, and they walked into the High Street of Courtfield. There, the captain of the Fourth glanced about the street, and De Courcy smiled.

"Lookin' for Greyfriars chaps?" he asked.

"Well, I'd be glad to fall in with our friends," said Courtenay. "Even if Greyfriars had not been put out of bounds, I shouldn't care to butt in there as matters stand. But Wharton and his friends have nothing to do with that silly yarn, and I shouldn't like them to think I had my back up, as far as they're concerned."

The Caterpillar grinned.

"Well, if you want a Greyfriars man, there's a happy specimen!" he remarked, with a nod towards the bunshop, which they had nearly reached.

"That fat duffer!" said Courtenay, smiling.

Outside the bunshop was a big tree, and under its branches were little tables. Close by them stood a fat figure—and a fat face adorned by a big pair of spectacles, met the view of the two Highcliffe juniors, as they came up.

Billy Bunter, like Moses of old, was looking this way and that way, apparently in the hope of spotting somebody.

He had, as a matter of fact, rooted through the bunshop, and discovered that Lord Mauleverer was not there. He would gladly have remained as a customer—but without Mauleverer to see him through that was impracticable. So there was the fat Owl, blinking to and fro, in the faint, lingering hope of spotting his lordship somewhere in the High Street.

The Caterpillar slowed down.

"There's a proverb, Franky, that second thoughts are best," he remarked. "On second thoughts, don't let's drop in for that ginger. I can do without quite a lot of that fat chap Bunter's conversation."

But it was too late. Two little round eyes, blinking through big round spectacles, had spotted them.

Billy Bunter rolled at once to greet them.

"Cut across, Franky!" murmured the Caterpillar. "Let's go into the bank, what?"

"What the dickens for?"

"Any port in a storm!" explained the Caterpillar.

"Fathead!" answered Courtenay.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Bunter. He rolled up, beaming.

"Hallo! Fancy meetin' you, old bean!" said the Caterpillar. "This is an unexpected pleasure—all the greater for bein' so unexpected!" From which, a brighter fellow than Bunter would hardly have guessed that, a few moments ago, the Caterpillar had proposed to dodge into the bank to elude him.

"Jolly glad to see you, old chaps!" said Bunter affably. "I don't think much of Highcliffe men, as a rule—"

"Eh?"

"But you two are all right!" said the fatuous Owl. "You can't help being at a rotten school, can you?"

"By gum, Franky, doesn't Bunter put it well?" said the Caterpillar. "They must use some sort of patent polish, or somethin', for manners, at Greyfriars. But I've noticed before that jolly old Chesterfield had nothin' on Bunter."

"Well, being at a decent school makes a lot of difference to a chap," said Bunter, on whom sarcasm was a sheer waste. "But, I say, old chaps, come and have a ginger. My treat!"

Courtenay looked a little restive. He had declined to dodge Bunter, as the Caterpillar would have done, but he did not seem to derive entertainment from him, as De Courcy did.

"We'd better get on, I think," said Courtenay.

"Oh, rot!" said the mischievous Caterpillar. "Can't refuse a kind invitation like that! Take a pew!"

"Here you are!" said Bunter, and the three sat down at one of the little tables under the tree. "Call the waiter. I say, what about some of those iced cakes? And a doughnut or two? What?"

"You're full of good ideas this afternoon, Bunter," said the Caterpillar. "Let's!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the two Highcliffians a little dubiously for a moment.

Had they been Greyfriars fellows, he would not have hesitated to order tuck right and left, and to discover—when the bill came along—that he had left his money in his study. But even Bunter hesitated to play that little game on fellows from another school. He could not feel quite sure how they would take it.

But it is well said that he who hesitates is lost. The lure of tuck was too strong for Billy Bunter to resist. He hesitated—but his hesitation was brief.

Ginger-pop, iced cakes, and doughnuts were soon before Bunter. He tucked in, and trusted to luck—which was one of his happy ways.

The Caterpillar watched him, with a smiling face. He found the fat Owl entertaining, in his way; and certainly his smiling face did not reveal that he regarded him as a particularly objectionable fat boulder.

"Any news from Greyfriars?" drawled the Caterpillar, as Bunter munched. "Have they found that jolly old chain yet?"

Billy Bunter gave him a quick blink.

"Oh, no! I don't know anything about it, of course," he said hastily. "If that ass Wharton has been talking any rot, don't you fellows take any notice of it!"

Courtenay looked at him. The

Caterpillar's sleepy eyes grew very keen.

"Wharton mentioned that the man may be spotted any old minute," remarked De Courcy. "He seemed to have an idea who it was."

"That's only his silly rot!" explained Bunter. "If he mentioned me, he was simply talking out of his hat! He's rather a fool, you know!"

"Oh!"

"The fact is, I've never even seen that rotten watch-chain," said Bunter. "And, as it happens, I wasn't in Quelch's study that afternoon at all. I never went in to take my lines, and Quelch hadn't gone to the Head when I went in, either."

"Oh, my hat!" murmured the Caterpillar.

"So, you see, I know absolutely nothing about it!" said Bunter. "I say, these are jolly good doughnuts, ain't they?"

"Fine!" agreed the Caterpillar.

He closed one eye at Frank Courtenay. The latter was staring at Billy Bunter blankly.

The same thought was in both their minds—that the unknown fellow who had pinched the missing chain was no longer unknown—that he was, in fact, sitting there in front of them, gurgling ginger-beer and guzzling doughnuts!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Luck at Last!

BILLY BUNTER finished the doughnuts. He started immediately on the iced cakes. He did not need an interval for rest.

Frank Courtenay was silent, his eyes on the fat face. The Caterpillar's eyes were gleaming.

Bunter's words revealed that he was suspected by Harry Wharton & Co. Neither of the Highcliffe fellows doubted that that suspicion was well founded.

The fat Owl, quite unaware of the train of thought he had started in their minds, guzzled cake with great relish.

"I say, you fellows, don't you think that I'm one of the chaps that think Courtenay did it," he went on. "I know that's all rot, of course."

"Oh, you know that's all rot, do you!" said the Caterpillar. He did not doubt that Bunter had the best of reasons for knowing.

"Of course, he wouldn't!" said Bunter. "Any more than I would, in fact! It was that cad Skinner started it, you know. He did it chiefly to rag Wharton, I believe. He thought of it all of a sudden. Nobody seemed to remember about Courtenay being at Greyfriars that day, till Skinner did—I remember he came into the Rag, after seeing Ponsonby off, and—"

"Ponsonby?"

"Yes. Pon came over and tea'd with Skinner in his study. Skinner went down to the gates with him, and when he came in, he started talking in the Rag. He was full of it."

The Caterpillar gave his chum a look.

"So Pon was there—just before Skinner suddenly remembered about Courtenay, and started this jolly old story!" murmured the Caterpillar. "Dear old Pon! Go on, Bunter—you're frightfully interestin'."

"Of course, a lot of fellows jumped at the idea," said Bunter. "It seems more natural, if there's any dirty trick, to think of a Highcliffe man than a Greyfriars man, doesn't it?"

"Oh!" gasped the Caterpillar. "Oh! Yes! Quite!"

"Still, it jolly well wasn't Courtenay, all the same!" said Bunter. "I say, do you want that last cake?"

"Leave it to you, partner."

Bunter guzzled the last cake.

"But it's fearfully rotten for Courtenay," he went on. "I'm really sorry about that! That's really why I've thought of an idea for keeping Quelch quiet—not because I think Quelch suspects me, you know—nothing of the kind—but entirely on Courtenay's account."

"That's like you, Bunter," said the Caterpillar blandly. "Your generous nature—what?"

"Well, I always was generous!" admitted Bunter. "Kindest friend and noblest foe, and all that, you know."

"Oh gad! I—I mean, yes, quite!"

"You see"—Bunter gave the Highcliffe fellows a hopeful, calculating blink—"Quelch would chuck the whole thing if he got his chain back. I mean to say, he would have to. He couldn't make out that it was pinched if he found it in the same drawer in his study table, could he?"

"Hardly!" agreed the Caterpillar.

"That would see Courtenay absolutely clear!" explained Bunter. "Nobody could fancy that he had got into Greyfriars somehow and put it back—what?"

"Couldn't possibly!"

"And even if he went on thinking that it was me there would be the rotten thing, anyhow!" argued Bunter. "Not that I'm thinking of myself in the matter at all, you know! I never do!"

"You wouldn't!" assented the Caterpillar.

"Well, suppose I could manage it?" said Bunter. "I'm not saying I can, and I'm not saying I can't—but suppose I could? The actual fact is that it's a matter of thirty bob."

"Oh crumbs!" said the Caterpillar.

"Just that trifling amount!" said Bunter. "Nothing to me, really—but the unfortunate part is that I've been disappointed about a postal order. And—you'd hardly believe it—but Wharton refused to lend me the thirty bob, and so did Toddy—after all I've done for them, you know."

"You don't say so!" ejaculated the Caterpillar.

"I do!" said Bunter sadly. "They're mean, you know! I could knock the whole thing right on the head if I could walk into old Lazarus' with thirty bob in my pocket."

Courtenay opened his lips—and closed them again. The Caterpillar gave him a gentle wink.

Bunter's words gave both of them the impression—which it could hardly fail to do—that he had pinched that chain, parted with it, and could get it back for thirty shillings.

As Mr. Lazarus was a pawnbroker, among his many other activities, the thing seemed clear enough.

Bunter could hardly have sold a valuable gold chain for thirty shillings, and, if he had, he certainly could not have repurchased it for the same sum.

If he had pawned it, however, the recovery was easy—he had only to return the sum lent on it, and that was that.

Neither of the Highcliffe juniors had the slightest doubt now that that was what Bunter had done.

It was difficult for Frank Courtenay to restrain his angry disgust; but the Caterpillar was smiling more urbanely than ever.

Billy Bunter, utterly unconscious of

what they were thinking—what, indeed, they could not help thinking after what he had said—blinked at them hopefully.

"If a fellow lent me thirty bob," he remarked, "I could square to-morrow—I'm expecting a postal order from one of my titled relations."

Courtenay rose from his seat.

"I say, don't go!" exclaimed Bunter, in alarm. "I—I say, the bill's not paid yet, and—and I—I left my money in my study—"

The captain of the Highcliffe Fourth gave him a look.

"I'll go and see the waiter," he said. "Ready to move on, Rupert?"

"My dear man, you buzz off and make yourself useful, and leave me to enjoy Bunter's conversation," answered the Caterpillar.

Courtenay gave an irritated shrug and moved away.

Billy Bunter blinked after him, and then blinked at the Caterpillar.

"I—I—I say," mumbled Bunter—"I—I say, old chap, if—if you had thirty bob you didn't want—"

"Pleasure!" smiled De Courcy.

The Owl of the Remove fairly jumped as a pound note and a ten-shilling note were pushed across the table. He could scarcely believe in his good luck.

"Oh!" he gasped. "I—I say, you're a brick, old chap! I'll settle this to-morrow, of course—out of my postal order—"

"Happy to oblige!" murmured the Caterpillar.

Bunter tucked the two notes into his pocket and rose. His eyes were almost dancing behind his spectacles. At last—at long last—he had the wherewithal to carry out that great scheme—and keep Quelch quiet!

"I—I say, I'll cut off if you don't mind!" he gasped. "I—I'd like to get to Lazarus' quick, you know. I—I mean—that is— Good-bye, old chap!"

Bunter rolled away down the High Street.

The Caterpillar, grinning, rejoined his chum. They walked down the street together—Bunter's fat figure rolling on ahead.

Courtenay cast a frowning glance after that fat figure.

"Not much doubt about it now, Franky—what?" murmured the Caterpillar.

"No, I suppose not."

"Don't be too fearfully contemptuous, old bean! That fat idiot is such a fool that I really hardly think he knows right from wrong! Mustn't judge a born fool too hard—temper the wind to the shorn lamb, you know."

"The young rascal! If what he said meant anything at all he has pinched that chain, and pawned it with Lazarus!" Courtenay drew a deep breath. "We can't say anything—but—"

"No need!" smiled the Caterpillar. "He's gone to dig that chain out, old bean—it was worth thirty bob, I fancy!"

"You've given him—"

"Of course, ass! I'd have given him twice as much, or twice that, to get that putrid chain parked where it belongs in old Quelch's study! Fancy dear old Pon's face when he hears that the jolly old chain has been found!"

The Caterpillar chuckled; but his friend did not smile.

"I don't like having a hand in it!" growled Courtenay.

"Well, you haven't had a hand in it! I have! But then, I'm less particular!" drawled the Caterpillar. "Hallo, there he goes!"

Ahead of them, Billy Bunter turned into Mr. Lazarus' establishment, over

the doorway of which gleamed three brass balls. He disappeared from sight in that establishment.

"That's that!" said the Caterpillar.

And they walked on—Courtenay frowning and the Caterpillar smiling. They took different views of the matter—but neither of them doubted that Bunter had gone into the pawnbroker's to redeem the chain that was missing from Mr. Quelch's study at Greyfriars!

Neither, certainly, had the remotest idea of the amazing scheme that was working in Billy Bunter's fat brain! That Billy Bunter was a fool, they knew—that fact leaped to the eye! But they were quite unacquainted with the abysmal and illimitable depths of his folly.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

All Serene!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry.

Five juniors, on the road over Courtfield Common, waved their hands and quickened their pace.

Harry Wharton & Co. were sauntering in the direction of Courtfield—with the idea in their minds that their friends at Highcliffe might be doing the same on that sunny half-holiday. They were in sight of the town when they spotted two fellows coming towards them—which evoked Bob Cherry's cheery roar.

Frank Courtenay's face brightened at the sight of the Famous Five. The Caterpillar gave them a nod and a cheery grin.

Both parties were glad of the meeting. Both were anxious that the present awkward state of affairs should make no difference to their friendship.

"Glad to see you fellows," said Courtenay, with a smile. "I rather thought we might fall in with you."

"Just what we were thinking," said Harry Wharton.

"Just the same!" said Nugent.

"The samefulness was terrific, my esteemed and absurd Courtenay!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The gladfulness to see your idiotic face is preposterous."

"Lucky we've met on the safe side of Courtfield!" remarked the Caterpillar. "Mobby's given us stern instructions not to speak to you bad boys. We're givin' his instructions a miss!"

"Mobby's an ass!" granted Frank Courtenay.

"You see, there's difficulties in taking all Mobby's tips!" explained the Caterpillar gravely. "He's been advisin' us to model ourselves on dear old Pon! I've no great objection, but Franky has. He's refused to go either to the Three Fishers or to the Cross Keys! So what's a fellow to do?"

The Famous Five chuckled.

"Is your beak as shirty as little Mobby?" asked the Caterpillar. "Has he ferociously commanded you to pass us by on the other side of the jolly old way?"

"Oh, no!" answered Harry. "Of course, it's beastly awkward—but Quelch is no fool. You fellows understand, of course, that only a few silly asses and one or two rotters are talking that piffle—fellows who don't know you, Courtenay. All the same, it's a rotten shame for your name to be mixed up in such a thing, and we're all sorry—"

"The sorrowfulness is tremendous."

"It's simply putrid!" growled Johnny Bull. "That worm Skinner started it—and I banged his head on the wall in

the Remove passage, if that's any comfort."

"You banged the wrong head!" said the Caterpillar. "Don't you fellows worry—that rot didn't start at Greyfriars, it was started by a Highcliffe man. We've seen your prize porpoise in Courtfield this afternoon, and he mentioned—among his other conversational delights—that Pon called on Skinner at your school just before the dear man got going on this story."

"Oh!" exclaimed Wharton, with a start. "I remember now! Ponsonby came to see Skinner—"

"And put the idea into his head!" said Courtenay, knitting his brows. "We might have guessed that, really. It's like him."

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob. "So Pon was the nigger in the woodpile, all the time! Well, I'm jolly glad to hear it! We've been feeling simply rotten over such a yarn starting at Greyfriars. Nobody thought of it last week—"

"And nobody would have thought of it at all, if Ponsonby hadn't butted in," said Courtenay. "I am quite sure of that."

"Dear old Pon is makin' the most of this," drawled the Caterpillar. "Couldn't have happened better for Pon. He sets the tale goin' at Greyfriars, and then spouts out at Highcliffe that Greyfriars men are callin' a Highcliffe man a thief! It's all happened so nicely for Pon that I began to suspect that he did the thievin' in the first place!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"But I suppose that really was only a stroke of luck for Pon," remarked the Caterpillar. "Pon's capable of most things, but he couldn't have made a long arm and reached over to Greyfriars for that blessed chain—"

"Ha, ha! Not quite."

"The fact is, we all believe it was Bunter," said Harry. "We don't think the fat idiot pinched the rotten thing—we can't—but we're pretty sure that he snooped it from Quelch's study."

"I gathered as much, from his bright an' genial conversation," assented the Caterpillar.

"You see, he's fool enough for anything," said Nugent. "Quelch whopped him, and he might have chucked the chain away to pay him out—not understanding how valuable it was. When a fellow's an absolute fool—"

"Yes, he's not struck me as one of those brilliant intellectual johnnies," agreed De Courcy. "You think he had it?"

"We feel pretty certain of that."

"And you don't think he pinched it?"

"Well, we can't!"

"Popped it, perhaps, to raise the wind?"

"Oh, no!" said the Famous Five, all at once.

"Not possible—what?"

"Quite impossible!" said Harry Wharton decidedly. "Bunter's the last word in idiots, but he's no thief."

The Caterpillar gave his chum a droll look, and Courtenay reddened uncomfortably.

They were thinking of the fat Owl rolling into Mr. Lazarus' shop, with the Caterpillar's thirty shillings in his pocket. They were not likely to mention that to the Greyfriars fellows; but they could not help drawing their own conclusions.

"It's quite likely," went on Harry, "that the fat ass hid it somewhere, and is afraid to own up now it's supposed to be a theft. Of course, it may have got lost—otherwise, I can't understand why he hasn't put it back. I'm quite

certain, at any rate, that he never had any idea of sticking to it."

"After all this fuss he would put it back, if he could!" remarked De Courcy, with a solemn nod. "And, to tell you fellows the truth, I believe that that's just what he's going to do. He gave me that impression, talkin' in that bright and bonny way of his. Do you know, I shouldn't wonder if Quelch spots that jolly old article in his study this very evenin'."

"I hope so!" said Harry. "That will clear any Highcliffe man of having had a hand in it, anyhow."

"Quelch doesn't think—" began Courtenay.

"No! Oh, no! I'm sure not!" said Harry, colouring. "You see, he got rather shirty when Mobby came over, blustering. Mobbs put his back up. But—"

"Talk of giddy angels," murmured the Caterpillar, "and you hear the rustle of their wings. Here comes the jolly old bird!"

From the direction of Greyfriars School a tall and rather angular figure came striding up the road.

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob. "Quelch!"

The group of juniors stood silent and rather uncomfortable, as the Remove master came up.

Courtenay compressed his lips a little. He could quite understand that Mr. Quelch might have been irritated by Mobbs' bluster, into expressing opinions uncomplimentary to Highcliffe. If that was all, it mattered nothing. But if that was not all—

Mr. Quelch stopped as he reached the group by the roadside. They capped him respectfully, in silence.

"Courtenay, I think!" said Mr. Quelch, his gimlet-eyes fixing on the captain of the Highcliffe Fourth.

"Yes, sir!" answered Courtenay quietly.

"I am glad I have met you, my boy!" said the Remove master. "I regret very much that your name has been coupled with an unfortunate recent happening at Greyfriars. I desire to assure you that no responsible person supposes, for one moment, that any suspicion in that unfortunate matter attaches to you."

Frank Courtenay's face cleared. "Thank you, sir!" he answered.

With a nod, Mr. Quelch passed on. The Famous Five exchanged glances of satisfaction. The Caterpillar grinned.

"Wise old bird, Quelch!" he remarked. "I fancy, from his beamin' countenance, that he's a tougher proposition in the Form-room than our Mobby—but I'd be rather glad to swap Mobby for him, all the same."

"No swap, thanks!" chuckled Bob.

Mr. Quelch disappeared in the distance. The juniors strolled, at a more leisurely pace, in the same direction. They had the pleasure—or otherwise—of spotting a fat figure a few minutes later. Billy Bunter, on his homeward way, wore a fat grin of happy satisfaction on his plump features. Evidently the Owl of the Remove was feeling bucked.

"I say, you fellows—" he squeaked.

"Oh seat!" growled Johnny Bull.

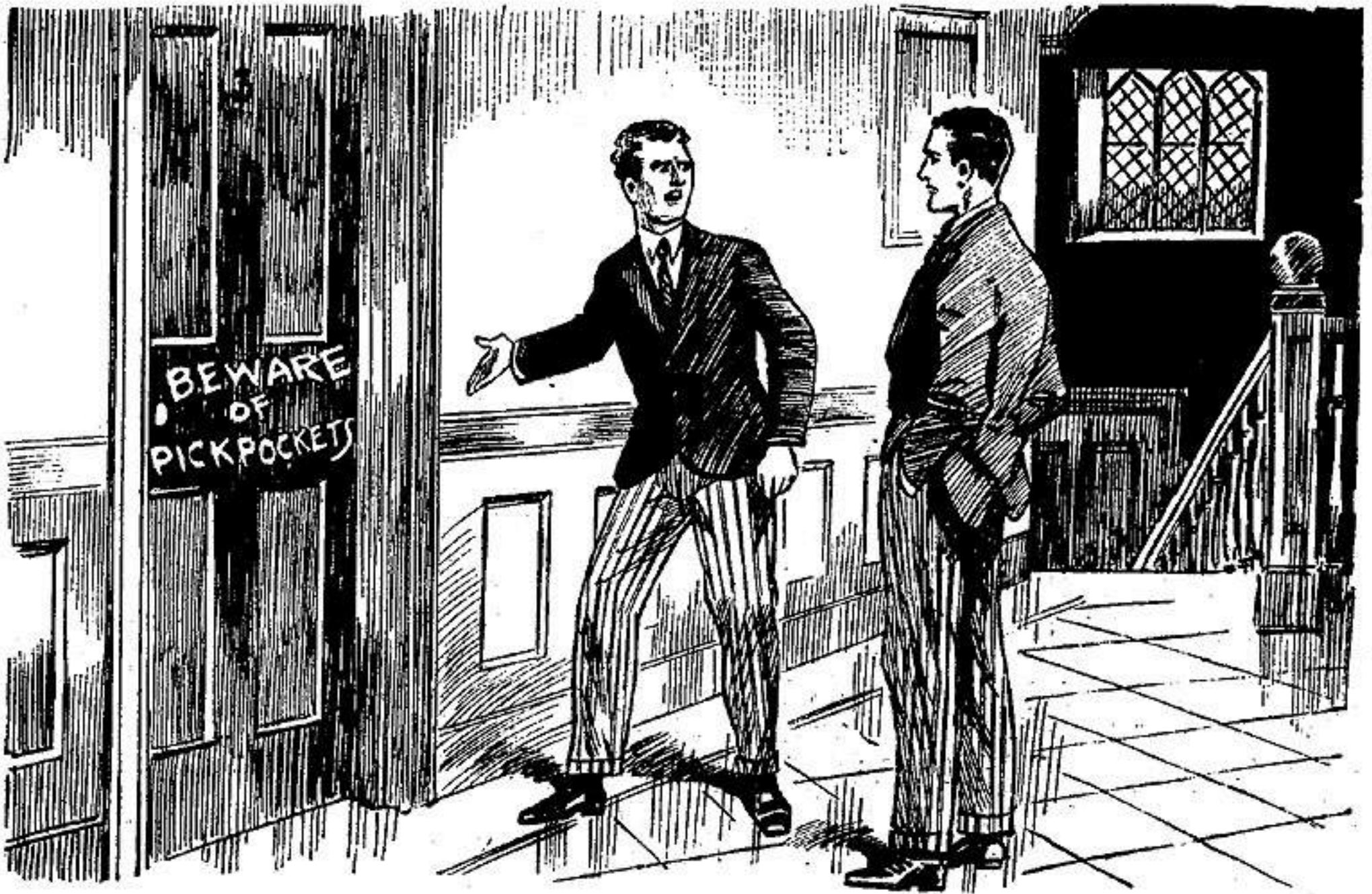
"I say, I've just passed Quelch!" grinned Bunter. "Lucky he didn't happen to pass me in the High Street—what?"

"Why, fathead?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Bunter. "I wasn't coming out of Lazarus', y'know. Still, I'm glad he didn't see me coming out!"

"Lazarus!" repeated Harry. "What the thump have you been doing there?"

"Nothing, old chap! I haven't been



Frank Courtenay and De Courcy stopped at the door of their study and read the inscription chalked thereon. "This," remarked the Caterpillar, quietly, "is the jolly old limit!" Courtenay stood staring at the chalked letters, too enraged to speak.

there! But, I say, you fellows, it's all serene now! Don't you worry, Courtenay, old man—I'm seeing you through!"

Frank Courtenay made no reply to that. The Caterpillar grinned; and the Famous Five looked at Bunter in blank amazement.

"What does that fat ass mean, if he means anything?" asked Bob.

"Eh? I mean what I say," answered Bunter. "It's all serene! Take my word for it! I know how to keep Quelch quiet! Leave it to me. You can take it from me that it's all serene!"

Billy Bunter rolled on his way—still grinning, and greatly bucked. The juniors stared after him—five of them at a complete loss to understand what the fat Owl meant, and the other two under a complete misapprehension as to his meaning! It remained to be seen whether it was "all serene."

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Caught in the Act!

MR. QUELCH stared. He frowned. His lips set.

It was evening at Greyfriars; and all Greyfriars fellows were—or were supposed to be—in their studies, at prep.

So Mr. Quelch, as he turned the corner from Common-room into Masters' Passage, was surprised, and not pleased, to catch sight of a member of his Form.

He halted—staring!

Billy Bunter should have been in Study No. 7, in the Remove, at that moment, deep in preparation. Instead of which, he was creeping cautiously up Masters' Passage, heading for his Form-master's study!

His manner was exceedingly cautious—in fact, stealthy!

He trod on tiptoe, and blinked round him, watchfully, through his big spectacles!

Unfortunately, his vision was limited, even with the aid of those big spectacles, and did not reveal the surprised face of his Form-master, staring at him from the upper end of the passage.

Happily unaware that those gimlet-eyes were fixed on him from the distance, the fat Owl tiptoed on.

Mr. Quelch's lips set hard! He fancied he understood!

Bunter had some secret and surreptitious reason for visiting his Form-master's study. He had chosen the time when prep was on, and all the fellows in the studies, and the passages deserted. What was his reason?

Possibly, to play some disrespectful prank! But a darker suspicion than that forced itself into the Remove master's mind.

Already his suspicions rested on Bunter, in the matter of the missing watch-chain. Now he beheld Bunter creeping softly and stealthily to his study. Did this mean that the young rascal, encouraged by impunity, was about to repeat an act of dishonesty?

It looked like it—terribly like it!

Mr. Quelch, standing and watching the fat junior, looked grimmer and grimmer as he watched. His face seemed moulded in iron.

Bunter reached the door of his Form-master's study. There he paused. He did not knock, and he did not enter. No doubt he supposed, or hoped, that Mr. Quelch was in Common-room. But he was going to make sure.

He stooped and applied an eye to the keyhole!

Certainly, he could not see into the study, as no light was on there, in Mr. Quelch's absence. But the fact that the study was dark assured the fat Owl that the room was unoccupied.

That was enough for Bunter!

He turned the door-handle, opened the door, and stepped quickly in. The door was shut again immediately.

Mr. Quelch breathed hard and deep. "Upon my word!" he murmured.

He walked down the passage. There was no doubt now—and Bunter was fairly caught in the act.

Mr. Quelch turned the door-handle in his turn, threw the door wide open, and switched on the electric light.

"Ooogh!" came a startled gasp.

Bunter bounded.

But the Remove master, in the doorway, saw how he was occupied.

Before he bounded, Bunter had been stooping at the writing-table. One drawer was open—the one that had contained the missing chain. Bunter had been at that drawer in the glimmer of the fire.

Now, suddenly revealed by the flashing on of the electric light, the fat junior bounded away like a very active kangaroo, and stood staring at Mr. Quelch, his mouth open, his eyes almost popping through his spectacles.

"Ooogh!" repeated Bunter, in a breathless gasp.

Mr. Quelch stepped into the study. The expression on his face might have made the fabled Gorgon envious.

"Bunter, what are you doing here?"

Quelch's voice was not loud, but deep—very deep.

"Oh, n-n-nothing, sir!" stammered Bunter.

Mr. Quelch closed the door and stepped towards his table. Billy Bunter watched him in horror. He was caught—fairly caught—and his fat head was almost spinning.

"You have opened that drawer in my table, Bunter!"

(Continued on page 16.)

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KEEPING QUELCH QUIET!



FRANK RICHARDS

(Continued from page 13.)

"Oh, no, sir!" groaned Bunter. "It—it was open, sir! I—I—I found it—it—open—"

"What have you taken from that drawer?"

"Eh? Oh, n-n-nothing, sir."

Mr. Quelch gave him a look. There was nothing of value in that drawer but papers—valuable only to Mr. Quelch. But it was the drawer from which the chain had been taken. It looked—plainly it looked—as if the thief had returned to it, in the hope of finding more plunder there.

"I—I—I didn't come here to take anything, sir!" groaned Bunter.

"You will hardly expect me to believe that statement, Bunter!" said the Remove master coldly. "What have you—"

He broke off as he glanced into the open drawer. A gleam of gold met his startled eyes.

Mr. Quelch jumped—he almost bounded, as Bunter had done!

"What—" he gasped.

He stared into the drawer. Under his eyes lay a gold watch-chain—a massive, old-fashioned, gold watch-chain, broken at the end. If it was not the missing chain, it was so exactly like it that Mr. Quelch was hardly likely to detect the difference at the moment.

"Upon my word!" he gasped.

"Oh lor'!" breathed Bunter.

He had intended to conceal that chain under the papers, in the happy hope that Quelch, finding it there, would believe that he had somehow overlooked it in his previous search.

Then it would have been "all serene"—as Bunter had assured the Remove fellows that it would be.

Obviously, it was not all serene now. Quelch had not only found the chain—staring him in the face from the open drawer—but he had found Bunter—caught him in the very act of putting it there!

Such was the outcome of the masterly scheme evolved by Billy Bunter's remarkable intellect.

"That," said Mr. Quelch, "is the missing chain, Bunter! You have replaced it in the drawer from which you had taken it!"

"Oh, no!" gasped Bunter. "Not at all, sir! I—I never knew it was there, sir! I—I've never seen it before!"

"Boy!"

"I—I—I mean, I—I—I thought it might be there, sir, and I—I came to—to look!" stammered the hapless Owl. "And—and I—I found it there, sir! W-w-wasn't that lucky, sir?"

"Bunter!"

"I—I—I told the fellows, sir, that you—you might have overlooked it, sir, and—and it was there all the time!" gasped Bunter. "You—you see, sir, that—that's how it was! You—you overlooked it, sir! I—I said to Toddy only to-day that—that you might have overlooked it there, sir—old people do such things—"

"What?"

"My—my grandfather is—is always losing and missing things, sir, just like that, and he ain't as old as you, sir—he's only sixty—"

Mr. Quelch was fifty—and certainly not old—merely fifty, and, in his own belief, at least, unusually young for his age, looking only about forty. Bunter's happy remarks did not have the effect of pouring oil on the troubled waters.

"Bunter—" roared Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" groaned Bunter. "I—I—I found it there, sir—I—I—I'm so gig-gig-glad I've found your chain for you, sir—"

"How dare you utter these palpable untruths, you young rascal!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "You have replaced the stolen article under my very eyes! It was, as I suspected, you who purloined it in the first place. Otherwise it could not have been in your possession. I am glad, at least, that you have done this, Bunter—but it cannot save you from the penalty of dishonesty! I shall now take you to your headmaster—"

"Oh crikey!"

"You will be expelled from Greyfriars this very hour—"

"Oooooogh!"

"You will be sent home this evening, Bunter—this very evening—"

"Ow!"

"You will now come with me to Dr. Locke!"

Billy Bunter tottered. His fat brain was swimming.

He had planned to replace the missing chain with the "dud" chain from Lazarus—nothing doubting that Quelch would suppose that it was the same chain. He had got away with that—so far—but it was, unfortunately, the very worst thing that could have happened for him. Believing that it was the same chain, Mr. Quelch could not, of course, doubt that Bunter had taken it in the first place.

But there was one gleam of hope for Bunter!

He had banked on Quelch believing that it was the same chain. Now he hoped to convince him otherwise. For if Quelch went on believing that it was the same chain, Bunter was booked for the boot right on the spot!

"Come!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"I—I say, sir—" gasped Bunter.

"You need say nothing. I shall take you immediately to Dr. Locke, to be expelled for theft."

"But I didn't—I—I wasn't—I—I—I never!" babbled Bunter. "That—that ain't your chain, sir!"

"What?"

"'Tain't, sir—'tain't at all! Oh crikey! It—it's mine, sir! Oh lor'!"

Mr. Quelch gazed at him. That astounding statement made him wonder for a moment whether the fat junior was in his right senses.

"Yours!" he stuttered.

"Ye-es, sir! I bought it to-day—"

"Silence! How dare you make such a statement!" almost shrieked Mr. Quelch. "No more—not another word—not another syllable! I shall take you—and this chain—to the headmaster. Come!"

"I—I—I—I—"

"Silence!" roared the Remove master.

With his right hand he caught up the gold chain from the drawer. With his left, he grabbed Billy Bunter by the collar.

He marched the fat junior out of the study—and Billy Bunter's fat knees knocked together as he tottered away with Mr. Quelch to see his headmaster!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

All That Glitters Is Not Gold!

DR. LOCKE laid down his pen—and lifted his eyebrows.

He gazed at Mr. Quelch. Seldom, or never, did that member of his staff present an aspect other than one of calm, cold composure.

Calmness and composure were conspicuous by their absence now from Mr. Quelch's speaking countenance.

Like the Alpine young man in the poem, his brow was set, his eye beneath flashed like a falchion from its sheath!

Obviously, he was very angry. It was surprising to see him march a member of his Form into his Chief's study by the collar. Still more surprising was it to see him carrying a heavy gold watch-chain in his other hand.

Quite astonished, the Head gazed at the Remove master as he rustled in, with a fat Owl in one hand and a gold chain in the other.

"Mr. Quelch!" murmured Dr. Locke.

"Sir!" said Mr. Quelch. He made an effort to speak calmly. "This boy—this—this Bunter—has been caught in the very act of replacing the stolen watch-chain in my study!"

"Oh!" ejaculated the Head.

"That, sir, is the chain!" Mr. Quelch dropped it, with a clink, on the Head's table. "Under my eyes, sir, he replaced it in the drawer from which it was purloined. No further doubt remains, sir, as to the identity of the wretched boy who has yielded to dishonesty! No doubt, sir, you will expel this boy from the school without an hour's delay."

"Most assuredly!" said the Head.

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter.

"If you, sir, actually saw this boy with the chain—"

"With my own eyes, sir!" said Mr. Quelch emphatically. "With my own eyes, sir!" Really, Quelch seemed to fancy that the Head might suppose that he had seen Bunter with somebody else's eyes. Anyhow, he made it emphatically clear that it was with his own!

"Then the matter is beyond dispute or investigation," said Dr. Locke. "I am glad it has been cleared up, though grieved to learn that there is a dishonest boy at Greyfriars. Bunter, you will leave the school this evening—"

"Oh, really, sir—"

"You are expelled for dishonesty!" said the Head sternly.

"I—I didn't—I—I wasn't—" wailed Bunter. "I never did, sir! It wasn't me! Oh crikey!"

"You need say nothing, Bunter! Your guilt is clear, if this chain has been in your hands since it was taken from your Form-master's study."

"Oh dear! It hasn't, sir!"

"Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice. "How dare you prevaricate to your headmaster? How dare you?"

"I—I—I ain't!" wailed Bunter. "I wasn't! I didn't! I wouldn't! I never!"

"I will hear you, Bunter!" said Dr. Locke. "Answer me directly! Do you deny that you took this chain from your Form-master's study one day last week?"

"Yes, sir, rather!" gasped Bunter.

"Then how did it come into your hands? Your Form-master found this chain in your hands, Bunter."

"He—he didn't, sir!"

Mr. Quelch gasped.

"Is it possible," he stuttered, "that the miserable boy is seeking to cast doubt upon my statement?"

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Not Guilty!

"Impossible!" said the Head. "Bunter, if you dare—"

"Oh! Yes, sir! I mean, no, sir! He didn't find it in my hands," wailed Bunter. "I tell you he didn't, sir! He found it in the drawer of the table, sir!"

"You utterly stupid boy! You had placed it there! It was in your hands when you entered Mr. Quelch's study."

"It wasn't, sir!" gasped Bunter. "Then where was it?" demanded the Head.

"In my trousers pocket, sir."

"Bless my soul!" said Dr. Locke. He gazed at Bunter, while Mr. Quelch gave a snort like a warhorse. "This boy appears extraordinarily stupid, Mr. Quelch. Bunter, attend to me! When I say that the chain was in your hands, I mean that it was in your possession."

"Oh! Yes, sir! Oh lor'!"

"You deny having taken it from the study last week?"

"Oh crumbs! Yes, sir."

"Then where did you obtain it?"

"In Courtfield, sir," groaned Bunter.

"I—I bought it at Mr. Lazarus', sir. I—I gave thirty bob for it."

"You—you—you did what?" gasped the Head. "Is this boy insane? What do you mean, Bunter? Explain yourself at once!"

"Tain't the same chain, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"Wha-a-t?"

"It's quite different, sir!" groaned Bunter. "You can't tell by looking at it, sir, because it's the same—I mean it looks the same—but it's a different chain, sir. Oh dear!"

"Mr. Quelch, is it possible—or even remotely possible—"

"It is not, sir!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, with a devastating glare at the unhappy Owl. "I know my own watch-chain by sight, sir, after having worn it for thirty years! Moreover, its value, as metal, is more than twenty pounds, and probably nearer thirty, and Bunter could not possibly have purchased such a chain for the sum he names. A reckless prevarication—"

"It's rolled gold, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"Rolled gold!" repeated the Head.

"Yes, sir; rolled gold—thirty bob, at old Lazarus'," groaned Bunter.

Dr. Locke gazed at him fixedly for a moment.

"Please examine the chain closely, Mr. Quelch," he said. "This statement, amazing as it is, must be investigated."

"Very well, sir; but there is no doubt—"

Mr. Quelch broke off as he picked up the watch-chain and began to scan it with care.

Certainly, at a glance, it was the replica of the chain he had lost.

On a closer inspection, however, there was a very considerable difference. Close inspection revealed the fact that the chain was not made of gold. It was made to look like gold; but, as the ancient proverb states, all is not gold that glitters! An extraordinary expression came over the face of Henry Quelch.

He stared at that chain! He glared at it! He gurgled!

Dr. Locke looked at him inquiringly.

"Well, sir?" he asked.

"It—it—it—" Mr. Quelch seemed to be afflicted with an impediment in his speech. "It—it—it—" "It—" repeated the Head.

"It—it—it is not the same chain, sir!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

BILLY BUNTER breathed more freely.

There was a long moment of silence in the study.

The Head's eyebrows were raised expressively. Mr. Quelch was red with confusion and vexation.

"Not the same chain!" repeated Dr. Locke.

"N-no, sir!"

"Did you not say, Mr. Quelch, that you would know the chain which you had worn, I think you said, for thirty years?"

Mr. Quelch gasped.

"I—I certainly said so, sir! I—I was deceived by the resemblance! The design of this chain is not by any means uncommon. No doubt there are many other chains in existence precisely similar in appearance. But I could not imagine, sir, that such a chain was in the possession of a boy of my Form! Neither can I guess why Bunter placed it in my study."

"That is truly extraordinary!" said Dr. Locke. "Your misapprehension was a very natural one, Mr. Quelch, if the chains are indeed so similar—"

"Exactly similar, sir; but on examination, I can, of course, see that this chain is not made of the genuine metal."

"Bunter!"

"Oh! Yes, sir! C-c-can I go now, sir?"

"You may not go, Bunter! You state that you purchased this article of spurious jewellery in Courtfield for the sum of thirty shillings?"

"Yes, sir. Old Lazarus will tell you, if you ask him."

"And why did you place it in Mr. Quelch's study?"

"I—I—I—"

"I caught him, sir, the moment he had placed the chain in the drawer, from which my own chain was taken last week, sir!" said Mr. Quelch. "It was lying there in full view, and Bunter was—" "That wasn't my fault, sir," gasped Bunter. "I was going to hide it under the papers, sir!"

"And why?" exclaimed the Head.

"Explain yourself!"

"To—to—to keep Mr. Quelch quiet, sir!" groaned Bunter.

"To keep Mr. Quelch quiet?" repeated the Head, like a man in a dream, while Mr. Quelch, looking far from quiet, looked as if he would have liked to bite Bunter.

"Yes, sir. You—you see, there's been such a row about that rotten chain," mumbled Bunter. "Some of the fellows think I snooped it, sir—and, of course, I never did—and some of them think that Highcliffe chap, Courtenay, had it; and I jolly well know he didn't, and—and—and I thought Mr. Quelch would be satisfied, sir, if—if he found his chain again in the drawer—"

"But it is not his chain!" gasped the Head.

"I—I—I thought he would think it was, sir, and—and keep quiet!" groaned Bunter. "I—I saw it in Lazarus' window, the other day, sir, and it looked exactly like Mr. Quelch's chain, so I—I thought I—I'd buy it, sir, and—and put it in his study, and—and it would be all serene, sir."

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Is it possible, Mr. Quelch, that this boy of your Form is so utterly, incredibly, and unconceivably stupid?" asked the Head.

"I fear, sir, that there is no limit to his crass stupidity!" said the Remove master.

"Oh, really, sir! I—I thought it a pretty good idea—"

"Did you think, Bunter, that Mr. Quelch could be permanently imposed on by such a transparent trick?"

"I—I wasn't going to impose on him, sir! I—I wouldn't! I was only going to make him think he'd got his chain back."

"Dear me!" said the Head, gazing at the fat Owl. He was beginning to feel that that member of Quelch's Form was rather too much for him. "Such an act, Bunter, whatever your motives, was an act of deceit!"

"W-w-was it, sir?"

"Do you not understand that it was, Bunter?"

"No, sir! Yes, sir! I mean, no sir!"

"Dear me!" said the Head again.

He glanced at Mr. Quelch. Thunder was fading from that gentleman's brow. He no longer looked disposed to bite Bunter.

"As it is not the same chain, Mr. Quelch—" The Head coughed.

"It certainly is not!"

"Then it cannot be taken as evidence that Bunter was concerned in the purloining of your chain last week."

"Obviously no, sir."

"The matter, then, rests where it did?"

"Precisely, sir."

"This boy appears only to have acted with extraordinary stupidity—"

"Such stupidity, sir, is amazing—almost unnerving!" said Mr. Quelch. "He appears to have believed that I should suppose this chain to be my own. Naturally, I was deceived at the first glance; but I should, of course, have detected the imposture as soon as I gave it attention."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

That, evidently, had not occurred to Billy Bunter's powerful intellect.

A faint smile flickered over the headmaster's face. There was an element of the comic in the monumental obtuseness of the fat Owl.

"This extraordinary boy, Quelch—" He paused. "Perhaps you would prefer to deal with him."

"Very good, sir!" said Mr. Quelch.

He signed to Bunter to follow him from the study, taking the chain in his hand.

Dr. Locke smiled when the door closed after them.

Billy Bunter's scheme for "keeping Quelch quiet," as he expressed it, was really enough to make a stone image smile.

"I—I say, c-c-can I go now, sir?" mumbled Bunter, in the corridor.

"You may follow me to my study, Bunter."

"I—I—I'd like to—to get back to prep, sir, if—if you don't mind! I—I'm rather keen on prep—"

"Follow me!"

"Oh crikey! I mean, yes, sir."

Bunter trailed dismally after Mr. Quelch to the Remove master's study. There Quelch fixed him with a gimlet-eye.

"Bunter, did you make this ridiculous attempt to deceive me in order to cover up your own guilt?" rapped the Remove master.

"Oh, no, sir! I—I was trying to please you—"

"To please me?"

"Ye-es, sir! I—I thought you'd be so glad to—to get your chain back, sir," said Bunter hopefully. "I—I didn't really mean that it was to keep you quiet, sir. It wasn't because you've been shirty ever since that mouldy—I mean, that valuable chain was lost, sir—"

"Bunter!"

"Yes, sir! C-c-can I go now?"

"I shall punish you with the greatest severity, Bunter, for this attempted deception if I did not feel bound to make allowances for your crass stupidity!" said Mr. Quelch. "As it is, I shall simply give you six strokes with the cane."

"Oh scissors!"

"You may take that chain, Bunter, as it is your property! Now you will bend over that chair!" said Mr. Quelch, taking up a cane from the table.

"Oh lor!"

Billy Bunter bent over the chair. He wriggled in horrid anticipation! Then he wriggled in anguish.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Ow! Wow! Yow!" bellowed Bunter.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yaroooooop!"

"You may leave my study, Bunter!"

"Ow! Wow! Yow!"

Billy Bunter wriggled out of the study. He wriggled back to the Remove passage and into Study No. 7. But he did not bother about prep. He was too busy wriggling like a fat eel to think about prep.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Asking for Trouble!

THE Caterpillar whistled. Frank Courtenay's brow grew as black as midnight.

They had come up to prep at Highcliffe. In the doorway of Ponsonby's study Pon & Co. were lounging in a grinning group. Courtenay gave them no heed—but his chum glanced at them curiously along the Fourth Form passage. The Highcliffe knuts winked at one another and grinned, as if in possession of some good joke. Only Gadsby in the knutty group did not grin. He was silent, and looked uneasy. But the rest seemed in high feather.

The chums of the Highcliffe Fourth knew the reason when they stopped at the door of their study, No. 3, in the Fourth.

On that door an inscription had been chalked. In large capital letters it stared at them:

"BEWARE OF PICKPOCKETS!"

"This," remarked the Caterpillar quietly, "is the jolly old limit!"

Courtenay did not speak.

For a long minute he stood staring at the chalked letters on the oak. He seemed too enraged to speak. His face flushed crimson, and then paled.

Still without speaking, he walked up the passage to Pon's study. De Courcy, a little alarmed by the look on his face, followed him to Study No. 5.

"Frank, old bean—" he murmured.

Courtenay did not heed him. His face was so passionately angry that the grinning in the knutty circle died off the knutty faces.

Vavasour stepped back into the study and Drury backed a little.

Ponsonby, setting his lips, stood his ground.

"That is your work, Ponsonby!" said the captain of the Fourth, his voice coming low and clear between his teeth.

"Eh?" drawled Ponsonby. "What is?"

"You've chalked on my study door—"

"Not at all!"

"You deny it, you cur?"

"Oh, quite!"

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The Caterpillar touched his friend's elbow.

"Keep cool, old bean!" he murmured.

"Easy does it. Pon's not the only dirty dog at Highcliffe!"

"Don't be an ass!" said Courtenay.

"Either Ponsonby did it or put another cur up to doing it! It comes from him! Who set that rotten story going at Greyfriars, and then brought it over here and spread it over Highcliffe? Whether Ponsonby chalked up that insolence or not, he's responsible—"

"Keep your distance!" said Ponsonby savagely. "I'm prepared to tell Mobbs that I never touched your rotten study door—and if you begin any hooligan game I'm goin' to call him up."

"Who did, then?"

"Find out!"

"Might have been anybody!" remarked Monson casually. "From what I hear there seems to be a sort of general impression that that Greyfriars beak might find his missing watch-chain if he looked in a Highcliffe study."

Smack!

The back of Frank Courtenay's hand fairly crashed on Monson's face, and he staggered along the passage.

"That's for you!" said the captain of the Fourth.

"Oh gad!" breathed the Caterpillar.

Monson stumbled against the wall, and then, with a roar of rage, hurled himself at Courtenay, hitting out furiously.

The captain of the Fourth met him with left and right. Pon & Co. made a forward movement—and the Caterpillar stepped between.

"Fair play, old beans!" drawled De Courcy. "Man to man, you know!"

Five or six Fourth Formers came out of the studies. They were prompt to gather round to see fair play. Pon & Co. decided not to intervene.

A minute more, and it was too late. Monson, knocked spinning by the captain of the Fourth, went down with a crash. He stayed down.

Courtenay, breathing hard, turned back to the group of knuts in Pon's doorway.

"Is anyone here going to repeat what Monson said?" he asked savagely.

There was no reply to that.

Frank Courtenay advanced on the dandy of Highcliffe, and Pon, panting, backed into his study.

"Hands off!" he hissed. "I tell you that—"

"You can tell me anything you like, you cur! Whether you did it, or another rotter like you, I don't care a bean! You're going to take the consequences!"

"Hands off!" screamed Ponsonby, as the captain of the Fourth grasped him.

In that muscular grasp he was whirled out of the study into the passage.

"Look here—" gasped Drury.

"I—I say—" stammered Gadsby.

Courtenay gave them no heed. His grasp was like iron on the back of Pon's collar, his knuckles grinding into the back of Pon's neck.

Struggling vainly, Ponsonby was dragged headlong along the passage to the door of Study No. 3.

The whole crowd of juniors followed in breathless excitement. What Frank Courtenay was going to do was not clear for the moment; but it was soon clear.

Gripping Pon by the back of the neck, he shoved his face against the oak door of Study No. 3, and rubbed it there.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped the Caterpillar. He grinned.

Courtenay was rubbing out the

chalked inscription, with Ponsonby's face as a duster.

He rubbed and rubbed. The dandy of Highcliffe, crimson with rage and humiliation, struggled frantically, and kicked and yelled. But there was no help for Pon.

The chalked letters disappeared from the oak, one by one, as his face rubbed them away. Once more Pon had asked for more than he could handle. His face grew grubby and chalky, and he undoubtedly had a pain in his features. He yelled and raved and spluttered.

"Look here—" gasped Drury.

"Keep back, old bean!" smiled the Caterpillar. "Pon's asked for this. He's always askin' for somethin' he doesn't want. Think there'll be any more chalkin' on our study door after this, you men?"

"Hardly," chortled Smithson.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Let go!" raved Ponsonby. "Ooogh! You rotter! Grooogh! Ooooch!"

His struggles were fierce and frantic. But the grip on the back of his neck never relaxed for a second. Without a word, quietly, grimly, Courtenay set himself to his task, and he did not cease till the last chalked letter was rubbed out—by Ponsonby's face.

Then, with a swing of his arm, he sent the dandy of the Fourth sprawling in the passage.

The knutty group looked on in silence; the rest of the juniors chuckling.

Ponsonby sat up, crimson glowing through the grubbiness on his face. He staggered to his feet.

This bitter humiliation was too much, even for Ponsonby. Fury supplied the place of pluck, and he hurled himself at Courtenay, panting, mad with rage.

"Go it, Pon!" gasped Monson, dabbing his own streaming nose with a handkerchief.

"Give the cad beans, old man!" exclaimed Drury.

"Absolutely!" chirruped Vavasour.

Pon was doing his best. A week ago he had scrapped with the captain of the Fourth, and shown the white feather. Now he was going all out.

For several long minutes the fight raged, and, with Pon in that unusual warlike temper, the captain of the Fourth had his hands full. Hard knocks were exchanged with the bare knuckles, and both looked badly damaged. The Highcliffe juniors looked on breathlessly. Pon had never been seen to put up a fight like this before.

But it booted not. Courtenay took punishment without flinching; but there was a yellow streak in Ponsonby, and as the hard knocks came home, again and again, he flinched and quailed and backed, and as the captain of the Fourth followed him up, he leaped back suddenly into his study.

"Go it, Pon!" shouted Monson.

"You're not licked yet, old bean!" urged the Caterpillar. "Come out an' mop up the passage with Franky. He's waitin' to be mopped!"

Courtenay stood in the doorway. He looked strongly inclined to follow Ponsonby in; then, with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, he turned away, and went to his own study.

The Caterpillar chuckled as he sorted out books in Study No. 3.

"Think it was Pon, old man?" he asked.

"I don't care who it was; it came from him," answered Courtenay. "I don't think it will happen again, anyhow."

"Not if you use jolly old Pon's face for a duster every time," grinned the



Billy Bunter grabbed the envelope with a fat hand and opened it. Next moment he gave a jump. There were no currency notes in the envelope—only a slip of paper bearing the words: "FIRST OF APRIL!" The fat Removite's eyes almost popped through his spectacles at sight of it!

Caterpillar. "I think that will make the dear man tired of leavin' his messages about on other fellows' doors. No; I don't think it will happen again!"

Courtenay's face was grim and frowning as he sat over his books. But the Caterpillar punctuated prep that evening with chuckles, as if he found something amusing in it.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Boot for Bunter!

"I SAY, you fellows!"
"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Famous Five.

It was the following morning—a bright and sunny April morning, the first of that merry month.

Billy Bunter, as he rolled in the quad, did not look as merry and bright as the April morn. Other fellows, however, seemed quite hilarious—and the fat Owl of the Remove was the cause of the hilarity.

Harry Wharton & Co., of late, had given Bunter grim looks whenever they had encountered him. Having no doubt that Bunter was the "snooper" of the missing chain, they regarded him as the cause of all the trouble. On the present occasion, however, they did not look grim when the fat Owl rolled up to them in the quad in morning break. They roared.

That morning the mere sight of Bunter seemed enough to make any fellow yell. The story of his amazing stunt with the "dud" chain was all over the Form now, and it made the fellows chuckle and chortle, till it seemed to Bunter that they would never leave off chuckling and chortling. That Bunter had even thought of such a stunt was remarkable. That he had

supposed for one moment that he could get away with it, was more remarkable still.

"I say, do stop cackling!" hooted Bunter. "I don't see anything to cackle at, you cackling dummies!"

"You're the only chap that doesn't," chortled Bob Cherry. "You frabjous ass! Did you really fancy you could make Quelch believe that a rolled gold chain from Lazarus' was the jolly old heirloom he had inherited from his grandfather?"

"Well, it looked just like it," said Bunter. "That was what put the idea into my head, you know. And he jolly well thought it was at first!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If he hadn't copped me in his study, I fancy it would have been all right," said Bunter. "Only then, you know, I had to tell him that it wasn't his chain."

"You blithering bandersnatch!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "He would have spotted that it wasn't his chain the first time he looked at it."

"Oh, I don't suppose so!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, do shut up cackling! I say, you fellows, it's pretty serious, as it turns out," said Bunter, blinking at the grinning juniors through his big spectacles. "You see, I expected a postal order this morning, and—and it hasn't come."

"Go hon!" said Johnny Bull sarcastically.

"We've heard that one," said Nugent.

"What I mean is, that chain cost thirty bob," said Bunter. "As the stunt never worked, you know, I've got it left on my hands. And I owe thirty bob on it."

"That needn't worry you," grinned Bob. "Maully can't have expected you to square, as you never do."

"It wasn't Maully lent me the thirty bob, you ass!"

"Rot! No other fellow in the Remove is ass enough!" said Bob, staring. "No other fellow at Greyfriars, if you come to that. What do you mean?"

"You see, it wasn't a Greyfriars chap at all," explained Bunter. "I borrowed it of a Highcliffe man in Courtfield yesterday."

The Famous Five ceased to display merriment. They looked at Billy Bunter as if they could have bitten him.

"You fat rascal!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "You've borrowed money of a fellow at another school that you can't pay?"

"Well, I could have paid it all right if my postal order had come this morning. But—but it hasn't. And I told De Courcy I'd square to-day. It's rather awkward, isn't it?"

"You—you—you——" Wharton gasped. "You touched the Caterpillar for thirty bob?"

"Well, it was really for his pal's sake, you know," explained Bunter. "If it had worked, Quelch would have fancied he'd got his chain back, and that would have seen Courtenay clear. I suppose you don't think I was thinking about myself in the matter at all? Do I ever?"

"Ye gods!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"It's awkward, owing a Highcliffe man money," went on Bunter. "I say, it's a jolly good chain! Suppose one of you fellows gave me thirty bob for it? Then I'd settle with De Courcy."

"You blithering idiot——"

"I'll let you have it for the same as I gave for it," offered Bunter. "I don't want to make a profit like Fishy. Nothing mean about me, I hope."

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"Do you think anybody wants a spoof watch-chain, you fat Owl?" roared Johnny Bull.

"Well, it's real gold, you know—real rolled gold!" urged Bunter. "I say, you fellows, do you think Lazarus would buy it back at the same figure?"

"The thankfulness is not terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"More likely offer you three bob than thirty, you frabjous frump," growled Johnny Bull. "I don't suppose it's worth anything at all."

"Well, look here, lend me the thirty bob, then," suggested Bunter. "I can't go on owing money to a chap at another school! You fellows mightn't mind—but I'm a bit more particular about such things."

"Oh, kill him!"

"I say, you fellows——"

"Gentlemen, chaps, and sportsmen," said Bob Cherry. "That fat villain borrows money up and down Greyfriars, and never squares—but he can't carry on that game at another school. The first time has got to be the last."

"Hear, hear!" agreed the Co.

"I vote for kicking him for borrowing money off a Highcliffe man, and kicking him regularly till he squares——"

"Good egg!"

"Turn round, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! I'll settle with De Courcy to-day, as I promised, if you'll lend me the thirty bob——"

"Slew him round!"

"I—I say, you fellows, don't play the goat!" howled Bunter. "Think I'm going to leave a debt unpaid, you beasts? Would that be like me?"

"Oh crikey!"

"Keep your hoofs away, Bob Cherry, you beast! I'm going to settle up with De Courcy to-day! If my postal order comes this afternoon, it will be all right. I fancy it's pretty certain—I'm expecting it from one of my titled relations, you know—Keep off, you beasts!" Bunter dodged.

"Gerraway!" he gasped. "I say, if my postal order doesn't come, I'll let De Courcy have the chain—see? That will be just as good! I—I think very likely he'll be glad to have that handsome watch-chain!"

"Oh crumbs!"

The idea of Rupert de Courcy, the most expensive and fastidious fellow at Highcliffe School, sporting a rolled gold watch-chain, made the Famous Five gasp. But Billy Bunter seemed to think it quite a good idea.

"That will be all right," he said. "I'll let him have the chain! The only difficulty is, that I can't go over to Highcliffe, because of the row that's going on! Think I could send it by post?"

"You 'frightful chump!' roared Bob. "I wish you wouldn't yell at a chap! I say, lend me a bob to register it in the post, and I'll let De Courcy have it! I mean it!"

"Bunter's got to learn not to bilk fellows in another school!" said the captain of the Remove. "Now, understand this, Bunter—you've got to pay De Courcy that thirty shillings! You're going to be kicked till you do."

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Every time we see you, we're going to boot you, if you haven't squared that Highcliffe chap, see?"

"Beast!"

"And we're going to begin now!"

"Yaroooooh!"

Billy Bunter dodged and fled. After him flew the Famous Five. There was

a series of fearful yells from Bunter, as he was dribbled across the quad.

The next few minutes were quite exciting for the Owl of the Remove. He was quite breathless when he dodged into the House at last, and escaped.

In the third school that morning, Billy Bunter sat rather uncomfortably on his form. And when the Remove were dismissed, he dodged away in haste.

If he was going to be booted till he settled his account with the Caterpillar, it was, so to speak, a bootiful prospect for Bunter. His cash resources were limited to fourpence; and the arrival of his postal order was, to say the least, uncertain. It looked as if Bunter was booked for booting till the end of the term!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Sold!

CECIL REGINALD TEMPLE, of the Fourth, grinned, and winked at Dabney and Fry, of that Form. Dab and Fry grinned

also.

"There he is!" murmured Temple.

"He" was Billy Bunter, of the Remove. After third school, the fat Owl was "mooching" under the elms, with a dismal and disgruntled expression on his face.

He had, in his pocket, a rolled gold watch-chain which had cost him—or rather, the Caterpillar—thirty shillings; if that was any comfort. But it did not seem to afford him much. He had offered it for sale up and down the Remove, a good many times already—but no fellow seemed to want it. Only Fisher T. Fish had made him an offer for it; and Fishy's offer being only ninepence, Bunter had refused it with scorn.

Before Bunter stretched an endless and disheartening vista of booting, and his fat mind dwelt on it unhappily.

He blinked dismally at the three Fourth Formers, as they bore down on him with smiling faces.

"Oh, here you are!" said Cecil Reginald, affably. "Looking for you, old man! I hear you've got a watch-chain to sell."

Billy Bunter's fat face brightened up at once.

"Yes, rather, old chap!" he said eagerly. "I say, it's a ripping chain—first-class article of jewellery! Fishy wanted to buy it, but he wouldn't go over twenty-nine shillings, and I—I said no."

"Oh gum!" gasped Fry. "Fishy offered you twenty-nine bob, did he?"

"He wouldn't go higher than that!" said Bunter; which was quite a truthful statement. Fishy had gone considerably lower than that.

"Well, let's look at it!" said Temple, closing one eye at his friends. "I couldn't go over two pounds——"

"Oh crikey! I—I mean, I'll let you have it for two pounds, Temple," gasped Bunter. His little round eyes danced behind his big round spectacles. "Here it is—just look!"

The chain was extracted from Bunter's trousers pocket, and he held it up for inspection. The rolled gold glimmered in the April sunshine.

"It's broken, though!" said Fry.

"Oh rather!" said Dabney.

"I've got the other bit!" said Bunter, eagerly. "You see, I had to snap it at the end, to make it look like Quelch's chain—it was broken, you know——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just look at it," urged Bunter. "Exactly like that chain that Quelch lost, and the fellows say that was worth over twenty pounds. Just look!"

Temple & Co. looked! There was no doubt that that massive chain appeared very valuable, at the first casual glance. Closer examination revealed that appearances were deceptive.

"Nobody would guess it was rolled gold, seeing it on you, Temple!" said the fat Owl. "Fellows are used to seeing you swank about with jewellery——"

"Wh-what?"

"I mean, look at that diamond pin of yours," said Bunter. "I dare say it's only paste, but fellows don't know, do they?"

Cecil Reginald Temple ceased to smile. Dabney and Fry, on the other hand, smiled more expansively than before.

"You cheeky fat frog——" began Temple.

"Oh, really, Temple——"

Cecil Reginald controlled his impulse to kick Bunter. That would have spoiled his little jest on the fat Owl of the Remove.

"Make it two pounds, and it's yours!" said Bunter. "Mind, it's going dirt cheap at that!"

"What do you fellows think?" asked Temple, looking at his friends.

"Well, I wouldn't go over two pounds!" said Fry.

"No, not over!" agreed Dabney.

"That's all right!" said Bunter. "Make it two pounds, old chap! I'm not asking you to go over that."

Cecil Reginald appeared to make up his mind. He slid his hand into his pocket, and Billy Bunter's eyes glistened.

He could hardly believe in his good luck. After all his efforts to sell that chain at thirty shillings, getting two pounds for it seemed really to be too good to be true. As a matter of fact, it was!

Temple's hand came out of his pocket—empty!

"Where did I leave that dashed envelope?" he asked.

"You left one on your study table," answered Fry.

"Did I? Then that must be it. Bother!" said Temple. "I don't want to fag up to the study now! Look here, Bunter, you take that chain up to my study, and take what's in the envelope on the table, will you? If you're satisfied——"

"Oh, yes, rather!"

"Well, if you're satisfied, leave the chain in the table drawer, and it's a trade!" said Temple.

"What-ho!" gasped Bunter. "Two pounds——"

"I said not over two pounds!"

"That comes to the same thing, doesn't it?"

"All right, then, it's a go!" said Temple.

Billy Bunter rolled off joyfully to the House. Temple & Co. gazed after him, as he went, with grinning faces.

"Now I wonder," said Temple, thoughtfully, "whether that fat ass thinks I'm goin' to give him two pounds for that dud watch-chain! Think he does?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" chortled Fry. "Sort of!"

"I never said so," argued Temple. "I said I wouldn't give more than two pounds. And I jolly well wouldn't!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In fact, I wouldn't give him two-pence!" yawned Temple. "I wouldn't take the thing at a gift! I fancy Bunter's misunderstood!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter, nothing doubting, rolled into the House, and trudged up the stairs. Stairs did not appeal to Bunter—he had too much weight to carry up. But he would have negotiated any number of stairs to collect two pounds for that watch-chain.

He puffed and blew up the stairs, and panted into the Fourth Form passage. He rolled breathlessly into Temple's study.

On the study table lay an envelope. Bunter grabbed it up with an eager, fat hand. He was ready, more than ready, to leave that chain in the table drawer, in exchange for two-pound notes from that envelope. Eagerly he opened the envelope.

Then he jumped. There were no currency notes in that envelope. There was a slip of paper. Bunter blinked at it. On that slip was written, in Cecil Reginald's elegant hand:

"FIRST OF APRIL!"

Billy Bunter's eyes almost popped through his spectacles at it. He had not thought of the date that day. Temple of the Fourth evidently had!

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Beast!" That chain was not sold! It was Billy Bunter who was "sold!"

"Beast!" hissed Bunter. "Pulling a fellow's leg! Beast!"

Bunter did not leave the rolled gold watch-chain in the table drawer. It was still in his trousers pocket when he rolled out of Temple's study. And the expression on his fat face was positively ferocious.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Bolts the Bolt!

"BETTER tell Bunter!" said Snoop.

"I'm not going to hunt for the fat ass!" answered Skinner. "I'll tell him if I see him."

"Well, if that chap De Courcy wants him—"

"I don't see why I should take a lot of trouble to oblige De Courcy—I hardly know the chap."

"I've heard that he stands jolly good spreads. Bunter wouldn't like to miss it, if he knew."

"No bizney of mine! I'll tell him if I see him!" yawned Skinner. "I'm not going all over Greyfriars looking for him, I know that."

Billy Bunter blinked round through his big spectacles.

He was leaning on one of the old elms, after class that day, in far from a merry mood.

After class, the Famous Five had inquired whether he had taken any steps towards liquidating that debt to a Highcliffe man. And, as it was evident that Bunter hadn't, they dutifully booted him.

They were quite in earnest about it. Bunter's manners and customs could be tolerated, with more or less patience, in the Remove. When he carried them outside Greyfriars, it was time to put the stopper on. "Bilking" a fellow at another school let Greyfriars down—and it was altogether too thick.

Bunter was leaning on the elm, his fat mind dwelling dismally on an endless prospect of bootings, when Skinner and Snoop passed.

They were dawdling along, in their usual slack way, and did not seem to see him there.

Bunter would hardly have noticed

(Continued on next page.)

The STately HOMES of GREYFRIARS

CHERRY PLACE

By
The Greyfriars Rhymester



"If you don't feel bright and merry, try a holiday with Cherry!" advises our long-haired poet.

(1)

Bob Cherry of the sunny smile
And curly head of hair,
Who speaks in Bull of Bashan style
And never seems to care,
Is known to readers far and wide,
Their friendship is his boast,
He lives in modest style beside
The peaceful Dorset coast.

(2)

The winding lanes of Dorsetshire
Are peaceful and serene,
For hiking you could not desire,
A more enchanting scene.
The hills are old, yet ever new,
The woods are sheer delight,
And there the sea is very blue,
The cliffs are very white!

(3)

The house is built of old grey stones,
They're "Cherry stones!" (Applause!)
And lichen adds its mellow tones
Of colouring, because
The house has stood for many years
In storm and rain and sun,
And though so ancient, it appears
As strong as it begun.

(4)

"Far from the madding crowd" to-day
It stands in silence wrapped,
And that quotation, by the way,
Is really very apt,
For one of Hardy's finest tales
Has those words for its name;
He wrote of Dorset's hills and vales,
And won a world-wide fame.

(5)

Now Major Cherry loves the place,
Though he is rather fierce!
He has a grim and rugged face,
His scorching eye could pierce
A slab of three-inch boiler-plate,
His voice roars like the sea!
Upon the whole, I'm bound to state
He puts the wind up me!

(6)

Whenever I go home with Bob
He glares and grips my fin,
The pressure makes my muscles throb,
He bawls at me: "Come in!"
His voice is like a cannon's roar,
And when I hear that shout,
I make a movement to the door,
As though he'd said: "Go out!"

(7)

He grinds his teeth and says: "What,
what!"
I back away in fright,
Quite ready to vacate the spot,
If he should start to bite!
But that's his way of being kind
And when you're used to it,
You like him, and you do not mind
His "soldier tones" a bit!

(8)

I had a ripping holiday
At Cherry Place. Not half!
With Bob I went out in the bay
And shared in many a laugh.
We sailed his little half-decked yacht,
Bermuda-rigged and fast!
I tied the sail in such a knot
We couldn't move the mast!

(9)

And then I caught the swinging boom
And vanished overboard!
I thought I'd gone to meet my doom
And, Golly, how I roared!
But Cherry brought the cutter round
And grabbed me by the ear!
I don't know why I wasn't drowned—
(Who was it cried: "Hear, hear!"?)

(10)

Yes, I enjoyed myself, you bet!
And if you want to spend
A holiday you won't regret—
Well, I can recommend
Bob Cherry's place. So cultivate
His friendship right away,
Or else, like Bunter, chance your fate
And go there anyway!

Next Week: DON OGILVY AT HOME.

them, but the words they uttered, as they passed, naturally drew his attention.

He gave Skinner an indignant blink. If De Courcy had met Skinner and given him a message for Bunter, Bunter naturally wanted it. It was just like that cad Skinner to neglect to deliver the message to save himself a little trouble.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Bunter.

Skinner and Snoop looked round. "Oh, there he is!" exclaimed Skinner.

Bunter detached himself from the elm. He gave Skinner an eager blink through his big spectacles. The mention of a spread in the Caterpillar's study at Highcliffe banished Bunter's troubles from his fat mind.

He knew those spreads. More than once he had butted in on them, without bothering about the formality of an invitation. If De Courcy had sent him a special invitation, however, it was all to the good. Even Bunter preferred an invitation, though he could do quite well without one.

"I say, what did De Courcy say?" he asked. "You've seen him?"

"Oh, here you are!" said Skinner. "I was going to look round for you, Bunter—"

"Yes, I know just how much you were going to look round for me!" grunted Bunter. "I heard what you said to Snoop! Look here! What's that message from De Courcy?"

"Tea in his study, if you like to go over!" answered Skinner. "Blessed if I know why he wants you!"

"We're friends!" said Bunter, with dignity. "I met him yesterday in Courtfield, and stood treat in the bunshop. We're great friends."

"Blessed if I knew it! Well, that's the lot," said Skinner. "I said I'd tell you—"

"You jolly well wouldn't have, if it had been any trouble!" yapped Bunter.

"Well, I've told you now! Go and eat coke!"

Skinner walked on with Snoop.

Not till they were at a safe distance from Billy Bunter did they exchange a grin.

"Swallowed it whole!" murmured Skinner.

"Like a cream puff!" chuckled Snoop.

"Queer!" remarked Skinner. "If I'd gone to him, and told him, he would have remembered that it was the first of April. There are ways of doing these things, Snoopey!"

"Easy enough to pull that fat idiot's leg! I say, what do you think will happen to him at Highcliffe?"

"Well, in the present state of affairs, I rather think he won't reach De Courcy's study alive. I dare say he will remember the date when he gets there."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner glanced round. He spotted a fat figure heading for the gates.

"He's going!" he murmured.

"Oh crumbs!"

"Of all the howling idiots—"

"Of all the blithering asses—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Skinner and Snoop strolled in the quad, chortling. The first of April gave Skinner many opportunities for exercising his peculiar sense of humour. But certainly no fellow had fallen so egregiously to his trickery as Billy Bunter.

The fat Owl rolled down to the gates in quite a cheery mood.

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A spread in the Caterpillar's study drew him like a magnet. But that was not all. He wanted to see the Caterpillar particularly. He nourished a hope that the Caterpillar might take that chain off his hands, in settlement of the debt of thirty shillings.

For once in his fat career, Billy Bunter was anxious to settle a debt.

Such trifles did not often worry him. But this was an exceptional case. He was going to be booted, continuously and painfully, until he had squared this particular debt. He had no use for the Lazarus watch-chain! If the Caterpillar had, it was all right.

Having—as he happily supposed—overheard Skinner and Snoop by accident, he had no doubt about the genuineness of the message.

Neither was it surprising to Bunter. He had met the Caterpillar and his chum the previous day, and had a very pleasant talk with them. De Courcy had been very genial—he had seemed fairly to hang on Bunter's words, in fact. It was not surprising that he wanted to see a really agreeable and nice-mannered fellow like Bunter again. It was not surprising, at all events, to Bunter!

There was only one fly in the ointment that Bunter could see, as he rolled brightly up the Courtfield road to catch the motor-bus.

In the present state of feeling between the two schools, a Greyfriars fellow going into Highcliffe might meet a hostile reception there.

That bullying beast, Ponsonby, would rag him, if he got a chance, at any time. It was owing to Pon ragging him, that Queleh's chain had fallen into the hands of the dandy of Highcliffe. But now feeling was running high, the sight of a Greyfriars cap might evoke hostility from any Highcliffe man.

Still, as the Caterpillar had asked him to tea, the Caterpillar would see him through, somehow, Bunter considered.

Anyhow, he was going—and he went.

His final fourpence got him a lift on the motor-bus to the Highcliffe side of Courtfield. After which, Bunter walked—with eyes and spectacles on the alert for an enemy.

He rather expected to see De Courcy waiting for him at the gates when he got to Highcliffe. Had that invitation been genuine, no doubt it would have been so—for certainly it was risky, just then, for any Greyfriars fellow to walk in without a convoy.

At the Highcliffe gates, however, Billy Bunter, blinking in through his big spectacles, saw nothing of the Caterpillar, and nothing of Courtenay.

Much less welcome to his sight, he saw Monson. Unfortunately, Monson saw him also. With a grin of anticipation on his face, Monson came sprinting to greet him.

Bunter did not wait.

It was only too plain what Monson intended to do when he reached him. Bunter travelled!

He travelled fast; Monson travelled faster. Bunter was only a dozen yards from the gates when a boot landed on his tight trousers.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter as he flew.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Monson.

"Ow! Beast!" Bunter stumbled, rolled, and sat up, blinking. "I—I say, you beast, I've come to see De Courcy. Ow! I say—"

"No Greyfriars cads wanted here!" said Monson. "Take that!"

"Yaroooh!"

"And that!"

"Yoo-hoop!"

Billy Bunter scrambled up and fled. Monson landed two more before he desisted from pursuit, and walked back, laughing, into the Highcliffe gateway.

Billy Bunter leaned on the paddock fence at a distance and gasped for breath.

He was still in the happy belief that a gorgeous spread awaited him in Study No. 3 in the Highcliffe Fourth if he could get there, but the most gorgeous of spreads would not have tempted him in at the school gates again.

Unless the Caterpillar came out to look for him, it looked as if Bunter was going to miss the spread, after all—and, in the circumstances of the case, the Caterpillar was not likely to come. Billy Bunter was not, so far, enjoying the first sunny day of the merry month of April.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Black Treachery!

CECIL PONSONBY glanced in at the window of the Fourth Form Room at Highcliffe with a black and bitter look.

In that Form-room two juniors sat at their desks after school. Courtenay and De Courcy were in detention.

That was the result of the row in the Fourth Form passage the previous evening. Mr. Mobbs had come down heavy.

Pon's face in Form that morning had shown only too many signs of his handling by the captain of the Fourth. Mr. Mobbs had noticed them with a shocked and horrified eye.

There were marks on Frank Courtenay's face also; but not, it was true, so severe, and not, in any case, of any consequence, from the point of view of "Snobby Mobby." The vials of his wrath had been poured on Courtenay, in the shape of two hours' detention and a difficult Latin paper. The Caterpillar had been awarded the same for his share in the "disturbance," as Mr. Mobbs called it.

So now they sat in detention—Courtenay with a knitted brow; the Caterpillar with his usual expression of whimsical good-humour.

Ponsonby, looking in from the quad, scowled at them and passed on.

It was, no doubt, a satisfaction to him to see the two chums in detention, but that was not the reason why he had looked in on them; there were other and darker thoughts in Pon's mind.

He lounged away to the House doorway and made a sign to Gadsby, who rather unwillingly followed him up to the study.

In that study, Ponsonby closed the door carefully, Gadsby standing and watching him uneasily. It was easy for Pon's pal to see that he was in a bitter, evil mood, and he did not like Pon's look at all.

"Well, what is it, Pon?" asked Gadsby gruffly. "Look here, old man, I don't like the look in your eye. You've had somethin' on your mind all day, and I can tell you I don't want a hand in it."

"Who's askin' you?" sneered Ponsonby.

Gadsby looked relieved.

"Oh, all right, then!" he said. "Leave me out of it, whatever it is. When your temper gets out of hand you're liable to go too far, Pon. You've done it before, and you look like doing it again. I'd rather steer clear."

"That cad Courtenay—" began Pon between his teeth.

"Oh, wash it out!" muttered Gadsby. "Leave the chap alone. I know you



"Well, I'll leave you to settle the matter of the pound note between you!" said Bob Cherry, with a smile. "Grab when I move my boot! Here goes!" And he lifted his boot and drew it away. Gosling and Bunter grabbed together. Crack! There were howls of pain as their heads met! But there was no sign of a pound note!

never chalked that rot on his door; but you put up that fool Vav to do it, and—"

"You saw what he did?"

"You jolly well asked for it!" said Gadsby sullenly. "You've made all the fellows think he may have pinched that rotten chain the day he was over at Greyfriars. You know better than anybody else that he didn't, as you bagged it off Bunter, and you've still got it."

"They're not only goin' to think it; they're goin' to know it."

"Oh, don't be an ass! How can they know it when it isn't so? I can tell you you've made Mobby suspicious of him since he was told of that rot chalked on his door this morn'n'. It's too thick when you've got the chain yourself. You ought to have given it back to that fool Bunter."

"That's what I'm comin' to," said Ponsonby. "Nobody but you knows that I got that chain from that fat fool. He's keeping it dark; he dare not let his beak know that he pinched it. No danger in that quarter. After what Mobby's heard he wouldn't be surprised to find that chain in Courtenay's study."

Gadsby gave a violent start.

"Pon, you fool—you madman!" he said huskily. "You couldn't—you wouldn't—"

"Couldn't I?" said Ponsonby. He passed his hand over his damaged face. "Wouldn't I? You saw how he handled me last night? Hasn't he asked for it?"

Gadsby's face was white.

"If—if it was found—" he faltered.

"It's goin' to be found."

"You can't do it, Pon! It's risky, too! Bunter could give the whole show away if he liked—"

"And get himself sacked? Think it's likely?"

"Well, no, but—"

"I fancy that fat fool will be jolly

glad to see it landed on a Highcliffe man!" sneered Ponsonby. "They suspect him in his own Form over at Greyfriars. I should be jolly glad, in his place, to see it landed somewhere else."

"Yes, very likely, but—"

"I'm not askin' you to help," sneered Ponsonby; "I'm askin' you to keep your mouth shut. I shouldn't say a word about it to you, you white-faced nincompoop, only you were with me when I got the chain from Bunter. You know—and you've got to keep dark what you know."

"I—I can't—not if you do that, Pon," muttered Gadsby. "It's outside the limit. It—it's vile! It's awful! You can't do it! You wouldn't think of it if you were cool—even you!"

"I thought of it before that chain had been in my hands a day," said Ponsonby in a low, tense voice. "I was keepin' it, at first, to frighten that fat idiot and keep him on the jump; then I thought of this, but—"

"But you weren't rotter enough, Pon, and you won't—"

"But I waited to see whether anythin' came out at Greyfriars," said Ponsonby coolly. "Nothin' come out; only they've got it into their heads that Courtenay may have snaffled the thing the day he was over there. Even Wharton and his crew will have to believe it when the chain's found here, hidden in the cad's study."

"You can't—you shan't! I tell you—" Gadsby's voice was shrill.

"You can't do such a foul thing—"

"Quiet, you fool!" breathed Pon.

There was a sound of a footstep in the passage outside.

Gadsby broke off.

They stood silent, and the footstep was not heard again; it had not come as far as Study No. 5.

Ponsonby went on in a low voice:

"You're going to say nothin'. Nobody

knows but you, and you're goin' to forget it. Keep clear of the whole thing."

"I can't let you do a thing like that, Pon. I should be as bad as you if—if—" Gadsby stammered.

"If you let me down, look out for yourself, Reggie Gadsby!" said Ponsonby in a low, bitter tone of menace. "We've been friends, but—"

"We're friends now, but I can't—I can't have a hand in such a thing," muttered Gadsby.

"Nobody asks you to! You know nothin' about it, that's all. Mind, I'm goin' on with it, whether you hold your tongue or not. If you howl out what you know you won't be believed; but if you are, it's the long jump for me—and I'll see that you get yours at the same time!" said Ponsonby savagely. "We've been in a good many things together, Gaddy, and if I go, I'll open my mouth wide enough to make sure that you catch the same train home."

Gadsby gulped.

"I—I shan't give you away, of—of course. But—but don't do it, Pon—don't do it! You'll be sorry later—I tell you you'll be sorry—"

"That's enough, you chicken-hearted fool! I've warned you to keep quiet! Now, steer as clear as you like and leave me to carry on."

"Oh, you rotter!" breathed Gadsby. "Ten to one you'll be copped! If they spot you in their study—"

"Mobby's come in useful ther! They're both in detention till six o'clock. It's hardly five yet. How are they goin' to spot me?"

"If some fellow saw you—"

"No fellow's goin' to see me! Nobody's goin' to know anythin' till Mobby gets a tip to look in Courtenay's study, and finds the loot there."

"Oh, you villain!" groaned Gadsby.

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"Pack that up!" said Ponsonby contemptuously. "Come on! If there's anybody in the passage, we stop and chat a few minutes near Study No. 3 till the coast's clear; if not, I whip in at once. Come on!"

"Pon, I wish you wouldn't—"

"Come on, you weak-kneed ass!"

Ponsonby opened the study door; he lounged out, and Gadsby tried to pull himself together as he followed.

Smithson of the Fourth was going down the passage. Ponsonby and Gadsby moved along to the door of Study No. 3. They loitered there till Smithson went down the stairs without even looking at them. And Gadsby gave his pal a last beseeching look—in vain—as Pon's hand was placed on the door-handle of Frank Courtenay's study.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

What Bunter Saw!

"**B**EAST!" breathed Billy Bunter. He was not thinking of Monson, who had kicked him along the road. He was, sad to relate, thinking of the Caterpillar, who had—as he fancied—invited him to tea and then, apparently, forgotten his existence.

Leaning on the paddock fence, the fat Owl blinked along the road again and again, in the hope of seeing the Caterpillar.

But Rupert de Courcy did not emerge. And time was passing. Unless under convoy of the Caterpillar, Bunter dared not roll in at the gates. To return to Greyfriars, minus that gorgeous spread was hardly to be thought of. Moreover, Bunter had depended on "touching" his Highcliffe friend for the return bus fare. Otherwise, there was a long, long walk ahead of Bunter.

Really, it was a very difficult position for a hungry, fat Owl. Bunter was not feeling happy. Probably, he would have felt still less happy had it dawned on his fat brain that he was the victim of a First-of-April trick

on the part of the playful Skinner. But that awful thought, fortunately, did not occur to him.

He shifted at last. It was useless to wait there longer, impossible to run the gauntlet at the gates, and still more impossible to go home unfed and on shanks' pony. Billy Bunter stepped through the gap in the paddock fence and rolled across the paddock.

It adjoined the ancient part of the Highcliffe buildings known as the "old courts." Bunter had heard that Pon & Co. used that way for getting out of bounds. A way out was a way in—Bunter hoped. He had been over the ground before, and knew his way.

He blinked over a low wall. No one was in sight, and he clambered over it. He knew the way to the Highcliffe quad—and did not go that way. Once he got as far as the Caterpillar's study it would be all right. The question was to get there, without being spotted and kicked by Monson or Ponsonby, or any other Highcliffe beast!

He was inside the place now, at any rate!

With great caution he moved along a laurel-lined path at the side of the House, hoping to spot an open door.

Instead of which he spotted an open window, and, standing at that window, looking out, was Mr. Mobbs, the master of the Highcliffe Fourth.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"Is—is—is that a Greyfriars boy?" ejaculated Mr. Mobbs. "Is—is—is that Bunter? Upon my word!"

"I—I—I say, sir!" stammered Bunter. "I—I've come to see a Highcliffe chap—"

"How dare you, Bunter? I do not believe Ponsonby would ask any Greyfriars boy here—though you had the audacity to ask for him on my telephone yesterday! I shall see you off these premises, Bunter!"

Mr. Mobbs disappeared from the window.

"Oh lor'!" breathed Bunter.

Obviously, Mr. Mobbs was heading for the nearest door, to come out to

him. Bunter's little fat legs almost flew, of their own accord!

But he paused. Mobby, evidently, did not want to see Greyfriars fellows at Highcliffe; but Mobby was a beast, and Bunter was not going to miss the Caterpillar's spread to please Mobby.

He jumped for the window from which Mobbs had disappeared.

It was a case of any port in a storm. He clambered in. By the time the angry Mr. Mobbs emerged from a doorway, Bunter had disappeared in at the window.

But he did not linger. He found himself in a corridor, and he scuttled along that corridor, and turned the first corner. Mr. Mobbs, failing to see him, would no doubt suppose that he had gone. He was more than welcome to suppose so.

Bunter had done the trick. Having turned a corner, he was in sight of the staircase.

He lost no time in negotiating that staircase. Breathless, he arrived on the landing at the end of the Fourth Form passage.

The Caterpillar's study was the third up that passage, and Bunter fairly bolted for it. No one, at the moment, was about—after class, on a fine afternoon, the Highcliffe juniors were, naturally, mostly out of the House.

In a split second, almost, Bunter had opened the door of Study No. 3 and bolted in.

"I say, you fellows—" he gasped.

Then he broke off. The study was empty.

"Beast!" breathed Bunter.

Neither Courtenay nor De Courcy was in the study. Neither was there any sign of a spread. Really, it looked as if the Caterpillar, after giving Skinner that message for him, had forgotten all about him!

In other circumstances Bunter would have gone out of the study to inquire for his host. In the present circumstances, he didn't. He had had the good fortune to reach that study unseen, but any minute Pon or some of his friends might have appeared in the passage.

Bunter shut the door.

It was tea-time, and the chums of Study No. 3 were bound to come up to tea—especially as one of them had asked a guest.

He had only to wait.

He sat down in the Caterpillar's luxurious armchair—to wait.

Footsteps passed the study.

Bunter sat up, prepared to turn on a friendly grin, if the door opened. But the footsteps passed on. It was, if Bunter had known it, Smithson of the Fourth going along to the stairs.

He grunted, and sprawled back again on soft leather.

Footsteps again!

This time they stopped at the door.

Bunter rose from the armchair, and turned on the friendly grin, all ready for Courtenay and the Caterpillar! He could hear that there were two fellows outside the door!

Then, through the door, a whispering voice reached him—which he recognised as Gadsby's.

"Pon, old man, don't—take my tip, and don't!"

Billy Bunter gave a jump. It was Pon and Gaddy outside the study. And Bunter knew what to expect from those cheery youths, if they caught him, without protection at hand.

"Oh crikey!" breathed the fat Owl.

"Shut up, you fool!" he heard Ponsonby's muttering voice. "Clear off, if you want to keep clear!"

STANDING BY THEIR SKIPPER!

Is Kildare, the popular captain of St. Jim's, taking the downward path? That's how it appears to Tom Merry & Co. when, much to their amazement, they see him breaking bounds after lights out! But the juniors are nothing if not loyal to their skipper, and they determine to stand by him . . . with startling results.

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"I'm not the fool—you're the fool, and a dashed rotter, too! Keep clear of that study, Pon. I tell you—"

"Shut up, and get out!"

Billy Bunter hardly breathed. Pon was coming into that study. There was a sound of a hand on the door-handle. "Pon, old man!" came Gadsby's whisper again.

"Leave me alone, you fool!"

Billy Bunter, for a moment, stood transfixed. Where Courtenay and De Courcy were, he had no idea; but it was plain that they were not at hand if Pon was coming into their study!

Obviously, from Gadsby's husky whispers, Pon was going to play some rotten trick in that study, while its owners were away. There was no help for Bunter if Pon spotted him there!

Only for a moment he stood—in terror. Then, swiftly, he hunted cover. The Caterpillar's handsome screen stood across the corner of the room by the window. Bunter backed into the corner behind that screen.

The door opened.

"Pon—" came the husky whisper again.

The door shut.

Ponsonby was in the study.

What he was up to there, Bunter could not guess, except that it was some hostile act. He scarcely breathed, behind the screen. He hardly dared to think of what would happen if Ponsonby spotted him. Why did not those beasts come up? Asking a fellow to tea, and landing him like this!

Ponsonby was moving about the study. He did not approach the screen in the corner.

Bunter realised that he was safe. The cad of Highcliffe had not the faintest idea that he was there—or that anybody was there.

Part of the screen was of carved filigree work. To that part Bunter applied his eyes, and his spectacles. He watched Pon curiously.

The look on Ponsonby's face startled him. It was pale and set, and expressed such bitter evil that it frightened Bunter. He was looking about the study—for what, Bunter could not guess.

Bunter watched him, in sheer amazement. What Ponsonby could possibly be up to was an utter mystery to him.

He could scarcely suppress a squeak of astonishment as Ponsonby thrust his hand into a pocket and drew out something that clinked faintly, and glittered in the light from the window.

It was the chain he had taken from Bunter a week ago—Mr. Quelch's missing watch-chain!

Bunter wondered whether he was dreaming as Ponsonby stood there, with the glimmering gold chain in his hand.

Why, in the name of wonder, had Pon brought that gold chain to the Caterpillar's study in that stealthy and surreptitious way? What was he going to do with it?

For a long minute Ponsonby stood, the gold chain shining in his hand, looking round the study. He stepped at last to the mantelpiece.

On the mantelpiece stood a small Chinese jar—a very handsome jar, one of Rupert de Courcy's expensive possessions.

Bunter had visited that study a dozen times before, and had seen the jar, and knew that it was the Caterpillar's. As Pon lifted it from the mantelpiece, he wondered whether the idea was to drop it and break it.

But that was not Pon's intention. There was a bunch of dried lavender stuck in the jar. Ponsonby removed it,

dropped the chain in and replaced the lavender. Then he replaced the jar on the mantelpiece.

Bunter, lost in amazement, goggled behind the screen. This was utterly beyond his comprehension.

Pon's work, it seemed, was done now. He turned swiftly to the door. That, at least, was a relief to the anxious Owl.

The dandy of Highcliffe opened the door a few inches and peered out. It seemed that the coast was clear; for he stepped quickly into the passage and shut the door after him.

Billy Bunter was alone in the study again.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

— —

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

April Fool!

BILLY BUNTER did not stir for several minutes.

He dreaded that Ponsonby might return. Why he had come to the study at all, why he had hidden Mr. Quelch's chain there, was a mystery to Bunter. But if he came back, Bunter did not want to be seen.

But Pon did not come back.

From where he stood, Bunter had a glimpse of the quadrangle below the window, and after a few minutes he caught sight of Ponsonby there—strolling with Monson and Vavasour.

Evidently, the dandy of Highcliffe was finished in Study No. 3. Bunter emerged from his cover at last.

"Oh crumbs!" he breathed.

Amazed as he was, puzzled and perplexed as he was by Ponsonby's extraordinary action, one happy thought dominated the fat mind of the Owl of the Remove. Quelch's chain, which Pon had taken from him and refused to return, was within reach of his fat fingers!

He had only to take it out of the Chinese jar! Whatever Pon's mysterious motive might be, nothing could have happened more fortunately for the fat Owl.

Once in his possession again, that wretched chain could be returned to Mr. Quelch's study, and the whole spot of bother would be wiped out!

Assured now that Ponsonby was not coming back, Billy Bunter stepped to the mantelpiece, and lifted down the little jar.

He took out the bunch of lavender and grabbed out the watch-chain. He fairly gasped with relief at getting hold of it again. He slipped it into a pocket, and put the jar back in its place.

"By gum!" murmured Bunter.

His fat brain did not penetrate Pon's motive in hiding the chain in the Chinese jar. He surmised that perhaps Pon was afraid to keep it in his own hands, and wanted to find a safe hiding-place for it.

Certainly, that hiding-place was safe enough, had not there been a witness to the transaction. Under the lavender in the jar the chain might have lain unsuspected for weeks. Neither of the fellows who used the study was likely to dream that it was there.

That so far as Bunter could see, was Pon's game. If it was, Bunter had put paid to it!

That chain was in his pocket now and going back to Quelch.

Billy Bunter grinned with satisfaction.

This was luck!

However, the fat junior's thoughts

came back to even more important matters. It was long past tea-time. He was hungry. There was still no sign of the Caterpillar or his study-mate.

Bunter sat down in the armchair again to wait.

But he did not sit there long. He was hungry, he was impatient, and he was getting more and more annoyed and indignant.

This was a rotten way to treat a fellow who had been specially asked to tea. A blink into the study cupboard revealed nothing of an edible nature there.

Had the spread been on the spot, Billy Bunter would not have hesitated to begin. But there was no spread on the spot—there was absolutely nothing! "Beast!" murmured Bunter.

He approached the door at last.

He dared not venture out. But this was getting altogether too thick! He could not wait in the Caterpillar's study for ever!

He opened the door about an inch and blinked out through his big spectacles. A glimpse of Ponsonby, Monson, Gadsby, or any of Pon's set, would have caused him to shut the door again promptly.

But there was no one to be seen in the passage.

He blinked out, in the hope of spotting the Caterpillar or Frank Courtenay, or at least one of their friends.

No one was to be seen!

Bunter breathed indignant wrath.

A junior came up the stairs, and an uneasy blink showed him that it was Yates of the Fourth, whom he knew by sight. Yates was a member of Courtenay's eleven, and a staunch supporter of the captain of the Fourth. From him the fat Owl had nothing to fear—he was no friend of Ponsonby's.

So as Yates came by, Bunter opened the door a little farther and squeaked: "I say—"

Yates stared at him.

"Hallo!" he said. "How did you get into that study?"

"I say, I came here to see De Courcy!" said Bunter. "He asked me over to tea. Know where he is?"

"Did he?" said Yates, staring. "He's in detention till six o'clock, with Courtenay. They've been in a row with Mobby."

"Oh crikey! But he asked me!" gasped Bunter. "He told Skinner this afternoon to tell me—"

"Gammon!" said Yates.

"He jolly well did!" howled Bunter. "I tell you Skinner said he'd seen De Courcy, and he asked him to tell me—"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said the Highcliffe junior. "The Caterpillar's been in detention since class, so how could he have seen a Greyfriars man? If Skinner told you that, he was pulling your silly leg! First of April—what?"

Yates walked on, laughing.

Billy Bunter blinked after him, shut the study door, in case Pon should come along, and stood breathing fury.

It dawned on his fat brain now that his podgy leg had been pulled. He remembered Temple's little joke—and the date!

"Oh, the beast!" groaned Bunter. "Oh lor! First of April—pulling my leg all the time! Oh crikey!"

It was a crushing blow!

Clearly, if De Courcy had been in detention since class, he could not have seen Skinner, and no message could have been sent by that youth inviting Bunter to tea at Highcliffe. That talk

he had heard between Skinner and Snoop, had, of course, been intended for his fat ears—to convince him that the message was genuine, and to make an April Fool of him!

Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed with rage behind his spectacles.

There was no invitation to tea—there was no tea—he had run all the risk of penetrating into Highcliff, and had still the risk of getting out to run—all to gratify Harold Skinner's peculiar sense of humour!

He blinked at the clock on the mantelpiece. It still wanted a quarter to six. The Caterpillar was in detention for another quarter of an hour—and he had, evidently, not the remotest idea that Billy Bunter was coming over that afternoon at all.

Bunter decided to wait that other quarter of an hour. They would come up to the study when released from detention, and all would be, after all, calm and bright. No doubt they would be astonished to see him there—but that did not matter. He could explain. Moreover, he could hand the Caterpillar the Lazarus chain, in settlement of that little debt of thirty shillings! There was no reason why they shouldn't be pleased to see him!

The fat Owl rolled to the window and stood looking out, waiting wearily for six to strike!

Seldom had a quarter of an hour seemed so long to him.

But six chimed out at last.

Bunter had been counting the minutes—now he counted the seconds. Still Courtenay and the Caterpillar did not come up to the study.

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter suddenly.

Below, in the quadrangle from the window, he glimpsed two figures. In utter dismay and consternation, he blinked at Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar walking down to the gates.

They were not coming up to the study, now they were out of detention!

Clearly, they were not coming up to a late tea. Possibly they had tea'd in Hall before going into detention. Anyhow, they were going out of gates now—utterly unaware of a fat Owl waiting for them in Study No. 3.

"Oh lor!" groaned Bunter.

This put the lid on.

Dismally he watched Courtenay and his chum disappear out of gates.

They were gone. No doubt they fancied a walk after hours of detention in the Form-room. But it was very unfortunate for Billy Bunter. As likely as not they would not come in till calling-over. Bunter certainly could not wait till then. He had calling-over at Greyfriars to think of!

With feelings too deep for words, the fat junior turned from the window. He had to go—and run the gauntlet of Pon & Co. as he went. There had been no spread, and he was fearfully hungry. He had not even been able to liquidate his debt to De Courcy by handing over the Lazarus chain. Bootings awaited him at Greyfriars. Really, it was awful! The only consolation was that he had recaptured Quelch's chain. But he was not in a mood to think much of that consolation. His mood was absolutely pessimistic.

He was not going to see De Courcy at all now, that was clear. Still, it occurred to him that he could leave the thirty-shilling chain for him when he came in. That would, at least, settle

that pressing debt and save him from further bootings!

He extracted it from his pocket and considered where to leave it. It had to be left in a safe place. There was no safer place than the Chinese jar where Pon had hidden Quelch's chain.

That was it!

Easy enough to drop De Courcy a line explaining that the chain had been left in settlement of the thirty "bob," and telling him where it was! It was, in fact, easier to explain by letter than by word of mouth—for De Courcy would not be in a position to decline if disposed so to do!

Billy Bunter jerked out the bunch of lavender once more, slid the chain, he had bought from Lazarus into the Chinese jar, and replaced the lavender.

That was all right!

Now he had to think of escape. He opened the door and peered into the passage. By great good fortune there was still no one in sight.

He hesitated to take the plunge. But it had evidently to be taken. He rolled out of the study and scudded along to the stairs. If only he got out unseen—as he had got in!

But that really was too much luck to hope for. Fortune, that had hitherto befriended Billy Bunter, at this point let him down with a bump!

At the foot of the stairs five or six surprised pairs of eyes turned on him. Among them were the small, narrow, unpleasant eyes of Mr. Mobbs!

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Mr. Mobbs. "A Greyfriars boy here! Upon my word! Bunter!"

"I—I—I say—" gasped Bunter.

"How dare you come here!" exclaimed Mr. Mobbs. "How dare you enter this house? Upon my word!"

"I—I—I—" stuttered the hapless Owl. "I—I say— Leggo! I—I'm going—I—I'm just gig-gig-going— Leggo my collar! Ow!"

Mr. Mobbs' bony fingers gripped his collar.

He had been under the impression, till that moment, that Bunter had cleared off. He was astonished and exasperated to spot him in the House. Having the fat Owl safe by the collar, he was not likely to let go.

"You young rascal!" said Mr. Mobbs. "You have entered this building surreptitiously! I shall see you safely off these premises, and I shall chastise you before you depart!"

"Oh crikey! I—I say—"

"Come!" snapped Mr. Mobbs.

He led Bunter out of the House by the collar. Fifty grinning faces watched the hapless fat Owl as Mr. Mobbs led him down to the gates.

"That's Bunter!" said Gadsby.

"What the dooce is he doin' here?"

"The fat ass!" said Ponsonby.

"I spotted him at the gates hours ago, and kicked him!" said Monson.

"How the dickens did he get in?"

"And what the thump did he want?" asked Drury.

Ponsonby chuckled.

"Whatever he wanted, it's not what he's goin' to get, to judge by Mobbs' look!" he remarked.

"Absolutely!" chirruped Vavasour.

And Pon & Co. watched, with great entertainment, as Mr. Mobbs, having led his prisoner down to the gates, boxed his fat ears soundly before twirling him out into the road.

It was a gasping and unhappy Owl that went tottering down the road—and Pon & Co. were left grinning. Though Pon, certainly, would not have grinned,

had he had the remotest idea of what had happened during Billy Bunter's unexpected visit to Highcliff!

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Whose Pound Note?

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"
"Bunter looks tired!"
"Must have walked a hundred yards or more!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were in the gateway of Greyfriars when a weary, fat figure came plodding dismally through the falling spring dusk.

They smiled at the sight of the returning Owl.

Bunter undoubtedly looked tired. He looked as if he could hardly drag one fat leg after another. He was dusty, and perspiration bedewed his plump features.

It was lock-up, and Gosling had come down to shut the gates. The Famous Five, who had come in from Friardale, had come in on time. But at the sight of Billy Bunter rolling wearily home from the direction of Courtfield they lingered in the gateway, with the kind intention of keeping the gates open till the fat Owl arrived. Late for gates meant lines from Quelch.

"Buck up, Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry.

Bunter was still at a distance! He heard Bob's stentorian roar, and gave him a lack-lustre blink through his big spectacles. But he did not buck up! He was past bucking up. He crawled.

"Ere, you stand out of that there gateway!" said Gosling. "You going in or going hout?"

"Hin, old bean," answered Bob Cherry affably. "Too late to go hout!"

"The hinfulness," said Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh solemnly, "is terrific, my esteemed and absurd Gosling."

Gosling grasped the gate to shut it. It was rather difficult to shut that gate with five juniors bunched in the way. Gosling glared. He had no objection to the chums of the Remove stepping out—in which case they would have been late for lock-up, and Gosling would have reported them when he let them in—a duty Gosling always performed with pleasure. But they were in—and could not be shut out—and at the same time they prevented the gate from closing.

"Wot I says is this 'ere," grunted Gosling. "You stand out of the way of this 'ere gate! You 'ear?"

"'Ear, 'ear!" agreed Bob.

"Which I'll report yer—"

"Hold on a tick, Gosling!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Bunter's just outside—give a man a chance! Be a sport, old bean!"

"My horders," said Gosling stolidly, "is to shut this 'ere gate on time, and horders is horders. I says to you, and I says it agin, you stand out of the way of this 'ere gate, or I'll report yer!"

"Come on, Bunter!" shouted Frank Nugent.

"Beast!" came faintly back from Bunter. But he did not accelerate. The fatigued fat Owl was on his last legs. If Mr. Quelch himself had stood in the gateway, brandishing his cane, Bunter could not have hurried.

"Now then!" said Gosling. "For the larst time I says—"

"Did you drop a pound note, Wharton?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. He made a jump and planted his foot

heavily in the gateway. "There—it won't blow away now! Did you drop one?"

"Eh? No!" answered Harry.

"Which of you fellows dropped a pound note?"

Four heads were shaken. None of the Co. had dropped a pound note. If there was a currency note, saved by Bob's foot from floating away on the breezes of spring, it did not belong to any of the Famous Five.

"Well, there's nobody else here," said Bob. "I suppose Gosling didn't drop a pound note! Did you, Gossy?"

"I might 'ave!" said Gosling. "If none of you young gents dropped it, it looks as if I must 'ave! Don't let it blow away, Master Cherry."

"It won't blow away!" assured Bob. "I say, sure none of you men dropped a pound note here?"

and can't afford to let a pound note blow away."

"You're sure you dropped a pound note, Gossy?" asked Bob, closing one eye at his comrades over the porter's bent head.

"Pretty sure I did, sir," said Gosling. "You jest move your boot, and I'll grab it afore this blooming wind shifts it!"

"I say, you fellows, is that a pound note?" exclaimed Bunter. Up to that moment the fat Owl had seemed too weary and worn to think of anything but getting in, and resting his weary legs. But at the mention of a pound note lying about, he seemed to revive. "I say, I fancy that's mine!"

"Yours!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Yes; I think—in fact, I'm certain. I dropped a pound note here as I went out. I remember hearing it fall—"

keep on telling you it's mine. I'm surprised at you, Gosling, making out that my pound note is yours. It's dishonest."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob. "Well, I'll leave you to settle it between you. Grab when I move my boot!"

"Look here, Gosling—"

"You look 'ere, Master Bunter—"

"Here goes!" said Bob. "Grab!" And he lifted his boot, and drew it away.

Gosling and Bunter grabbed together, and the next moment there was a hoot of wrath from Gosling, and a squeak of annoyance from Bunter as their heads met. But there was no pound note to be seen.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five.

Gosling stared, and Bunter blinked at the spot where Bob Cherry's boot

EASTER comes but once a year, which is once a year more than Bunter's postal-order. In spite of the fact that at Bunter Court royalty and nobility fight each other to do Bunter honour, our famous Owl does not yearn for his ancestral home. He tries desperately to bag an invitation from some other fellow.

Week in, week out, from morn to night, he tries; and fellows fly from Bunter as from a grisly specter. How to baffle Bunter is a serious problem; he won't take "No" for an answer. But, at last, Peter Todd has shown us the way!

Just before the Easter hols., Bunter rolled up to Toddy in the Rag. Toddy was a last resource. Bunter did not pine to spend Easter with Toddy's solicitor father in Bloomsbury, but what was a fellow to do?

As it happened, Toddy spoke first. "I say, old fellow," said he, "what about coming home with me for the vac?"

Bunter stared at Toddy dumb-founded. He was prepared to deal with excuses—even to dodge a boot—but to be actually invited to Toddy's home took away his breath.

"Do come, old chap," went on Peter. "You'll enjoy it no end at Todd Court. Plenty of huntin' and shootin' and fishin' and all that. Rather a catch for a measly stockbroker's son, what? He, he, he! But, dash it all, old fellow, I'm no snob! I'd really like you to come, old chap!"

"Quite sure!"

"The surefulness is terrific."

"Must have been Gosling," said Harry Wharton. "It's certainly not ours. Gosling had better take charge of it, anyhow."

"If you think it's yours, Gossy—"

"Well, I think it must be, as it ain't any of yours!" said Gosling.

He quite forgot, for the moment, that orders were orders, and that he had to shut that gate on time. Shutting out Greyfriars fellows was one thing—shutting out a stray pound note was another.

"Don't you move your boot, Master Cherry, till I get 'old of it in this 'ere wind."

Leaving the gate, Gosling toddled into the gateway. That brief delay was enough for Billy Bunter. He rolled wearily in.

"I say, you fellows—" mumbled Bunter breathlessly.

"Now you move your boot, Master Cherry," said Gosling, stooping. "I'll get it all right now! I'm a pore man,

BUNTER COURT

A Short, Short Story

By

FRANK NUGENT.

"Ha, ha, ha!" we roared, catching on to the game. It was rich to hear Bunter's own delightful style parodied like that.

"Are you pulling my leg?" stammered Bunter.

"Oh, really, Bunter—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, let's talk it over in the tuckshop, old chap. My treat, you know!"

Bunter's face brightened.

"Yes, rather, old chap!"

"This way, old fellow," said Toddy. "As it happens, I've been disappointed about a postal order—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"From one of my titled relations—"

"Oh crikey!"

"But you can pay temporarily, old fellow. Only temporarily, of course. I'll hand it to you when my postal order comes, see? And, by the way, I've just remembered that we have the brokers in at Todd Court, so we'll have to wash it out. I'll come with you instead, old man! It's all the same, as long as we stick together, what?"

"Oh crikey!"

"Now don't you talk nonsense, Master Bunter!" exclaimed Gosling warmly. Still stooping, he glared up at Bunter. "I see you go out jest after class, and if you'd dropped a pound note then it would 'ave blown away long ago. Don't that stand to reason, young gentlemen?"

"I should jolly well think so!" said Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Scat, you fat spoofer!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows, that's my pound note!" hooted Bunter. "I tell you it dropped just as I went out. I—I was in a hurry, and I never stopped. I jolly well know it was mine!"

"Wot I says is this 'ere, that pound note ain't yours, Master Bunter, and can't possibly be!" exclaimed Gosling. "You move your boot, Master Cherry, and let a man pick up his pound note."

"I say, you let me pick up my pound note!" gasped Bunter, and he stooped on the other side of Bob's boot. "I

Bunter gasped. Really it was hard to have his own patent method of attack turned against him. There seemed to be no answer.

"Beast!" he roared, and turned away in disgust.

He encountered Harold Skinner. Even Bunter had but few hopes of Skinner, but he was growing desperate.

"I—I say, Skinner, old fellow—"

"My dear old chap," cried Skinner genially, "you're just the man I want to see! I want you to come home with me to Skinner Court, Bunter—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No end of huntin' and fishin' and all that—"

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter, and he rolled away to speak to Ogilvy.

"It's dear old Bunter!" exclaimed Ogilvy joyfully. "I say, old fellow, I've been goin' to ask you to come home with me to Ogilvy Court—"

"Oh lor'!"

"Rats!" cried Wibley. "Bunter's coming with me to Wibley Court! Aren't you, Bunter?"

"I say, you fellows, I want Bunter to come to Penfold Court—"

"I guess Bunter's coming to Fish Court—"

There was a general chorus. Billy Bunter stopped his ears and rolled hurriedly over to the door.

"Beasts!" he roared, and slammed the door behind him.

And no more was heard of Bunter Court that evening, thanks to Toddy.

had been firmly planted. The surface of the solid globe was all that met their view. There was no pound note—not the ghost of one!

The ancient Greyfriars porter rose to his feet, with a very expressive expression on his guarded countenance. He realised now that the non-existent pound note was a little trick to make him keep the gate open till Billy Bunter rolled in.

"Did you think there was a pound note there, Gosling?" asked Bob innocently, while his comrades yelled.

"You said there was, you young rip!" growled Gosling.

"I did!" exclaimed Bob, in surprise. "Did I say anything of the sort, you men?"

"No fear!" chuckled Nugent. "You asked us if we had dropped one—quite a different thing!"

"That's all," agreed Bob. "Might have asked any chap a civil question like that—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

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"You said it wouldn't blow away with your foot there!" hooted Gosling. "Well, so it wouldn't," said Bob. "How could it blow away when it wasn't there?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the chums of the Remove went on their way, laughing; while William Gosling closed the gate, with a clang that woke nearly every echo of Greyfriars School.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

A Little Misapprehension!

"PLEASE, sir—"

"What is it, Bunter?"

"May I fetch my map, sir?"

It was the following morning in Form. First lesson that morning was geography, for which the Remove fellows had been told to bring in maps.

Mr. Quelch glared at Billy Bunter.

"Have you forgotten your map, Bunter?"

"Yes, sir, I—"

"You will take a hundred lines, Bunter. And you may look at Todd's map."

"Oh lor'!"

Mr. Quelch frowned, and the Remove fellows smiled. Every fellow near Bunter had seen him slip a map under his desk before making that request to the Remove master.

Bunter evidently was not in want of a map, but of an excuse for getting out of the Form-room.

The juniors guessed that much, though fortunately Mr. Quelch did not. But they were very far from guessing the reason. Not a man in the Remove dreamed that Quelch's gold chain, so long missing, was now in Billy Bunter's trousers pocket, and that he was feverishly anxious for a chance to get rid of it.

While Quelch was busy with his Form, it was an excellent opportunity to replace it in Quelch's study—if Bunter could have got out. Unluckily, he couldn't.

He waited till break, in the hope that during that interval, he would find an opportunity of popping into his Form-master's study unnoticed.

At the end of the lesson Wharton, as head boy, collected the Latin papers, and piled them on the Form-master's desk, when the Remove were dismissed.

Billy Bunter lingered in the Form-room door, his eyes and his spectacles anxiously on Quelch.

Sometimes Quelch stayed at his desk in the Form-room to look at the papers. Sometimes he carried them to his study. Bunter was anxious to know what he was going to do now.

If he stayed in the Form-room, the coast was clear in his study. It would not take more than a minute or two to drop that beastly chain into the table drawer in his study, shove some papers over it, and leave it for Quelch to discover later—when, Bunter hoped, he would fancy that he had overlooked it

all the time. But if he went to his study, Bunter had to postpone the restitution of the missing article. Naturally, he wanted to know.

Mr. Quelch sat down on the high chair at his desk. But as he did so, he glanced at the fat figure lingering in the doorway.

As the gimlet-eyes fixed on him, Bunter bolted after the other fellows. He was unaware of the extremely suspicious glint that came into those gimlet-eyes, as his back was turned. Neither did he know that Quelch rose from his seat.

It was all right now. Quelch was going through those papers in the Form-room. The coast was clear.

While the rest of the Remove ran out into the April sunshine with a cheery whoop, Billy Bunter rolled away to Masters' Passage.

He cut into Mr. Quelch's study, shut the door after him, and hurried across to the writing-table. Swiftly he opened the well-known drawer with one hand—with the other jerking the gold chain from his trousers pocket.

And as the drawer opened, so did the door.

Mr. Quelch stepped in.

Bunter had been happily unaware that his Form-master had followed almost on his heels to the study. He became aware of it now, with startling suddenness.

"Oh!" gurgled Bunter. "Oh crikey!"

For the second time, he was caught stooping at that drawer, with a gold chain in his possession! But this time it was the real chain, and Bunter's fat heart almost died within him with terror.

"Oh, jiminy!" groaned Bunter.

Mr. Quelch stepped towards him.

"Upon my word," he said, in a deep voice, "this passes all belief! Bunter, are you in your right senses?"

"Oh, sir! No, sir! I—I mean, yes, sir!" groaned Bunter.

"The day before yesterday," said Mr. Quelch, "I caught you in this study, in the act of placing that spurious watch-chain in my table drawer, in the absurd, the ridiculous, the insensate hope that I should imagine that it was my own."

"Eh?"

"Such stupidity, such obtuseness, such crass want of common intelligence," continued Mr. Quelch, "is amazing, even in so incredibly stupid a boy as yourself, Bunter. Yet you have surpassed even that! I find you in the act of playing the same foolish, absurd trick over again!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"After I had been made aware that that chain was a spurious imitation, after I have caned you for your folly, it appears that you still entertain a hope of succeeding in that insensate trick!" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh crikey!" gurgled Bunter.

He realised how the matter stood.

On the former occasion, Mr. Quelch had taken the dud chain for the real

one. Now he was taking the real one for the dud one!

It was a natural mistake on Quelch's part. From a little distance the chains looked exactly the same. His impression was that Bunter, with unexampled stupidity, was playing the same trick over again, with the same chain.

"Have you no common sense whatever, Bunter?" exclaimed the Remove master. "Are you utterly without ordinary intelligence?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! No, sir! Oh, sir! Oh crikey!"

"Is it possible, Bunter, that you imagine that, if you had concealed that chain in my table drawer, I should have supposed, for one moment, that it was the genuine article?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter.

Really, Bunter had the best of reasons for supposing so—this time.

He was not going to explain those reasons to Mr. Quelch, however. He let the chain slip back into his pocket, glad to get it out of Mr. Quelch's view before the Remove master had a chance to detect that it was the genuine article.

"You actually supposed so, Bunter?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir," murmured Bunter.

"Incredible!" said Mr. Quelch, staring at him. "Amazing! Such stupidity is beyond my comprehension. In the first instance, perhaps, so stupid a boy might have supposed that there was a possibility of imposing on me. But after I have become fully acquainted with your absurd trickery, it is almost inconceivable that you should suppose so! Bunter, can you—even you—be so impenetrably stupid?"

"Oh, yes, sir! I mean, no, sir! I—I—"

"It appears," said Mr. Quelch, "hopeless to make any appeal to your intelligence, Bunter! But I can, at least, make it clear to you that you must not play absurd and foolish tricks in your Form-master's study! I shall cane you—"

"Oh lor'!"

"Severely. Bend over that chair, Bunter!"

What followed was painful. It was quite painful. But it was not so bad as being taken to the Head for the sack, so Billy Bunter was glad to leave Mr. Quelch in his error.

When the Remove went into third school, the chain was still in Bunter's pocket.

It really seemed as if he was never going to get rid of that wretched chain. It gave him a feeling like a gangster with a body to dispose of. Rachel, of old, mourned for that which was lost, and could not be comforted—but Billy Bunter was mourning over that which was found, and had still less comfort.

THE END.

(On no account miss the final yarn in this grand series, chums. It's entitled: "THE HEAVY HAND!" You'll find it brimful of fun and exciting situations!)

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JACK JOLLY'S RUSE!

Another Spasm of Dicky Nugent's Laughable Serial:

"THE ST. SAM'S TREZZURE HUNT!"

IN DURANCE VILE!

"It's rotten!"
"Here, here!"
"It's absolutely rotten!"
said Jack Jolly, of the St. Sam's Fourth, with a eye, chafing restlessly at the cruel bonds that encircled his wrists. "Here we are in durance vile—victims of the vandals who are venting their villany on us!"
"Prisoners of a plausible pair of plotters!" cried Frank Fearless. "It's a fowl bizziness!"
"Fowl" is right!" snorted Merry. "We're trussed up like chickens; and we're in a deserted wing, I should feel hopeless, if I weren't such a plucked 'un!"
"Look here, you chaps," wailed Tubby Barrell, from his corner of the room where the kidnapped skoolboys had been dumped. "I'm hungry!"
"Well, that's your fault, Tubby!" grinned Jolly. "With my feet just by your mouth, you can easily do as the arctic eggplorers do and eat a little shoe-leather!"
"Ha, ha, ha!"
"Dashed if I know what there is to laugh at!" snorted Tubby Barrell. "What I want to know is, how are we going to get out of this?"

"Ah! That's eggs-actly what we'd all like to know," said Bright, restfully. "If we could only get our hands free, we could set about our captor when he brings us our grub."
"You mean IF he brings us our grub, don't you, old chap?" asked Fearless.
"He's bound to turn up soon," mermered Bright. "And we're 'bound' to prevent us from turning on him!" chuckled Jack Jolly. "Tied up as we are, it's rather a knotty problem!"
"Lissen!" whispered Merry.
The chums of the Fourth lissened. Their hearts beat faster, as they heard the hovy clumping of hob-nailed boots on the bare boards outside the room.
"The Head!" muttered Jolly. "I'd reckenise his footprints anywhere! I know all along that he was the culprit!"
"The old raskal ought to be ashamed of himself, kidnapping us like this so as to get us out of the way while he and Scrownger win the Gouty Greybeard Trezzure Hunt!" said Fearless, indignantly. "I shall tell him so, too!"



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The GREYFRIARS HERALD



EASTER HOLS. GIVE FILLIP TO COLLECTORS

Says DICK RAKE

Chaps who don't have time during term to indulge in the collecting mania come into their own in holiday time. From inquiries I've been making, I imagine that collectors will be working overtime this vac.
Peter Todd, who collects fossils, intends to look out for some really curious old fossils this time. I hear that he's taking his cousin Alonzo with him, so he won't have far to look for the first one, anyway!

Skinner tells me that he has become very keen on collecting cigarette-pictures. He'll do almost anything to get them. You can tell that, when you see his pasty face and hear his nasty 'acking cough!

Bunter will spend his hols. collecting anything that's going free. Banknotes, foods or invitations out are all welcome, so far as Bunter's concerned—he collects the lot! He tried to collect a loan from me, when I interviewed him, but he only collected a thick ear!

Lord Mauleverer has an idea he might go in for collecting butterflies this vac. When I told him there would be nothing doing at this time of the year, he said that was just the sort of hobby he'd been lookin' for, begad!

Brown, I find, has a queer hobby—he collects ugly mugs. He's spending part of his holidays with Bulstrode and Bolsover, so he shouldn't find it difficult!

LINLEY LONGED FOR A LONELY LIFE!

But Longing Was

Short-Lived!

Mark Linley vowed he'd spend the Easter vac. as a kind of hermit. He was tired, he said, of noise and speed and meaningless chatter. Like the celebrated film-star, he "wanted to be alone!"

So he started the vac. in a tent—on a moor—about ten miles from anywhere.

The first five minutes was good. Then he found he needed a tin-opener. And some matches. And some spirit for his cooking-stove. And a patch for his tent when the rain showed up a leak. And a newspaper to read the football results. And a lot of other things.

So he moved—reluctantly—to a field near a village. Here he was regarded as a bit of a curiosity. Village folk came to look at him and talk to him. One or two of them hinted at calling a doctor.

Marky began to get a little alarmed. In the grey light of dawn, he packed up his tent and silently went away.

He went right back to his noisy native town in Lancashire, talked to everybody, went for bus-rides and also went to the pictures.

Somehow he no longer wanted to be a hermit. He didn't know why.

Previously he had felt the call of the wild. Our suggestion is that he'd no sooner answered it than he felt the call of the tame again!

GYMNASIUM GOSSIP!

Lord Mauleverer is strongly of the opinion that the Greyfriars Gymnasium should be converted into a dormitory—a sort of rest-room for fellows who happen to feel tired in the daytime. Mauly declares that there would be room to swing about twenty hammocks. But Greyfriars has got no room for hammock swingers—or, for "lead swingers!"

HE DIDN'T TAKE A CHANCE!

Strange Story of School Porter

All through the winter Gosling has nursed a secret. You could tell by the look of him that he had something on his mind. There was a twinkle in his eye and at odd moments he would utter a sly chuckle.

But what the secret was nobody seemed able to guess.

Now and again, he'd stand outside his lodge and puff away reflectively at his pipe, till something seemed to strike him. Then he'd bring out a grimy notebook, lick a stub of a pencil, and then laboriously write a note in the book.

Fellows became intrigued. What on earth was Gossey up to, they wondered.

Gossey wouldn't tell. When asked point-blank about it, he'd answer: "Wot I says is this 'ere: hask no questions an' I won't tell no lies!" There was no drawing him—till Smithy got to work just before breaking-up.

Smithy happened to choose just the best time—when Gossey had been mellowed by several

glasses of liquor out of a mysterious bottle he keeps in a cupboard in his lodge. After a little humming and hawing, Gossey let him into the secret.

"It's like this 'ere, Master Smith," he said. "Arter wot I went through on the First of April last year, with all the young himps leadin' me a dog's life of it, I made up me mind I wouldn't 'ave no more of it; see?"

"So I started makin' notes of all the April Fool jokes I ever 'ad played on me at this 'ere school as far back as I can remember—just so I'd be on me guard, like. Wot I says is this 'ere: a man wants to get ready for a day like April the First an' then 'e won't be caught nappin'!"

"They won't catch me nappin' this year, I can tell you! I been studyin' me notes for weeks an' weeks an' there isn't a joke or a jape I shan't see a mile off! I'm ready for anythink they like to get ready for me!"



"It's been a 'ard job for a man. But it's been worth it, 'cos why? 'Cos they won't be able to catch me nappin' this year, see?"

So now you know the secret that Gosling has nursed through the winter!

He might have saved himself all that trouble if he'd looked at the calendar beforehand.

THE POOR OLD CHAP NEARLY WENT MAD WITH RAGE WHEN SMITHY POINTED OUT THAT ON APRIL THE FIRST THIS YEAR WE SHALL ALL BE IN THE MIDDLE OF OUR EASTER HOLIDAYS!

A moment later, the door was flung open. A bearded figger, wearing a mask, looked into the room. The young prisoners brightened up a little as they saw that he was carrying a tray containing donuts and jam-tarts and bottles of ginger-pop.

Without saying a word, the man in the mask walked in and placed the tray on a table. Then he started feeding his prisoners. The juniors kept as mum as oysters till he had finished. Then they started in corns.

"You beastly old rotter!"

"We'll put the perlice on your track when we get free again!"

"We know who you are! You're Doctor Birchmall, and it's no use denying it."

The last remark, from Frank Fearless, seemed to go home, for the man in the mask broke his silence at last. "Don't talk silly!" he

said, in a disguised voice. "I'm not Doctor Birchmall, even if you think I am, Fearless!"

"Ratts!"
"What!"
"Ratts and many of 'em!" said Fearless, recklessly. "You're Doctor Birchmall right enuff—and you won't half get into trouble for this when we get out!"

That remark seemed to infuriate the Head. He grabbed a half-full bottle of "pop" and stepped forward with the intention of poring its contents over the bold Fourth Former.

It was a fatal move for the Head, if he had only known it. In stepping forward, he tripped over Merry's legs and did a summersault; and in doing a summersault, he accidentally shot all the contents of his pockets over the floor.

Amongst the contents were an unposted letter and a pencil. And, by sheer chance, they both happened to fall near Jack Jolly.

Not one fellow in a thousand would have conceived the idea that came to the kaptin of the Fourth soon after. But Jolly did.

While the Head lay flat on his back, completely winded, Jack Jolly moved his head forward, seized the pencil in his mouth and started writing a message on the back of the envelope, which was uppermost. There was just a chance, he thought to himself, that the Head might post the letter without noticing, and the person who received the letter might put the perlice on the track.

"HELP! WE ARE PRISONERS!"

This was the message that Jolly succeeded in writing before Doctor Birchmall got his puff back. Then he saw the Head make a move to rise again and he hastily let the pencil drop.

"Ow! Bust you! You knocked the puff right out of me that time!" panted Doctor Birchmall. "You wait till another time, though!"

With these words, he grabbed the letter and the other fallen articles and dashed out, locking the door behind him and leaving the prisoners from St. Sam's to listen to Jack Jolly's eager tale of the ruse he had adopted and to discuss the chances that it would bring them freedom!

BIRCHY PUTS A PERK IN IT

"Any news, sir?"
Quite a crowd of Fourth Form fellows asked that question, as Mr. Lickham walked into the din'g-hall for brekker.

The Fourth Form master, who was carrying a letter in his hand, smiled faintly.

"I presume you are referring to Jolly and the other boys," he remarked. "If so, the answer is, yes. I have just had a letter from an anonymous correspondent announcing that all the missing juniors are safe and sound."

"Oh, good!"
"Well, it's good in a way, of course," said Mr. Lickham, dewbiously. "On the other hand, this letter may merely have been sent to allay our fears. I am afraid myself that they have been kidnapped by some despit, deastardly, dubble-d'ed deceiver who has done the dirty deed in order to diddle their dotting dear ones into dubbing up dibs."

"Oh crumbs!"
"At the present moment, as like as not," said Mr. Lickham, "your unhappy skoolmates are under-going Chinese torcher in some garstly underground den where their shreeky of aggerny will never reach the outside world. However," he added, with a slye shudder, "we will forget it and get on with our breakfast."

And Mr. Lickham sat down in his seat at the head of the table and clapped his hands for his eggs and bacon.

But the master of the Fourth was not allowed to get far with his meal. In fact, he had hardly started, before Binding, the page, entered the dining-hall at the dubble.

"Call for you on the tellyphone, sir!" he told Mr. Lickham.

"Bust it! Tell 'em to ring up later!"

"Please, sir, the caller says it's important," said Binding. "He says to tell you it's Mr. Smith, Sir Gouty Greybeard's secretary."

"Oh, all right, then," said Mr. Lickham, rising reluctantly from the table. "I suppose Mr. Smith must be treated with deference. After all, Sir Gouty is a Guvvornor of the skool and the donor of the fifty pounds prize for the grate trezzure hunt; and Mr. Smith is his

official representative while he is abroad."

And Mr. Lickham went to the tellyphone in his study.

If Mr. Lickham had been aware that "Mr. Smith" was in reality Doctor Alfred Birchmall, the fegwitive Head of St. Sam's, in disguise, he would not have been so anxious to treat him with deference. But he had no idea that this was the case, so his voice was awfully respectful, as he spoke into the receiver.



"This is Lickham, sir. What can I have the pleasure of doing for you?"
"You can supervise the remaining rounds of the trezzure hunt, Lickham," was the reply from Sir Gouty Greybeard's secretary.

"TO-DAY!"
Mr. Lickham started. "To-day?" he echoed. "But I understood that they were to be contested in the future, as in the past, at intervals of one week."

"Never mind what you understood!" retorted "Mr. Smith," unpleazantly. "The rest of the rounds are to be contested to-day, at intervals of half-an-hour. See?"

"Ahem! I see, Mr. Smith, of course. But—but will this meet with the approval of Sir Gouty?"

"Sir Gouty left the trezzure hunt in my hands entirely," snorted "Mr. Smith." "And for certain private reasons, I wish to see the thing settled and the prize-munny handed over to the winner. The prize will be paid to the winner by the bank on site of a certificate signed by me and you. I think we should be able to finish the hunt and sign the certificate before the bank closes to-day, don't you?"

"I will help all I can, sir, of course," mermered Mr. Lickham; and there was a grunt of satisfaction from the other end.

"Good! Then I will send a servant along with full details."

"Mr. Smith" went off the wire; and Mr. Lickham replaced the receiver and returned to his breakfast, looking quite flummoxed.

A RACE AGAINST TIME!

The St. Sam's fellows had a rare serprize that morning, when Mr. Lickham announced after breakfast that no classes were to be held. They were more serprized

peet of keeping them as prisoners while the trezzure hunt drags out its dreary existence at the rate of one round per week is too much for me! We've got to win that prize—and we've got to win it to-day before the bank closes! Then I shall vanish—or rather, 'Mr. Smith' will vanish!"

"And Doctor Birchmall will reappear?" asked Scrownger.

"Eggsactly!"

"But Doctor Birchmall is a 'wanted' man!" cried Scrownger. "As soon as you turn up again as yourself, the perlice will arrest you for that old crime of stealing a perlice helmet—not to mention the additional offence of jail-breaking!"

The Head larfed.

"With several russling notes in my pocket, Scrownger, those difficulties will take on a different aspect to me. I should be able to square the perlice easily with a fiver. I shall then take up my old position as Head of St. Sam's and quite a welthy man! But enuff of this idle talk. Take this suit-case."

"What's inside it, sir?"

"All that you require to win the remaining rounds of the trezzure hunt!" grinned the Head. "There's a door-nocker in the shape of a lion's head, a jar of tadpoles, a Christmas card (very rare at this time of the year!) and a bow-and-arrow. All you have to do is to fetch each of these articles as the announcement is made. Mind you don't waste time. There is bound to be a lot of delay over getting the boys back after each round—and we must win the prize before the bank shuts this afternoon!"

"My hat!" grinned Scrownger. "It's going to be a regular race against time!"

"Eggsactly! And if you lose this time," said the Head, with a glare, "I shall tick you off! Now buzz, Scrownger!"

Scrownger nodded and buzzed—carrying with him the trezzures that could not possibly fail to win the Gouty Greybeard prize that day!

(Will the schemers be successful? You'll get the answer in next week's instalment!)