

"BILLY BUNTER'S LUCKY DAY!" Special Holiday Yarn of Harry Wharton & Co.—Inside.

The Magnet ^{2^d}



BILLY BUNTER BUTTS IN!

Somebody's got to have Billy Bunter for Easter! Who's it to be? It's an unlucky day for the victim, but what does it matter so long as it's—

BILLY BUNTER'S LUCKY DAY!



Vernon-Smith hooked Billy Bunter out of the car, like a fat winkle out of a shell. "Herbert!" The millionaire gave his son a disapproving glare, as he came hurrying down the steps. "What does this mean?"

By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**

Exciting Schoolboy Yarn, dealing with the Easter Holiday Adventures of HARRY WHARTON & CO., the Cheery Chums of Greyfriars.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Non-Stop!

SQUEAL!
Squeak!
Buzzzz!

Herbert Vernon-Smith dragged open the door of Study No. 4 in the Remove passage at Greyfriars, and glared out.

"Stop that row!" he roared.

The Bounder of Greyfriars looked angry and excited. He glared at the crowd of Remove fellows in the passage.

His glare concentrated on Tom Brown, who was twiddling the dials of his portable wireless.

Brownie had brought his wireless out into the passage. A lot of fellows wanted to hear it, and accommodation in junior studies was limited. It was the last evening of the term; on the morrow, Greyfriars School was breaking up for Easter. Most of the fellows were merry and bright, on the eve of the holidays. It was quite a happy party in the Remove passage.

Smithy looked neither merry nor bright. He looked extremely bad-tempered.

Certainly, the sounds that were proceeding from the wireless at the moment were not grateful or comforting. They were, in fact, horrid. A jazz band with a double allowance of saxophones would have sounded musical, in comparison.

But in radio matters, as in others, the rough had to be taken with the smooth. Sometimes a station came through beautifully. Sometimes it seemed to be coming through a dog-fight, accompanied by a horde of cats on the tiles.

Just now Brownie's set was squealing, squeaking, whistling, and buzzing. But,

as Bob Cherry remarked, what was the odds so long as you were happy? If a dozen other Remove men could stand it, Smithy could.

"Shut it off, you silly ass!" shouted Vernon-Smith from the doorway of Study No. 4. "Take it away and bury it! Chuck it into the water-butt! Jump on it!"

"Rats!" answered Brownie, over his shoulder. He continued to twiddle dials.

"All serene, Smithy, old man!" said Harry Wharton soothingly. "We're just going to get the news!"

"Blow the news!"

"Look here, don't be a cheeky ass, Smithy!" said Johnny Bull.

"Great idea!" said Bob Cherry. "That's a tip, Smithy!"

Squeal, squeak, from the wireless.

"Will you stop that rotten row?" roared Vernon-Smith. "Take the dashed thing down to the Rag, when a fellow's got a headache."

"Where did you pick up the headache, Smithy?" asked Johnny Bull sarcastically. "You've got the only one in the Remove."

"Mind your own business!" snarled the Bounder.

"Well, you mind yours, old man!" suggested Frank Nugent. "Your business is to stay in bed after lights out, not to break bounds and collect headaches, and then make yourself a general nuisance."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Bob.

Herbert Vernon-Smith scowled savagely. It was true that he had a headache, and that the horrid cacophony from the radio did not make it feel any better. It was equally true that he had been out of bounds the previous night, as most of the Remove

knew, and had collected that headache in a smoke-laden atmosphere. In those circumstances, he was not likely to get much sympathy in the Remove.

"Cheeky ass!" said Peter Todd. "You've often asked Brownie to switch on for the news, to hear about stocks and shares, and bulls and bears, and things, which no other fellow wants to hear. And now—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"We'll be getting the news soon, Smithy!" urged Bob Cherry. "All the prices of fat stock and fat stockbrokers, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You'll hear all about your pater's shares and things, Smithy! Don't you want to know whether Diddlems have gone up, or Bamboozlems have gone down?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Vernon-Smith came stamping angrily out of his study.

Smithy's excursion out of bounds, after lights out the previous night, had been a sort of glorious wind-up to the term. He had played billiards, and hanked, and smoked cigarettes, with a dingy crowd at the Three Fishers—and crept back to the Remove dormitory long after midnight. But if it was glorious overnight, it seemed anything but glorious in the morning!

School that day had been quite a horror to Smithy, tired and nervy and headachy. After class he had retired to his study for a rest, like a bear with a sore head—only to be disturbed by the squealing in the passage, the squeaking and the hooting and the buzzing, which the other fellows did not mind in the least, but which Smithy, in his present rotten state, minded very much indeed.

Stock market news did not interest him now!

It never interested any other fellow in the Form at any time; but Smithy often liked to follow the operations of his father, Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, who was a tremendous man in the financial line.

Now he did not care two hoots whether Hanky-Panky Tin was going up or down; whether stores shares were deep in the doldrums, or whether rubber shares were going through the roof!

All he wanted was quiet; which, in the Remove passage at Greyfriars, was never easy to get at the best of times; and really quite unobtainable on the last night of the term.

But Smithy, when he was in a bad temper, was reckless and arrogant, and as overbearing as the other fellows would let him be. And he was in the very worst of tempers now.

He stamped along the passage to the spot where the juniors were gathered round the radio. Browney, who was bending over it, was stirred by the lunge of a boot in his ribs.

"Ow!" he gasped. "What—"

"Will you shut that thing off?" howled Vernon-Smith.

The New Zealand junior glared up at him.

"No!" he bawled. "I jolly well won't! But I'll shut you off, fast enough, if you don't shut up, you cheeky idiot!"

"Then I will!" snapped Vernon-Smith. And he aimed a kick at the portable—which, had it taken effect, would no doubt have shut it off, with a crash.

Bob Cherry grabbed his ankle, in time.

He jerked it up.

Bump!

Smithy sat down in the Remove passage.

He sat down hard and heavy. There was a chortle from the crowd of juniors as he sat.

Bob gave him a cheery grin as he spluttered for breath.

"That's right, Smithy!" he said. "Take a pew, old man, and join the happy circle. We'll soon be getting the news!"

"You cheeky rotter!" panted Vernon-Smith. "I'll—I'll—" He scrambled up with the evident intention of hurling himself at the cheery Bob, hitting out right and left.

"Stop that, Smithy!" rapped out Harry Wharton sharply.

"My esteemed and idiotic Smithy!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The Bounder did not heed. He was on the point of hurling himself at Bob, when Wharton and Johnny Bull grabbed him by the arms and dragged him back.

"Let go!" yelled the Bounder, struggling fiercely.

"Are you going to keep quiet?" demanded Wharton.

"No, you fool!"

"Then we'll jolly well keep you quiet!" said the captain of the Remove grimly. "You ought to be jolly well booted for playing the goat last night, Smithy; and if you fancy that anybody is going to stand your airs and graces, you've got to guess again, see? Pin him!"

"Will you let go?" yelled Vernon-Smith.

"No!"

The Bounder struggled. He was a sturdy fellow, and not easy to hold. But the two fellows who had hold of his arms were quite able to deal with him singly, and together they were too much for the angry Bounder. They held on

to his arms with a vice-like grip, and Smithy struggled and wrenched in vain to release them.

The two juniors, grinning, leaned on the passage wall. Smithy had to lean between them. The other fellows looked on, chuckling. Smithy had not succeeded in stopping the show. He had only succeeded in adding himself to the audience, at close quarters. The wireless was squealing and shrieking within six feet of him, as Browney twiddled dials.

"You rotters!" panted the Bounder.

"Dear man!" said Bob. "Smithy wants us to remember how nice he is, in the hols, and make us miss him!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll give you a thump each to take home for the hols!" yelled the Bounder.

"Going to whop us all, one after another?" asked Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

"Yes, you rotter!"

"Well, we'll try to survive it!" said Johnny. "Just now, though, you're going to shut up and keep quiet, and if you don't stop wriggling, you'll get your head tapped on the wall. That won't do your smoky headache any good."

The Bounder wrenched savagely.

"Chuck it, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton.

Smithy's answer was another savage wrench.

Tap!

His head tapped on the passage wall behind him, rather hard. With an ache inside the head, a tap outside was

At a loose end, as usual, Billy Bunter has got to hook on to someone for the hols. And who better than the son of a millionaire?

painful. The Bounder spluttered with rage, but he ceased to wrench. He did not want another tap!

"Getting on to it!" said Browney, cheerily. "We'll soon have it through."

Squeal! Squeak! Buzz! went the wireless merrily.

Herbert Vernon-Smith leaned on the wall, his arms held as in a pair of vices. His angry scowling face a startling contrast to the grinning faces around him.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Startling Announcement!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter rolled out of Study No. 7. There was a rather peevish expression on Bunter's fat face. He blinked at Browney through his big spectacles with a disapproving blink.

Squeal! Squeak! Howl! went the wireless. There seemed to be a little atmospherical trouble going on somewhere. Stations did not seem easy to get. Wild squeals and unmusical howls seemed only too easy.

"I say, you fellows, I don't like that stuff!" said Billy Bunter. "Turn on something a bit jollier, Browney!"

"Fathead!"

"Well, you call a fellow names," said Billy Bunter warmly, "but I can jolly well tell you, I don't like that classical stuff."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors, and even the Bounder's scowling face broke into a momentary grin.

The fat Owl of the Remove blinked

in surprise. He had not, so far as he was aware, made a joke.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" he said crossly. "If that's Debussy, I don't like it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Or Korsakoff, or whatever it is!" said Bunter. "Turn it off, Browney, old chap. See if you can get Henry Hall's band, or something decent like that."

"You howling ass!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Browney's tuning in to a station, and hasn't got anything yet."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!" said Bunter. "Sounds jolly classical to me. I'm jolly well not staying to listen to it, I know that. I say, you fellows, seen Smithy?"

There was another howl of laughter in the Remove passage—of which Billy Bunter again failed to spot the cause. Smithy was standing leaning on the wall between Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull, about ten feet from Bunter. The short-sighted Owl of the Remove did not observe him there.

"Oh, don't cackle every time a fellow opens his mouth!" exclaimed Bunter. "I say, I want to see Smithy—it's rather important. Know whether he's in his study?"

"He was ten minutes ago!" said Bob, chuckling.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Smithy did not speak. If Bunter wanted him, he did not want Bunter, and he was in too deep a state of angry exasperation to be amused.

"Well, let a chap pass," said Bunter. "I'd better go and see if he's there. Don't block the passage. I'd better speak to Smithy about Easter. He's rather keen on my coming home with him for the hols, you know."

"Is he?" asked Harry Wharton, laughing, quite entertained by the expression on the face at his side.

"Oh, yes!" said Bunter. "Fairly hunting a chap lately. I'm not sure that I shall go. These new-rich people are hardly up to my standard, you know. They splash their money about—but money ain't everything, though Smithy thinks it is."

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

Whether Herbert Vernon-Smith really wanted Bunter for the holidays was extremely doubtful. But after hearing this, it was not doubtful how the Bounder would treat any attempt on Bunter's part to hook on for Easter. Still happily unaware that he was speaking in the Bounder's hearing, the Owl of the Remove rattled on:

"His father's coming down for him to-morrow in the usual whacking car, you know—he can't go home by train, like any other fellow! They like splashing that big car about. I'm not at all sure that I shall care to be seen in it. I mean to say, it gives a fellow like Smithy a leg-up to have a chap like me home for the holidays, but where do I come in?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Vernon-Smith gave a terrific wrench. But Wharton and Johnny Bull held him tighter than ever.

Had they released Smithy at that moment, his look indicated that there might have been battle, murder, and sudden death, in the Remove passage.

"Still, I might give Smithy a few days!" said Bunter generously. "I can stand his people for that. I think I will, if he's civil about it. I say, you fellows, let a chap pass—I want to get to Smithy's study."

The grinning Removites cleared a way for Bunter. As he had to pass Smithy to get to Smithy's study, they were rather entertained to see the effect on

him when he spotted the Bounder, and found that Smithy had heard all his cheery remarks.

Bunter rolled down the passage.

"Oh!" he ejaculated suddenly, as he came abreast of the spot where Smithy stood between Wharton and Johnny Bull. "Oh! Oh crikey!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter's little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles as he blinked at Herbert Vernon-Smith. The expression on Smithy's face showed what Smithy would have been doing at that moment had his hands been free.

"Oh! Is—is—is that you, Smithy?" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, I—I never saw you—I didn't mean—"

"Will you rotters let go my arms?" hissed the Bounder.

"I—I say, Smithy, old chap—" stammered Bunter.

Smithy made another effort to break away. He was held, but his effort was so terrific that the three juniors rocked.

Billy Bunter jumped away, and turned to retreat to his own study. The look on Smithy's face quite banished any desire on his part to interview the millionaire's son about the Easter holidays!

Fortunately for Bunter, the Bounder could not get loose. But if he could not use his hands, he could use his feet.

He lashed out with a boot, as Bunter retreated, and there was a fearful crash as that boot landed on the tightest trousers at Greyfriars School.

"Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter.

He flew.

"Goal!" chortled Bob Cherry.

"Well kicked, sir!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter plunged headlong forward, toppled over, and clutched wildly at the nearest fellows for support. One arm went round Peter Todd's neck—the other caught on Fisher T. Fish. But only for a moment did Toddy and Fishy sustain Billy Bunter's uncommon weight. They staggered over, and went—and over them went Bunter sprawling.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

"Wow!" spluttered Toddy.

"Wake snakes!" yelled Fisher T. Fish.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared all the rest of the Removites.

"Ow! I say, you fellows—wow!" Billy Bunter sat up blindly. "Ow! Oh, crikey. I'm sitting on something sharp—yow-ow!"

"Only Fishy's nose!" gasped Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Aw! Wake snakes! Wow! Gerroff my face!" shrieked Fisher T. Fish. "Aw, great gophers! I'll tell a man, this is fierce! Wow!"

Billy Bunter rolled off. Fisher T. Fish's transatlantic nose was thin and bony and sharp, and Bunter did not like sitting on it. Still less did Fisher T. Fish like Bunter sitting on it!

He clasped it with both hands. It felt as if it had been driven through his bony head like a nail.

"Aw, carry me home to die!" groaned Fisher T. Fish. "You pie-faced geck; you wait a shake of a mosquito's eyelids, till I gerrup! If I don't make potato-scrappings of you—"

"Beast!" gasped Bunter.

He did not wait a shake of a mosquito's eyelids. He did not wait at all. He bolted into his own study, evidently having no desire to be made potato-scrappings of. Fisher T. Fish was left caressing his bony nose in anguish.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here it comes!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the squeals and squeaks faded off at last and a voice emerged from the radio.

"Cheerio, Smithy, old man!" said Brownney. "We're getting the news

now! Listen-in, old bean, and put on a smile!"

"I'll kick your rotten wireless the length of the passage!" snarled the Bounder. Smithy's temper was boiling, and there was no doubt that he would have been as good as his word had he been free to make his angry words good.

"Will you?" said Johnny Bull. "I think not, old bean! Hold him, Wharton!"

"I've got him!" answered the captain of the Remove.

"You rotters!" yelled the Bounder, crimson with rage. "Will you let me go? I'll fight the pair of you, and willing!"

"You'll find one at a time enough when you get going!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "But we're not scrapping now, old man! We're listening-in!"

"You cheeky rotters! I'll—I'll—" The Bounder choked with rage.

"Shut up, Smithy! Can't listen-in while you're blowing off gas!" said Tom Brown.

"Quiet, old thing, if you don't want another tap!" said Johnny Bull.

"You rotter—"

Tap!

"Ow!"

"Plenty more if you want them!" said Johnny.

The Bounder stood, panting. The wireless was going quite well now, and the announcer's voice came clearly with its carefully high-class accent!

Vernon-Smith was gathering his strength for another desperate wrench, when suddenly he stood quite still, as if turned to stone by the words that reeled off the radio:

"The attempt on the life of Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, the well-known financier—"

A buzz of atmospherics interrupted.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

A Blow for the Bounder!

B UZZZZZ! came the atmospherics. Faintly through the buzz came a trace of the announcing voice, but no words could be caught.

Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull released the Bounder immediately. All eyes were on Smithy. The Bounder stood petrified, his face white as chalk. He seemed hardly to breathe.

A moment ago he had been raging. That had vanished on the instant at the sound of his father's name on the radio.

Few fellows would have suspected the hard, cynical Bounder of being an affectionate son. But fellows who knew him well knew that there was a soft spot in his hard heart. The look on his face now made the fellows exchange uneasy glances. He looked like a fellow stricken to the very heart.

Buzzzzz! went the wireless.

Brownney was making almost frantic efforts to get it clear, but the atmospherics were too strong for him.

"My father!" The words came quivering from the Bounder's trembling lips. "Did—did you fellows hear—"

"Sorry, old man!" said Harry Wharton awkwardly.

"Sorry, old chap!" murmured Johnny Bull.

Vernon-Smith did not heed them. He ran towards Tom Brown—certainly not now with any intention of kicking his wireless along the passage!

"Can't you get it?" he panted. "For mercy's sake let me hear what the man's saying—Brownney, old man, it's my father—"

"I know, old fellow!" muttered Tom

Brown. "But, look here, he said 'attempt'—you all heard that—only an attempt—"

Buzzzzz!

"Buck up, old chap, it's coming!"

It came—but the announcer's voice, when it came clear again, had passed on to another item of news.

Vernon-Smith clenched his hands desperately.

The words he had heard were echoing in his ears—"The attempt on the life of Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, the well-known financier—" His father! And there was no more to be heard! An attempt on his father's life—and he was left in the dark as to the rest!

The Bounder groaned aloud. The hard case of the Remove, the scapegrace of the school, the fellow who would have been sacked had the Head known of his exploits of only the previous night, the sportsman who prided himself on being as hard as steel all through, was utterly knocked over. The anxiety of it was too much even for the Bounder's iron nerve.

Harry Wharton touched him on the shoulder.

Smithy looked at him almost wildly.

"The telephone, old chap!" said Harry quickly. "Quech will let you use his phone if you tell him—"

"Oh!" The Bounder gasped. "Yes! Thanks!" He turned and ran to the stairs. He had been too knocked over to think, but he caught on to the suggestion at once.

"Poor old Smithy!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Is that chap fond of his father?" said Bolsover major. "Blessed if I should have thought he was fond of anybody!"

"He locked it!" said Harry Wharton dryly.

"Poor old Smithy!" said Frank Nugent softly.

Tom Brown shut off the wireless. Nobody wanted anything else now. The juniors had grave faces as they discussed that startling announcement on the radio and its effect on Herbert Vernon-Smith. All angry feelings were quite forgotten. A few minutes ago the angry, hot-headed Bounder had been held in a hostile grip, and the Famous Five had been booked for a series of "scraps" with him! Nobody wanted to remember that now. All the fellows were anxious to hear what the Bounder learned on the telephone—whether his father was safe or not.

Vernon-Smith fairly flew across the landing and down the Remove staircase.

Coker of the Fifth was coming up the lower stairs, and he frowned at the sight of a Remove junior "racing about the place"; a proceeding of which Coker of the Fifth distinctly disapproved.

"Look here—" began Coker loudly.

He got no further.

The Bounder barged into him, shouldering him out of the way, and Horace Coker went over on the stairs, with a crash and a roar.

Smithy was past him and racing down the staircase in a twinkling.

Coker rolled down two or three steps before he clutched at the banisters and stopped.

"My hat!" gasped Coker. "Why, I—I—I'll—"

But the Remove fellow was gone. He cleared the staircase before Coker was on his feet, and he was rushing for Masters' studies as if he were on the cinder-path.

At the corner Mr. Prout stood, in majestic conversation with Mr. Capper.

Both the masters stared at Vernon-Smith as he came breathlessly up.

"Boy!" boomed Prout.

Smithy heeded the master of the Fifth no more than he had heeded Coker. He shot between the two masters.

Capper stepped back in time. But the stout Prout was slow to move. Smithy's elbow banged on his well-filled waistcoat as he passed. Prout, spluttering, staggered against the wall.

"Upon my word!" gasped Mr. Prout. "Upon my word!"

Smithy raced on.

He reached Mr. Quelch's door. Without pausing to knock, he tore the door open and flew into his Form-master's study.

Mr. Quelch, at his writing-table, had

presence, without a word, was a thing that had never happened before.

"Vernon-Smith!" gasped Mr. Quelch.

"Quiet!" panted the Bounder.

"Wha-a-t?" stuttered the Remove master.

"Keep quiet, will you?"

Mr. Quelch wondered whether he were dreaming this. A boy of his Form was grabbing his telephone under his eyes and telling him to keep quiet. Henry Samuel Quelch stood transfixed.

"Oh, quick—quick!" panted the Bounder into the mouthpiece. "Get me through quick! It's my father's number! Quick! Oh, quick!"

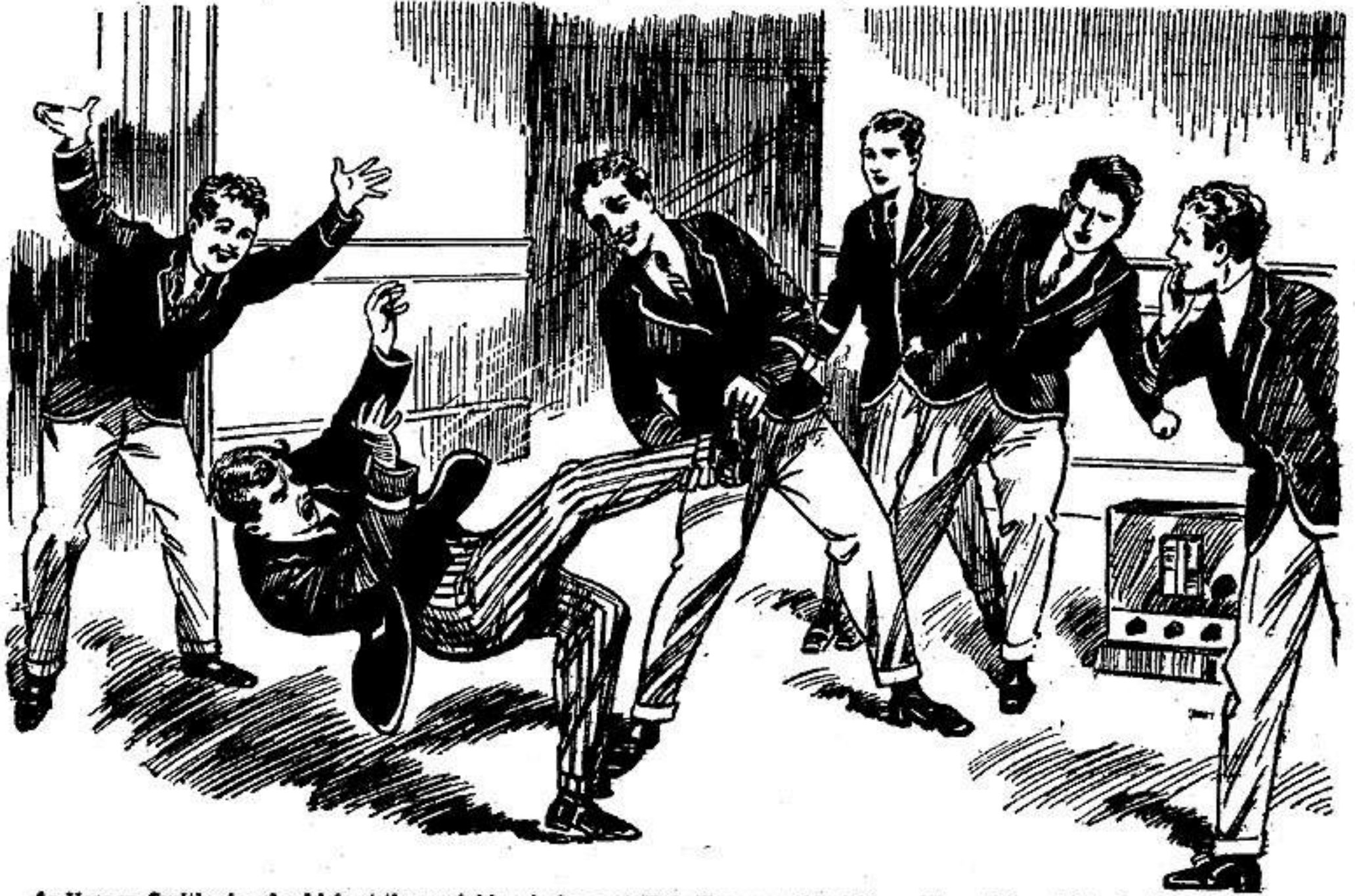
But it was a trunk call, and the Bounder had to wait. Seventy or eighty miles lay between Greyfriars School and the house in Courtman Square,

they were starting, and he turned his face hurriedly away.

Mr. Quelch's thunderous brow cleared.

"You may telephone, Vernon-Smith," he said quietly. And he went back to his table, and laid down the cane.

The receiver was clamped to the Bounder's ear. He forgot Mr. Quelch—he forgot everything but his feverish desire to hear. He would not have stirred, had the school burst into flames round him. Minutes—centuries—crawled by. A low, unconscious moan fell from the Bounder's lips; and the Remove master's face was strange in its expression as he looked at him. This was the "bad hat" of his Form—the scapegrace who had tried his patience sorely—whom he more than suspected



As Vernon-Smith aimed a kick at the portable wireless-set, Bob Cherry grabbed his ankle and forced him to lose his balance. "Take a pew, old man, and join in the happy circle," he said, with a cheery grin. "We'll soon be getting the news!"

a pen in his hand, correcting Latin papers. As his door crashed open, and Vernon-Smith tore in, the Remove master gave a jump, and blots scattered from his pen.

Mr. Quelch abhorred blots. He would give a Remove man lines for blots. He could not give himself lines, of course! He rose to his feet, staring at the Bounder in thunderous wrath.

"Vernon-Smith!" he roared.

Even his Form-master's voice passed unheeded. Leaving Mr. Quelch to glare and thunder, Vernon-Smith jumped at the telephone and grabbed the receiver off the hooks. He shouted a number into the transmitter.

Mr. Quelch viewed that proceeding almost dizzy with astonishment and wrath. Remove fellows were allowed, on rare and urgent occasions, to use that telephone on a special and respectful request to Quelch. Sometimes they used it unpermitted when Quelch was safe off the scene. But for a fellow to rush into the study and handle the instrument in his Form-master's

London. Herbert Vernon-Smith stood trembling with impatience and anxiety. Every second that he had to wait was a century to him.

Mr. Quelch, for several long moments, stood staring at him like a man in a trance! He woke from that trance, however, caught up a cane from his table, and strode towards the Bounder.

"Vernon-Smith! What—"

"It's my father, sir!" Had the Bounder been through he would not have taken any heed of Mr. Quelch had the cane been crashing on his shoulders. But he had to wait, and he spoke.

Mr. Quelch lowered the cane.

"Your father?" he repeated.

"Yes, yes!"

"Do you mean that you have had bad news, Vernon-Smith—that your father is ill?"

"He may be dead, for all I know!"

The Bounder choked, and his voice died in his throat. Even at that moment he hated to let anyone see the tears in his eyes: and he knew that

of having earned expulsion over and over again. Was this the hard, cool, cynical Bounder, the fellow who broke bounds, and defied authority, and rejoiced in his dubious reputation—this white-faced boy trembling as he listened for a sound over the wires—hardly able to restrain the sob that was shaking him? Mr. Quelch's severe face softened very much as he gazed at him.

"Larkin! Is that you, Larkin?" Mr. Quelch was aware that Larkin was the butler at Mr. Vernon-Smith's town house. "Larkin—my father!"

"Is that Master Herbert?"

"Yes, yes, yes! My father!" shrieked the Bounder.

"Here, Master Herbert?"

"What—what?" the Bounder stammered. "What—"

Another voice came through.

"Herbert! Is that you, Herbert? What the dooce are you ringing up for—what?"

"Father!" stammered Smithy.

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He could say no more for a moment. Mr. Quelch quietly left the study. Mr. Quelch was a tactful gentleman, and he would not stay there and witness the tears running in a stream down the cheeks of a Remove man.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Narrow Escape!

"FATHER!"

The Bounder spoke again, after a moment or two. The emotion that shook him, like a reed in the wind, came as a surprise to himself; and he hated to lose his self-control. If his cheeks had ever been wet with tears before, he could not remember the time. But those long minutes of torturing anxiety, and the relief of hearing his father's voice on the telephone, had been too much for the Bounder. The receiver was shaking in his hand.

"Father, you're all right?"

"Eh? Yes! What the dooce—" came Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith's surprised voice. "Is anything the matter, Herbert?"

"Isn't it true?" panted Smithy. "Haven't you been in danger?"

"Eh? Yes! How could you know? How the dickens have you got wind of it, Herbert? How the dooce do you know anything about it?"

"You're not hurt?"

"No."

"Oh, thank Heaven for that!" said the Bounder. "I—I was afraid—I—I was horribly afraid—" He broke off.

"My dear boy!" Mr. Vernon-Smith's rather strident voice had an unusually soft note. Had he been able to see his son, he would have been startled; but he could guess a good deal, from the faltering voice over the wires. "My dear Herbert, I never dreamed you could have heard. It happened only this afternoon—a few hours since. I suppose it will be in the late editions of the evening papers, but you can't have seen—"

"I heard it on the radio—"

"Oh! Then surely you knew I was safe?"

"The rotten thing cut off before I knew! All I knew was that there had been an attempt on your life."

"Oh, my dear boy—"

"Hardly ten minutes ago. I got through as quick as I could." The Bounder was calmer now. "What's happened, father?"

"A bullet through my hat, Herbert—that's all. Total damage, two guineas for a new hat," answered the millionaire.

"You were fired on—"

"That's it—in my car from a window. A few inches lower, and it would

have been a different story. But a miss is as good as a mile, Herbert."

Mr. Vernon-Smith's voice was perfectly cool. It was evident that his narrow escape had not shaken him in the least.

"But who—what—why—" panted the amazed Bounder.

"Goodness knows! The police have the matter in hand, of course, but—"

"Have they got the man?"

"No."

"He's known—"

"Not in the least. Nobody saw him. He got away at the back of the house, long before he could be got at. But I've no doubt he will be caught. Sure to be," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "Don't you be anxious, my boy. I was not even touched; but I had to miss an appointment in the City—that was the worst of it. I can afford a new hat." The millionaire chuckled.

"But why, father?" exclaimed Smithy. "Why should anybody—"

"We'll find that out when they get the man, Herbert. My own belief is that some mistake was made. The man must have been after somebody else, and let me have it in error. That's really the only thing I can think."

"You've got no enemy?"

Mr. Vernon-Smith chuckled again. "A man doesn't rule the roost in the City for twenty years, Herbert, without making enemies, and plenty of them," he answered. "But my sort of enemies don't handle guns. City methods are quite different from those on a Wild West film, my boy. Plenty of men up here would like to see me crash, but most of them would be frightened of a loaded firearm."

"But why, then—"

"A mistake, my boy—a mistake. I'm sure of it. Some disgruntled fool potting at the wrong man."

"If you're sure of that, dad—" said the Bounder, immensely relieved.

"Well, I feel pretty sure, Herbert. No other way of accounting for it, I think. I never thought of you getting the news—and only part of it, at that—or I'd have rung up, of course. Don't you worry, my boy. It's all over, and they'll get the man to-night, or to-morrow, anyhow."

The Bounder breathed more freely.

"You're coming down to-morrow for break-up, as arranged?" he asked.

"Certainly!"

"You think it's safe, father?" asked Vernon-Smith, with a recurrence of doubt.

There was a snort on the telephone.

"Don't be a young ass, Herbert! Do you think your father would show the white feather, if there were a gunman sticking at every window between London and Greyfriars? Huh!"

"But you think it's safe?"

"I know it is. Don't you worry, my boy. I shall see you to-morrow. Good-bye, Herbert!"

"Good-bye, father!"

The Bounder hung up, and stepped away from the telephone. He shot a swift glance towards Mr. Quelch's table.

He had not seen or heard the Remove master leave the study. And it was a great relief to him to see that

Quelch was not there. Any display of emotion was hateful and irritating to the Bounder, and he knew what Quelch would have seen, had he remained in the study.

Anxiety was over now. It seemed to him that Mr. Vernon-Smith must be right, and that the attempt must be due to some mistake of identity—some half-cracked fool with a gun, potting at the wrong man. He could imagine no reason why any man should make an attempt on the millionaire's life. It was an immense relief to his mind. And now that he was no longer anxious, he was intensely annoyed by the emotion he had shown—of which Quelch must have seen something, and which the Remove fellows could not have failed to see.

He made a grimace as he looked into Mr. Quelch's mirror. There were traces on his face, of which no son need have been ashamed, but of which the cynical Bounder was very much ashamed indeed.

Very carefully he dabbed away those traces; and he hated himself for a tell-tale redness that he could not remove from his eyelids. If any fellow fancied that he had been blubbing, he was ready to hit out at the first word.

A booming voice from the passage reached his ears—the wrathful voice of the master of the Greyfriars Fifth.

"Such disrespect, Quelch—such unmannerly disrespect—rushing by a master, sir, actually colliding with me, almost causing me to lose my balance."

"I beg you to excuse the boy, Mr. Prout. He appears to have had alarming news from home, and was anxious for his father—"

"Oh, in that case—" Prout's boom died away.

"Old ass!" muttered the Bounder.

Mr. Quelch came back into the study. He glanced inquiringly at Herbert Vernon-Smith.

"I hope you have heard good news, my boy!" he said.

"Yes, thank you, sir!" answered Smithy. "I'm sorry I rushed in like that, but—but I heard on the radio that my father had been in danger. I hope you will excuse me, sir."

"Certainly, certainly, Vernon-Smith! Mr. Vernon-Smith is well, I hope?"

"Oh, yes, sir; he wasn't hurt, as it turns out."

"I am glad to hear it."

The Bounder left the study. Mr. Quelch's face was unusually benign in its expression, and Smithy wondered how much he had seen. He could have kicked himself as he went down the passage and strolled into the Rag.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Just Like Smithy!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Here's Smithy!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were in the Rag when the Bounder came in. A crowd of other fellows were there, and they all looked at Vernon-Smith.

The Famous Five stared a little. They remembered the Bounder's face when he heard that startling announcement on the radio—and how he had rushed headlong down the stairs. The change in him now was amazing. He sauntered into the Rag with his hands in his pockets, a cool grin on his face—evidently the old Bounder once more.

"You got through, Smithy?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"Eh? Oh, yes!" drawled the Bounder. "Quelch was good enough

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to let me use his phone! Not a bad old bean, is he?"

"Quite a good old bean," said Harry quietly. "Is that all?"

"Yes, that's all."

"I suppose you've had news of your father, Smithy?" asked Frank Nugent, staring blankly at the Bounder.

"Oh, yes, I had a chat with him over the wires. It seems that some potty ass knocked his hat off with a bullet meant for somebody else. It's all right," yawned Smithy. "They'd have said so on the wireless, if that rotten contraption of yours was any good, Brownney."

Tom Brown gave him a look.

"Can't help atmospherics," he said. "And you got the news, anyhow, Smithy."

"Yes; it was quite an interestin' item—fearfully excitin', in fact," said Vernon-Smith. "But I've still got my headache; and if you're not kickin' up that awful row in the passage any more, I'll go up to study."

"You can go and eat coke!" answered Brownney.

"Storm in a teacup—what?" remarked Skinner. "No need to go off at the deep end as you did, Smithy."

"Did I?" said Smithy, with a rather dangerous look at Skinner.

"I hear that you barged Coker over on the stairs," said Bob Cherry. "The dear man's raging."

"The fool was in the way!" said the Bounder carelessly. "I stopped a minute to barge him over—there was no special hurry."

Harry Wharton smiled. He could read in the Bounder's face what Vernon-Smith hoped no one could read there, and what he would have hated to admit.

Smithy gave him a dark look, and turned to the door again. As he went out Billy Bunter rolled in.

Bunter blinked at him inquisitively through his big spectacles. He grinned as the Bounder passed him scowling.

"I say, you fellows!" gasped Bunter, as Smithy disappeared into the passage outside. "I say, did you see Smithy? I say, he's been blubbing!"

"Shut up, you fat ass!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"Ring off, you burbling bloater!" said Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry! I say, I could jolly well see it—he's been blubbing!" grinned Bunter. "Fancy Smithy blubbing! He, he, he!"

A figure reappeared in the doorway behind Bunter. Perhaps the Bounder had lingered to hear any remarks that followed his departure. Anyhow, he had heard Bunter.

The expression on his face, as he glared at the back of Billy Bunter's fat head, was quite alarming.

"Shut up, you dummy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton hastily.

"Shan't I!" retorted Bunter independently. "I can tell you fellows, Smithy has been blubbing? Has Quelch been licking him, or what? I say—Yaroooooh!"

A boot fairly crashed on the fat Owl of the Remove, and he spun across the Rag, with a wild yell, and landed on his fat hands and knees.

"Ow! Wow! Yoo-hooooop!" roared Bunter. "Who—what—I say, you fellows—Yaroooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Oh crikey. I say—Wow! Yow!" roared Bunter, as the Bounder, following him up, kicked again, and yet again!

"Hold on, Smithy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

The infuriated Bounder did not heed. He kicked again and again, and Billy Bunter roared with anguish.

"Stop that!" shouted the captain of the Remove. And as Vernon-Smith gave no attention, he rushed forward, grasped the Bounder by the shoulder, and dragged him forcibly back from the sprawling and yelling Owl.

The Bounder turned on him like a tiger and struck out. His fist crashed on Wharton's chest, and sent him spinning backwards.

The captain of the Remove went full length on the floor with a bump.

"You mad ass, Smithy!" shouted Bob Cherry, his eyes blazing.

"You cheeky rotter!" bawled Johnny Bull.

Unheeding, Vernon-Smith turned to Bunter again. Apparently he had not finished with that fat youth. That, however, was his little mistake—he had. The Co. rushed forward as one man and collared him.

"Hands off, you cads!" yelled the Bounder, struggling.

"Ow! I say, you fellows, keep him off!" yelled Bunter. "I say, I didn't know the beast was listening—ow! I only said he was blubbing—wow! And so he jolly well was—yow-ow-ow!"

The Bounder made a fierce effort to get at the Owl of the Remove, red with rage. Instead of which, he was swung off his feet in the grasp of four pairs of hands. Harry Wharton staggered up, panting. A quarter of an hour ago he had been full of sympathy for Smithy—now he strode towards him with clenched fists and blazing eyes.

"You cheeky cad!" he roared.

"You meddlin' fool!" retorted the Bounder.

"Chuck him out!" snapped Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows—ow! I say—wow!" spluttered Bunter.

The Bounder struggled furiously. But the four Removites swung him to the doorway, heaved him up, and sent him spinning in the passage. He sprawled there in a spluttering heap.

"Now come back and have some more, you cheeky tick!" bawled Johnny Bull.

"The morefulness will be terrific, my esteemed rotten Smithy!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows, keep him out!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

Herbert Vernon-Smith staggered to his feet, panting for breath. He made a movement to come back into the Rag; but the Co. were standing ready to collar him if he did, and he changed his mind and turned away. Breathless, untidy and enraged, he tramped to the stairs and went up.

Coker of the Fifth was on the landing with his friends, Potter and Greene. Coker was talking—his usual state!

"Barged me over!" said Coker. "A cheeky Remove tick barging a Fifth Form man over! I hear that he's had some bad news from home. If that's true, I'll let him off—a chap can be sympathetic, but——"

Vernon-Smith scowled at the Fifth Form men as he reached the landing. He did not want sympathy from Horace Coker, or anyone else.

"Oh, here you are!" hooted Coker. "Now, look here, young Smith——"

"Oh, shut up!" yapped the Bounder.

"You barged me over!" roared Coker. "See? Now I want to know why——"

"Why shouldn't I barge over a silly fool who got in the way?" asked the

Bounder coolly. "I'll barge you over again if you shove into my way again, you silly fathead!"

That was enough for Horace Coker—in fact, a little too much. He fairly hurled himself at the Bounder of Greyfriars.

Smithy had asked for it. Now he got it. He hit out savagely as Coker grasped him, and there was a spurt of red from Horace's nose. The next moment the Remove fellow went spinning, and as he spun, Coker's boot landed on him.

The next minute or two were wildly exciting. Three Fifth Form men followed Smithy across the landing, booting him. He dodged into the Remove passage—Coker and Potter and Greene after him, still booting. Not till he dodged into Study No. 4, and slammed the door, did they give up the pursuit and retire—feeling, justly, that that cheeky young Remove tick had had a jolly good lesson.

In his study, the Bounder scowled and panted, and panted and scowled.

His headache had not been improved by his hectic experiences; but worse than that was Bunter's gibe in the Rag and the fact that the other fellows knew. Anyhow, any fellow who repeated that gibe, had the worst trouble to expect!

There was a tap at his door, and it opened. He scowled blackly at Lord Mauleverer's face, as Mauly looked in.

"I say, old man——" began Mauly.

His lordship got no further. A Latin dictionary came whizzing across the study, and Lord Mauleverer jumped back barely in time. The volume whizzed across the passage and crashed on the wall.

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Mauleverer. "What the jolly old dooce——"

He ceased to speak as Todhunter's Algebra followed the Latin dictionary. He shut the door promptly, and the book crashed on the door and rolled on the study floor.

"Oh gad!" repeated the astonished Mauly, and he went down to the Rag, still in a state of great astonishment. Smithy, no doubt, supposed that any visitor to his study just then came to spot signs of "blubbing," and he was not in a mood to make sure.

"I say, is Smithy mad?" asked Lord Mauleverer, when he arrived in the Rag. "I looked into his study to ask him to supper this evening, and he started buzzin' books at me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Removites.

"Well, it may be funny," said Mauly, "but I jolly well shan't go back and ask him again!"

And the Bounder was not present at the end-of-the-term supper in Mauly's study that evening, and he was not missed. Probably he would not have been very good company.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Gets a Lift!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Seat!"

"If that's what you call civil——"

"Blow away, Bunter!"

"You needn't be so jolly shirty because I can't come with you for the hols, you fellows!" said Billy Bunter, with a severe blink through his big spectacles at the chums of the Remove. "The fact is, it can't be done."

"Eh?"

"What?"

The Famous Five gazed at Bunter. When that fat and fatuous youth ran
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them down in the quad on breaking-up day, they expected, naturally, to hear anything-but this.

Bunter, as usual, was at a loose end for the hols.

As a matter of preference, he would have gone to Mauleverer Towers; but Mauly's uncle was calling for Mauly, and if Mauly was soft, his uncle was not, and there was nothing doing in that direction.

Smithy was said to be going on some expensive and luxurious trip, in company with some pals from Highcliffe School. Billy Bunter had lately had some little troubles with Ponsonby & Co. of Highcliffe, but he was quite willing to overlook that, or anything else, to join up. But even Bunter, though he had a very hopeful nature, entertained little hope of hooking on to the Bounder after the late occurrences.

So he had fallen back, as it were, on his old pals. And the Famous Five expected to hear as much, and were ready to reply with an emphatic negative.

Billy Bunter's remarks took them quite by surprise.

"Sorry, and all that," went on Bunter breezily, "but I really can't manage it. The fact is, a fellow so much sought after as I am has to ration his friends, if you know what I mean."

"Sort of rush for you—what?" grinned Bob.

"That's it exactly!" assented Bunter.

"The exactfulness is probably not terrific!" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Oh, really, Inky! Some Sixth Form men want me, but I don't know about hols with seniors," said Bunter, shaking his head. "Too swanky, you know. Hilton of the Fifth is rather keen on my going to his place—Hilton Hall, down in Devonshire, you know. I may give him a look-in."

"Better look out if you look in!" suggested Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Then there's those St. Jim's chaps," went on Bunter, unheeding. "Tom Merry's written me a jolly pressing

letter. I'll let you fellows read it if you like."

"Oh, do!" said Harry Wharton. "Always glad to hear from Tom Merry."

"I find I've left it in my study. Then D'Arcy—that chap in the St. Jim's Fourth, you know—he's rather a lisping ass, but he's got a very decent place down in Hampshire; not up to Bunter Court, perhaps, but rather decent. I ought to give him a few days if I can. There will be some rather big things at home, too. I hear that some of the royal dukes will be there for week-ends, so I shall have to put in some time at Bunter Court. I'm sorry if I seem to be letting you fellows down—"

"Not at all!" said Harry Wharton gravely. "Stick to your royal dukes, old fat bean. We never have dukes at all at Wharton Lodge—not even common or garden ones."

"I was trying to fix up a week for you, old chap," explained Bunter. "Then I thought I might make it a week-end. But I can't, and that's that. I hope you don't mind very much."

"My dear old perpoise, we don't mind at all!" assured the captain of the Remove. "Not the least little bit in the wide world."

"Well, that's all right, then," said Bunter. "I shouldn't like you to think I was forgetting humble friends, just because I'm moving in very high circles. I'm no snob, I hope."

"Oh crikey!"

"So that's that," said Bunter. "The utmost I can do, Harry, old chap, is to give you a day—just one day. You don't mind if I give you no more than that?"

"Not at all; but I shall mind if you give me as much as that!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Have you finished your funny story?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Well, what I mean is, we travel in the same direction when we break up," said Bunter. "My idea is to drop in at Wharton Lodge with you, Harry, and go on to Bunter Court in the morning. I don't want to let you down entirely, but that's all I can promise."

"Now," remarked Johnny Bull, "we're getting to the milk in the coconut."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Remove chuckled. Billy Bunter's deep-laid and artful scheme was, rather unfortunately for Bunter, as clear as glass to the fellows he had "done" so many times.

Once installed at Wharton Lodge for the first day of the holidays, the fat Owl was not likely to be easy to dislodge.

Trains could be lost; ankles could be sprained; even serious illness might be developed. Bunter's dodges were innumerable.

By the time Bunter was at the end of his resources, the Greyfriars fellows would be at the end of the Easter holidays. And that would be that!

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said the fat Owl, blinking at the hilarious Five. "As I've said, that's all I can do for you, Wharton. Now, what train are you catching?"

"Any train that you don't catch, old fat man!"

"Oh, don't be an ass, you know!" said Bunter peevishly. "Some of the fellows are going off quite early. Are you going early?"

"Are you?" counter-questioned Wharton.

"Well, yes."

"Then we'll go late."

"Beast! I mean, I'm going rather later. What's the good of hurrying?"

"Lots of good, if you're going late. We'll jam into the first bus."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, you cheeky beast," roared Bunter, "if you mean that you don't want me for the first day of the hols—"

"What a brain!" said the captain of the Remove admiringly. "How do you do these things, Bunter? You've guessed it in one!"

"He, he, he!" Bunter decided to take that remark as a joke. "Well, look here, I'll be ready when you fellows go. I'm an accommodating chap, and I'll accommodate you, sec? That's all right."

"But I'm not an accommodating chap, and I can't accommodate you," explained Wharton. "No accommodation at Wharton Lodge. Stick to royalty, old fat bean, and leave us contented in our humble sphere."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter, as the Famous Five walked away, laughing.

The fat Owl cast a devastating blink after them through his big spectacles. His little scheme, deeply laid as it was, did not look like being a winner.

As he blinked round the sunny quad, the fat Owl spotted the Bounder.

Herbert Vernon-Smith was looking much better-tempered that morning. Having recovered from his night out of bounds, he was feeling fit, which made a lot of difference. And he was looking forward to seeing his father arrive.

His good-tempered expression encouraged Bunter—always hopeful. As a matter of choice, he would rather have rolled off in Mr. Vernon-Smith's whacking car than have taken the train with the Famous Five.

"I say, Smithy!" he squeaked.

The Bounder glanced round at him, the good-tempered expression fading off his face.

"Well?" he yapped.

"I say, your pater will be along pretty early, won't he, in that magnificent car of his?" said Bunter. "I hear that your pal Redwing has let you down for the hols and gone off by himself."

"You hear a lot, don't you?" said the Bounder, his eyes glinting.

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"Ow! I say, you fellows—wow!" gasped Billy Bunter. "Ow! Oh crikey! I'm sitting on something sharp! Yow-ow!" "Aw! Wake snakes! Gerroff my face!" shrieked Fisher T. Fish. "Aw, great gophers! I'll tell a man, this is fierce! Wow!"

Smithy, as a matter of fact, was rather feeling the loss of his chum, who had gone to sea with his sailor father for the holidays, and had left a day or two before break-up for that reason. Nothing, however, would have induced the Bounder of Greyfriars to admit that he felt that, or anything else.

"Well, so I hear," said Bunter. "Gone off on some filthy ship, or something, with that tarry-jack father of his! He, he, he! Look here, Smithy! If you'd like to give me a lift in your pater's car—"

"I wouldn't!" said the Bounder briefly.

"I mean, they can't send the Rolls for me from Bunter Court," explained the fat Owl. "The pater's got it to-day—he's had to go to Buckingham Palace. So if you could give me a lift, I—"

The Bounder looked at him.

"If a lift's all you want—" he said, as if considering it.

"Yes, rather, old chap!" said Bunter eagerly. "A lift as far as London, see? If I lost my train, I dare say you could put me up for the night—just one night!"

"I couldn't give you a lift as far as London," said the Bounder, shaking his head. "but I'll give you a lift as far as I can."

"That's all right, old fellow."

Billy Bunter grinned with glee. Once he was safely packed in the Vernon-Smith car, he considered that he could trust to his fat wits for the rest.

"Let's have this clear," said the Bounder. "You want me to give you a lift as far as I can?"

"Yes, rather! That's it!"

"Well, I'll do that!" said Smithy, with a nod.

He made a sudden grasp at Bunter, and twirled him round.

The fat Owl uttered a squeak of surprise.

"Ow! Leggo! Wharrer you at, you ass?"

"Giving you a lift!" answered Smithy, drawing back his foot.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, in dire apprehension. He understood now the sort of lift that the Bounder was going to give him; and he did not want that lift—very much indeed he did not. But it was coming!

Thud!

"Whoop!"

Bunter flew, fairly lifted by that drive of the Bounder's boot.

"Ow! Yaroooh! Beast!" roared Bunter, as he landed—not a happy landing.

The Bounder walked away, laughing.

Billy Bunter sprawled—not laughing. He gasped and spluttered and wriggled. Still, there was one consolation. Smithy had given him a good lift; but he had not been able, as he stated, to give him a lift as far as London!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Minus Bunter!

"BUMP him!" suggested Johnny Bull.

Johnny was a Yorkshireman, with no nonsense about him. Still, even Johnny, practical youth as he was, did not really want to bump Billy Bunter on the last day of the term.

He wanted to see the last of him till next term—a desire shared by every fellow who knew Bunter. He was prepared to take drastic measures, if driven thereto. Still, if gentler means would suffice, he had no objection.

The Famous Five had packed long since. They were ready to go. Already one bus had rolled off with an early cargo. Lord Mauleverer, safe under his uncle's wing, had escaped Bunter. The Bounder was not gone yet, but the fat Owl of the Remove was giving Smithy a wide offing. Smithy had booted him once, and was prepared to boot him again, without hesitation. The Famous Five preferred gentler measures—if practicable.

So the Co. shook their heads at Johnny's suggestion.

"Last day of term," said Harry Wharton. "After all, we're not seeing the old porpoise again till the summer term!"

"Says you!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"The seefulness will probably be terrific, unless the bootfulness is applied trouserfully to the esteemed Bunter!" remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Oh, bump him, and have done with it!" said Johnny. "The fat trout's got an eye on us now!"

"Four!" said Nugent.

Billy Bunter, at a little distance, had his eyes, and his spectacles, on the Famous Five.

There were several buses, one after another, to the station. Bunter was going to take the one that the Famous Five took. He was going to take the same train. And he was going to arrive, if he could, at the same destination. He was well aware that those fellows were not so hard-fisted as the Bounder; and it was just like Bunter to take full advantage of the fact.

"Gentlemen, blokes, and sportsmen," said Bob Cherry, with a cheery glimmer in his blue eyes, "I've got the big idea. Anybody like a walk?"

"Oh, fine!" said Johnny Bull, with sarcasm. "If we walk, Bunter will

drop off. It's only about a hundred miles. Come on!"

"Fathead!" said Bob. "Look here! Our luggage is going on the next bus. Suppose we start walking—"

"That fat slug will crawl after us," grunted Johnny Bull, "and you can bet that he will turn up at the station on time."

"But suppose we walk in the other direction?"

"Eh?" Johnny stared. "Going to catch a train by walking away from the railway station? Is that the big idea? They have big ideas like that in Colney Hatch, I think!"

"Lend me your ears, old bean, instead of your chin!" said Bob cheerily. "We walk off, and that fat boulder follows on. We walk for Lantham—and catch the train there, see, instead of at Courtfield? Same jolly old train passes through Lantham."

"Ten miles—"

"We can pick up a motor-bus on the way, sooner or later, when your poor little legs get tired. But we don't pick up an old motor-bus till Bunter has fallen, dead or dying, by the weary wayside."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Good egg!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Let's!"

And the Famous Five chortled.

Really, it was quite a simple way out of the difficulty. Booting Bunter, like Smithy, or bumping him, as Johnny suggested, doubtless would have done the trick; but Bob Cherry's big idea was equally efficacious. It was easy enough to let the luggage go on in the bus, and walk across to the Lantham road. Once the fat Owl dropped behind, all was clear. None of the Famous Five objected to a walk on a sunny spring day—in fact, they liked the idea.

"Passed nem. con.," said Frank Nugent, "and the sooner we start, the better. It's a big step to Lantham, even if we get a lift on the way. We don't want to lose the train as well as losing Bunter."

And the Famous Five lost no time. As their baggage was already on the school bus that was waiting for the next lot, they were done with it. A few more good-byes did not take up much time; and Bob, who had intended to look for Coker of the Fifth and knock his hat off before starting, abandoned his designs on Coker's hat.

Ten minutes after plotting that little plot, the chums of the Remove walked down to the gates.

After them rolled Billy Bunter.

Bunter was not likely to lose sight of his victims. That day, the fat Owl was as keen on the trail as the celebrated Ferrers Locke.

Vernon-Smith was loafing in the gateway, his hands in his pockets, waiting there for the arrival of his father's car.

He gave the Famous Five a scowl.

Most of the fellows, at the end of the term, parting for the holidays, forgot little grievances and disagreements; but the Boulder of Greyfriars had a long memory for such things.

He had not forgotten having been pinned in the Remove passage the previous day; neither had he forgotten having been "chucked" out of the Rag.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, Smithy!" roared Bob Cherry, who never remembered a row ten minutes after it was over. "We're just off!"

"Sooner the better!" grunted Vernon-Smith. "Taking that megaphone with you?"

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"Eh? What megaphone?" Then, as Bob understood that Smithy was alluding to his dulcet tones, he laughed good-naturedly. "Same old Boulder—always biting!"

"Good-bye, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton.

"Good-bye, and good riddance!"

"My esteemed shirty Smithy—"

"Oh, shut up, and give a fellow a rest!" growled the Boulder, and he moved away, with a knitted brow.

Johnny Bull paused.

"What about banging Smithy's cheeky head on the gate before we start?" he suggested.

"Try it on, if you like!" sneered Smithy.

Johnny Bull looked warlike; but his chums gathered round him, and barged him into the road.

The Boulder gave a disagreeable laugh as they went, to which the Famous Five turned a deaf ear.

They walked away down the road, and after them rolled a fat figure.

About a hundred yards from the gates, Billy Bunter panted breathlessly up.

"I say, you fellows!" he gasped.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Bunter!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Coming for a walk, Bunter? Lovely day for a walk, what?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"The walkfulness is delightful in this absurd springy weather, my esteemed fat Bunter!" remarked Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows, you'll lose the school bus!" panted Bunter. "I say, you'll lose the bus for the station, if you go wandering about now."

"That's all right," said Bob affably. "If we lose it, somebody's sure to find it—it's big enough to be seen! Anyhow, we can inquire for it at the Lost Property Office!"

"You silly ass!" roared Bunter.

"Same to you, old fat bean, with knobs on!"

"If you're walking to the station, you blithering idiots, it's a long way round if you go this way!" gasped Bunter. "Look here, I'm jolly well not going to walk—see?"

"Good-bye, then, old fat top! See you next term!"

"Beast!"

The Famous Five walked on, with smiling faces.

Billy Bunter rolled after them, with a very unsmiling face. By the time they crossed the bridge over the Sark the fat Owl was short of wind. He puffed and he blew, and he blew and he puffed!

But he was not going to lose sight of those beasts, if he could help it. He had little doubt that if he dropped out of sight they would be lost for good. He had no doubt that, in the long run, they would head for the station; but that was no use to Bunter, unless he arrived there at the same time. He wanted to catch the same train, and no other train would do.

But as they walked cheerily up the Lantham road, a good two miles from the school, Billy Bunter began to realise that keeping them in sight was not practical politics. His little fat legs were already almost falling off.

They were not hurrying. They considerably gave Bunter a chance to keep them in sight, if he wanted to. But it was getting tougher and tougher. It was, at last, more than flesh and blood could bear—Bunter's flesh and blood, at any rate. He stopped.

"I say, you fellows!" he yelled.

Five smiling faces looked round.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" bawled Bob Cherry. "Put it on, Bunter! Eight miles to Lantham yet!"

"You—you—you mean beasts! You ain't walking to Lantham!" gasped Bunter, in utter dismay. "You—you—you rotters! Oh dear!"

"Like us to give you a lift? I saw Smithy give you one this morning—like another?"

"Beast!"

"Coming, Bunter?" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Rotter!"

"Buck up, old man!" chuckled Frank Nugent.

"Beast! Rotter! Cad! Swab!"

"I don't know how you fellows feel," remarked Bob Cherry, "but Bunter's conversation is beginning to pall on me. Shall we be moving on?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five moved on. Billy Bunter stood on the dusty road, perspiring in the spring sunshine, and glared after them with a glare that might have cracked his spectacles. The chums of the Remove walked cheerily on, and passed beyond the range of Bunter's limited vision. The fat Owl did not pursue. He had hardly a crawl left in his fat little legs.

"Beasts!" moaned Bunter.

It was dusty on the road, and there was a scent of petrol from passing cars. The sunshine blazed down on the fat Owl's crimson and perspiring face.

He was two miles from Greyfriars—eight from Lantham! The eight were impossible—the two almost so! Before he negotiated those two miles back to the school Billy Bunter required a long, long rest.

He rolled off the road, into the shade of the bordering wood, and sought a comfortable shady spot for the much-needed rest.

Looking back, ten minutes later, the Famous Five saw nothing of the fat Owl. They chuckled.

"Quite as good as bumping," remarked Nugent, "and as good as booting! We seem to have lost Bunter!"

And the chums of the Remove chuckled and strolled on till the Redclyffe motor-bus came roaring by, and they stopped it for a lift to Lantham.

A quarter of an hour later, rolling on to Lantham on the motor-bus, they glanced at a big, handsome Rolls car passing in the road, driven by a chauffeur they had seen before, and occupied by a stout gentleman they knew well—Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith. It was Smithy's pater, on his way to Greyfriars to fetch his son.

Bob Cherry cheerily waved his hat to the City gentleman; and Mr. Vernon-Smith started, stared, and then smiled and acknowledged the salute.

The car dashed on its way and vanished, and the motor-bus rolled into Lantham, in good time for the Famous Five to catch their train—minus Bunter!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Billy Bunter Butts In!

BILLY BUNTER leaned back against the trunk of a beech, his little fat legs stretched out in the thick grass, with the hawthorns nodding around him, and over him.

The branches overhead shut off the glare of the sun, and the shade was grateful and comforting to the tired fat Owl.

Through the hawthorns that grew along the roadside he had a glimpse

of the dusty road in front of him, on which cars whizzed by every now and then. He had a faint hope that some kindly disposed motorist might give him a lift back to the school, when he had had a rest. But he needed a rest first—a good, long rest. He mopped perspiration from his fat brow, slew guats, and groped in his pocket for a chunk of toffee. It was, at least, a comfort that he had found some toffee in Ogilvy's study that morning.

He chewed toffee, and found comfort therein; but his fat thoughts were of a doleful cast. The Famous Five were gone—and gone for good. By the time he got back to Greyfriars nearly everybody else would be gone. It looked as if Billy Bunter would have to take a ticket for Bunter Court—and pay for the ticket himself, which was the unkindest cut of all.

The toffee went the way of all toffee. A couple of ancient bullseyes, which he found sticking to the lining of his pocket, followed them. Billy Bunter was beginning to think of making a move, when there was a rustle in the wood behind him.

He paid it no heed. There was somebody coming through the wood, to get out on the Lantham road—a circumstance that did not interest him in the very least.

It did not even occur to him to wonder why that somebody was coming through the thickness of the wood, instead of following the public foot-path, which certainly was an easier proposition.

The hawthorns close by him nodded as an unseen figure passed under the boughs of the beech by the trunk of which he sat.

Blinking up through his big spec-

acles, he had a glimpse of a dark, foreign face, under a black felt hat.

The head passed on, and disappeared. Bunter had a faint feeling of curiosity. The man was a foreigner, and foreigners were not common in those rural parts.

His dark complexion, his black eyebrows, and the curls of black hair that showed under the wide-brimmed felt hat, proved that he was of southern race. He reminded Bunter of an Italian organ-grinder he had seen in Courtfield, and so he guessed that the man was an Italian.

However, he would have forgotten the swarthy man in a few moments, but for another glimpse of the back of the dark head, under the felt hat.

The man had stopped on the border of the wood, and was looking out into the road.

He stood perfectly still, and perfectly silent, his back to Bunter; and the fat junior would not have known that he had stopped there at all, but for that glimpse of the back of his head through the nodding hawthorns.

Bunter felt a qualm of uneasiness.

It was broad daylight, certainly, and cars passed on the road every few minutes; it was the main road from Lantham to Courtfield. Still, the spot was a lonely one.

Nobody else was at hand. And there was something stealthy in this silence and stillness of the man who had come through the wood, and now stood watching the road, without showing himself in the open.

Bunter sat very still.

The Italian had not seen him, and he was rather glad of it. Sitting at the foot of the beech, the hawthorns all round him, he was hidden from sight,

unless specially looked for—and clearly it had not occurred to the swarthy man that anyone was there. Had he been standing, the man might have noticed him—but, luckily, he was sitting down. Bunter did not like that dark-faced foreigner's looks at all, and was glad to be unseen.

He noticed a movement; the man was looking at a watch. A low mutter came to his fat ears:

"Va bene! Va bene!"

Bunter did not know that that meant "it goes well," but the tone told him what was implied. The man was watching the road for someone to pass. He had looked at his watch to assure himself that he was not late. His muttering voice told that he was satisfied.

The fat Owl's heart was beating quite unpleasantly.

A man who watched thus stealthily, keeping out of sight from the road, could scarcely be awaiting the passing of a friend. In such a case, obviously, he would have stood out in view.

But though he was on the very edge of the wood, where it bordered the road, he was keeping carefully back in cover.

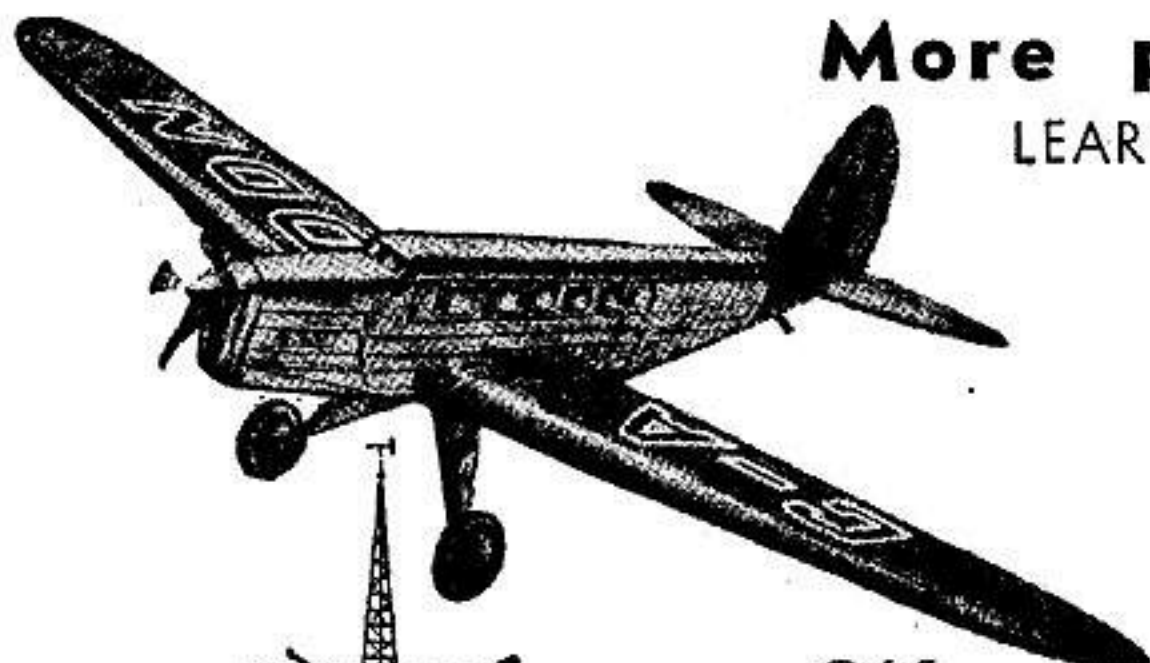
It was with hostile intent that he was watching the road to Lantham. Billy Bunter wished that he had selected some other spot to take his needed rest.

He had selected that particular spot because it was thick and shady, and screened him from a glaring sun. Evidently the Italian had selected it for the same reason—though it was not the sunshine from which he wished to be screened. It was from the view of the man for whom he was waiting and watching!

Another movement—and Bunter's fat
(Continued on next page.)

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heart gave a jolt at the idea that that unpleasant foreigner might spot him. But the man did not look round. He remained facing the road, as he took something from his pocket.

Bunter did not know what it was for a moment or two; but as the man examined it, he had a glimpse of a bluish barrel; and his heart seemed to turn over as he realised that it was a pistol.

Bunter hardly breathed.

Having looked at the automatic pistol as if to make sure that it was in order, the man slipped back the safety catch, gripped the weapon in his right hand, and watched the road again.

The fat Owl of the Remove sat as if frozen.

He dared not stir.

There was a deadly weapon—a murderous weapon—in the dusky hand of the man hardly six or seven feet from him.

Bunter knew now why the swarthy villain was watching the road! Incredible as it seemed on an English country road, that desperate rascal was watching for someone to pass, with the intention of firing on him.

Bunter could have groaned aloud with terror.

But he did not. He dared not make a sound. A gnat settled on his fat little nose, and he did not venture to make a movement to brush it off.

Minute followed minute—every minute a long-drawn-out horror to the terrified fat junior.

But for the sight of the black felt hat showing through the hawthorns, the Owl of the Remove might have supposed that he had fallen asleep, and dreamed this horror. But there was the back of the hat—the man was standing as still and silent as a watching tiger, the murderous automatic in his grip—watching!

A car rushed by on the sunny, dusty road, and the Italian made a slight movement. Then he was still again. The car roared on towards Courtfield, and there was silence once more, save for the hum of insects in the wood.

But that movement revealed to Bunter that it was a passing car for which the black-browed Italian was watching. His enemy—whoever his enemy was—was expected to pass in a car—and he watched every car that passed.

He was in good time to lay his ambush—nearly half an hour dragged by; and save for a slight movement when a car passed now and then, the Italian had not stirred.

But when the car for which he was watching appeared, what then?

Bunter knew only too well!

Then the automatic would open fire from the border of the wood, spraying the passing car with bullets—death, almost certain death, to the man in it. Each time a car whizzed by, the automatic came up—only to be lowered again. The assassin was as watchful as a cat.

The dreadful act would be carried out in safety. Not an eye would fall on the wretch—and the wood was behind him to cover his flight. No eye—but the terrified eye of the unhappy Owl, squatting at the foot of the beech, palpitating with terror.

Again there came the hum of a car from the distance, from the direction of Lantham. Again the automatic rose, ready in the dusky hand; and this time a quiver ran through the waiting figure, and Bunter knew that he had glimpsed a car that he knew by sight, far up the road—the car that bore his intended victim to sudden death.

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"Ecco! Ecco!" he heard the man breathe in a whisper.

It was the victim at last! Closer, louder came the hum of a large car, deepening to a roar as it approached.

Less than a minute more—it was a matter of seconds now—before the car would be abreast of the ambush, and the hidden automatic would send the death spray! Like a wild beast, and as merciless as one, the swarthy rascal crouched there, watching the road through the thicket.

Billy Bunter's fat heart seemed to miss a beat. Had the desperado's face been turned to him, had the weapon been trained in his direction, Bunter would not—could not—have stirred. But the crouching back was towards him—and somehow or other, he hardly knew how, Bunter screwed up his courage. He could not see this dreadful deed done without stirring—he could not. Shaking like a fat jelly, but without a sound, Bunter lifted himself to his feet.

The car came roaring up—and the man was firing even as the fat Owl of the Remove, reckless from sheer desperation, charged into the middle of his back and sent him crashing headlong out of the thicket into the sunshine on the road.

The automatic roared—the bullet whizzed—and the assassin, with a frantic yell of surprise and fury, crashed on his face in the dust, the pistol flying from his hand, the felt hat from his head, and his swarthy features grinding into the dust of the Lantham road.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Bit of Luck for Bunter!

CRASH!

The smashing of breaking glass rang far and wide as the windscreen was smashed by a whizzing bullet.

Mr. Vernon-Smith, a moment ago sitting at his ease on soft leather, thinking of soaring shares, fairly bounded. Indeed, he almost soared like the shares of which he was thinking.

The chauffeur gave a startled yell, and jammed on the brakes.

The car swerved, skidded, and banged into the hedge on the opposite side of the road.

"What——" spluttered Mr. Vernon-Smith. He found himself sitting on the floor of the car, breathless, dumbfounded.

But he was swiftly on his feet.

The happening was entirely unexpected. Mr. Vernon-Smith had not dreamed of a repetition of the previous day's startling experience. But he was a very alert man, quick on the uptake. For a second he was dumbfounded—but only for a brief second. Then he was on his feet, leaping from the car almost before it came to a standstill jamming in the hedge.

His eyes, glaring under his knitted brows, fixed on a sprawling figure on the other side of the road, face down in the dust, gasping—a wicked-looking automatic lying a yard from him—and a fat schoolboy, with little round eyes goggling through big round glasses, squeaking with terror.

"Good gad!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith was plump and portly. But he moved quickly. One rapid glance told him what had happened—told him that if the man who sprawled in the dust had time to recapture the automatic, the financial world would miss a millionaire!

He tore across the road, his silk hat falling off the back of his head in his hurried rush.

The sprawling Italian raised himself on his elbow, glaring round him.

He had been taken so utterly by surprise, by the sudden charge in the rear, that he was confused, confounded, and the crash of his swarthy face in the dust of the Lantham road had dated him.

He glared round at Bunter.

That fat youth tottered and squeaked, frightened out of his podgy wits at what he had done, and at what might follow.

But the desperado wasted only a moment on Bunter. Then, scrambling up, he stared round for the fallen weapon.

He saw it, and sprang towards it, reaching it at the same moment as Mr. Vernon-Smith.

He stooped and clutched at it—and Mr. Vernon-Smith, with great presence of mind, kicked at him as he stooped, catching him full in the swarthy face with his boot.

The Italian, yelling with pain, fell on his knees, his clutching hand missing the grab at the pistol.

Before he could clutch again, the millionaire kicked it away, and it spun a dozen feet along the road.

"You scoundrel!" panted Mr. Vernon-Smith. "Tomlinson! Here! Quick! Help me with this scoundrel!"

The chauffeur was already out of his seat. He came running across the road.

The Italian leaped up with the agility of a cat. He made a backward jump, eluding the grasping hand of Mr. Vernon-Smith. For a moment he stood, spitting fury, and then, as the chauffeur came at him, he turned and bounded into the wood.

There was a crash of thickets as he fled like a hunted hare.

"Follow him, Tomlinson!" shouted Mr. Vernon-Smith.

The chauffeur ran into the wood, though with little chance of seeing the fleeing Italian again. The assassin was running like a hare, thinking only of escape now that his attempt had failed.

Mr. Vernon-Smith hurried to the spot where he had kicked the automatic and grabbed it up. It was not the first time that the millionaire had handled such a weapon—Samuel Vernon-Smith's chequered life had not been wholly spent in the purlieus of the city. Automatic in hand, the millionaire followed the chauffeur; and the grim look on his face indicated that the swarthy rascal had something drastic to expect if he came within range.

Billy Bunter staggered against a tree, gasping.

He was left alone on the road.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "Oooooogh! Oh crumbs! Wooooogh! Oh lor'!"

The rustle in the wood died away.

"Oh, jiminy!" gasped Bunter. "It's old Smith—Smithy's pater! Oh dear!"

He realised that the danger was over. The swarthy rascal was on the run, with two pursuers close behind. Billy Bunter mopped his fat, perspiring brow, and gurgled for breath.

Now that it was over, the fat junior could hardly believe that he had done it—that he had desperately charged at a ruthless rascal with a deadly weapon in his hand. But he had. If, as it appeared, the man had intended to take the millionaire's life, Bunter had saved his life.

The danger being over, Billy Bunter recovered his courage. When there was no danger, the Owl of the Remove was as brave as a lion.

How he had done it he hardly knew; but he had. And he was glad now that he had—not only for Mr. Vernon-Smith's sake. This looked like being



The Italian scrambled up, with the schoolboy in his grasp, and pitched him headlong out of the boat. Vernon-Smith, flung at the bank, crashed into the rushes!

rather a good thing for Bunter, which was really a more important consideration. At the very least, Smith's father would give him that much-desired lift back to Greyfriars. Only that morning that beast Smithy had booted him, and now he had saved Smithy's father's life. Bunter began to feel bucked.

There was a rustle in the wood again. Mr. Vernon-Smith emerged, gasping for breath, puffing and blowing.

Evidently the chase had not been successful. Mr. Vernon-Smith had reached a time of life when he was of little use in a foot-race.

The automatic was no longer in his hand. He had slipped it into his pocket when he gave up the chase. Tomlinson, the chauffeur, was helping him with his arm as he tottered, breathless, out of the wood. In his desire to run the rascal down, Mr. Vernon-Smith had rather forgotten his years and his weight. He looked all-in as Tomlinson helped him back to the road.

"Urrrrgh!" was his first remark, as he reappeared in the sunshine.

Billy Bunter blinked at him.

Bunter had recovered his breath by that time. He picked up the millionaire's hat and took it to him.

Mr. Vernon-Smith, gasping, stared at him.

"Your hat, sir!" said Bunter politely.

"Oh, thanks!" gasped Mr. Vernon-Smith. He took the hat, and fanned his hot, perspiring face with it. "Ooogh! The scoundrel! Wurrgh! Tomlinson, see to the car!"

"Yes, sir!"

Tomlinson went back to the car.

Mr. Vernon-Smith devoted the next few minutes to recovering his wind, rather exhausted by the rush in the wood.

But he gave Bunter his attention at last.

"I think I've seen you before, my

boy," he said. "You are a Greyfriars boy, I think?"

"Yes, sir; in Smithy's Form."

"I remember. Your name is Punter—"

"Bunter, sir."

"Oh, yes, Bunter! That is it—Bunter! Did you see that villain watching for my car, Bunter? Did you pitch him over?"

"That's it, sir!" said the fat Owl cheerfully. "I wasn't going to let him get away with it, sir! You see, I was taking a rest in the wood, owing to some beasts leaving me behind, and I saw him—"

"Where did he come from?"

"He came through the wood, sir. He was watching this road for a long time, and I could see that he was watching for a car, so I—I—" Bunter paused a moment. Bunter was not the man to hide his light under a bushel. He was not the fellow to spoil a good story. "So I—I—I just watched him, sir, ready to chip in as soon as he started with that pistol!"

"He could not have known you were there," said Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"I took jolly good care of that!" grinned Bunter. "Of course, I wasn't afraid of his revolver! In fact, I was thinking of collaring him and taking it from him, only—only—"

Grunt!—from Mr. Vernon-Smith.

Probably he could guess exactly how much the fat junior had been thinking of collaring an armed and desperate man and taking his weapon away from him.

"You pitched him over as he was firing," said the millionaire. "That's what it looked like to me!"

"That's it, sir!" said Bunter. "Butted right into the middle of the beast's back, and toppled him over on his chivvy. But for that—"

"The bullet came close, all the same," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "You ran a

good deal of risk, Punter—I mean, Bunter. If he had turned on you—"

"Oh, I didn't care about that, sir!" said Bunter cheerfully. "I'd have handled him all right, I fancy. The fact is, I was going to take that pistol away from him and knock him down with it—"

"Nonsense!"

"Eh?"

"You have rendered me a great service, Bunter!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "But don't talk nonsense!"

"Look here—" hooted Bunter. Grunt.

Mr. Vernon-Smith had a very clear idea of what had occurred. Still, at the very least, it was clear that Bunter had barged the Italian over and prevented him from spraying a stream of bullets at the car. Whether the Italian had actually intended to shoot him, Mr. Vernon-Smith was not sure, but there was no doubt at all that he had been in terrible danger. If his life had been aimed at, Bunter had saved it. But a practical and hard-headed man like Samuel Vernon-Smith had no use for fatuous swank.

"I'm greatly obliged to you, Bunter!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "You have done enough, my boy, without exaggerating. You will not find me ungrateful. If you are going back to the school, step into my car."

"Jolly glad of a lift, sir!" said Bunter.

"Take up the man's hat." Mr. Vernon-Smith pointed to the felt hat that lay in the road where it had fallen from the Italian's greasy black head. "The police may find some use for that in the way of a clue. Put it in the car. Tomlinson, you can proceed, I suppose?"

"Ready, sir!" said the chauffeur.

(Continued on page 16.)

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BILLY BUNTER'S LUCKY DAY!



FRANK RICHARDS

(Continued from page 13.)

"No damage done—except the wind-screen—"

"Drive to Courtfield Police Station before going on to the school. This must be reported at once! Get in, Bunter!"

Billy Bunter got in.

Mr. Vernon-Smith resumed his way. He did not speak to Bunter again; his thoughts reverted at once to stocks and shares.

Billy Bunter sat, with a gratified grin on his fat face, as the Rolls rolled on. He was getting that lift, which was so much to the good. And Mr. Vernon-Smith had stated that Bunter would not find him ungrateful, and the fat Owl hoped that Mr. Vernon-Smith's gratitude would take a solid and substantial form. On the whole, Bunter was glad that those beasts, Harry Wharton & Co., had left him behind on the Lantham road.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Splash for Smithy!

HERBERT VERNON SMITH grunted discontentedly.

Everybody—or nearly everybody—was gone.

The Bouncer should have gone also; his father's car should have arrived to pick him up long before this.

Hanging about, with nothing to do, like a fellow who had been forgotten, was extremely disagreeable to the arrogant Bouncer.

Gosling came out of his lodge two or three times and looked at him, which annoyed Smithy.

He supposed that Gosling was wondering why he had not gone when all Greyfriars was gone. Perhaps Gosling was; though Gosling's thoughts lingered chiefly on the extravagant tip he expected from the millionaire's son when he went.

The Bouncer slouched away from the gates, with his hands in his pockets and a moody frown on his brow.

Mr. Vernon-Smith was a busy man—so busy that it was only by a great concession to parental affection that he found time to come down to the school to take his son away for the holidays. He had not been able to state the exact time that he would arrive.

Still, he should have arrived before this. Smithy would rather have gone by train than hung about a deserted school, with servants glancing at him and wondering what he was doing there.

He felt that it made him look like Fisher T. Fish, who stayed on at the school because he had nowhere to go in the hols; or like Bunter, who would hang about till the latest possible moment, in the hope of hooking on to somebody.

More and more irritated, the Bouncer lounged about the deserted quad. He went into the House and up to his study; but the study was already in

the hands of housemaids, and was no place for him. He went down again, and passed Mr. Quelch and Mr. Prout, both of whom glanced at him, obviously surprised to see him still there.

He set his lips hard as he went out into the sunny quad again.

He was fed-up with this.

It was odd, perhaps, that a fellow who had been knocked completely off his balance the previous day by the thought of danger to his father should now be feeling irritated and disrespectfully angry with that father. But it was very like the Bouncer.

He even thought of ringing up a taxi, and clearing off by train; leaving his father to find him gone when he arrived. But even the sulky and arrogant Bouncer could not go quite so far as that.

But he made up his mind that he was not going to hang about the deserted school any longer, looking a fool, as he considered it, to the servants.

If the car was not in sight when he looked for it again, he was going out—and Mr. Vernon-Smith could take his turn of waiting, if he arrived before his son came back!

Gosling put his ancient head out again as the angry Bouncer walked down to the gates once more. Smithy gave him a scowl in passing.

From the gateway he stared up the road towards Courtfield.

Mr. Vernon-Smith was coming by way of Lantham and Courtfield; it was in that direction that he had to be looked for. But the magnificent Rolls was not in sight on the road.

Herbert Vernon-Smith knitted his brows and walked out of gates. He went slouching down to the river.

The Sark rolled bright and rippling in the spring sunshine. It was a day that any fellow might have enjoyed in a boat, on gleaming water that rippled between woody banks. Smithy, however, was not thinking much of enjoying himself—but of killing time that hung heavy on his hands, and keeping away from the school till the hour of departure came.

His face was angry and sullen as he reached the boathouse. Hanging about, looking a fool because some rotten City affair had delayed the millionaire at the last minute—that was how it looked to him! If the millionaire thought more of stocks and shares than of his son, he could wait at the school and think about stocks and shares till Smithy came in! It did not occur to Herbert Vernon-Smith at that moment that what he really needed was to have his ears boxed!

The boatkeeper was there, and he stared as Smithy looked in. He had not, naturally, expected to see any Greyfriars fellow there, wanting a boat, at that time of day. However, he gave the Bouncer a hand with his skiff, and Smithy entered it and pulled away up the Sark.

The exercise, and the fresh air, had rather an ameliorating effect on the Bouncer's temper. His face cleared a good deal as he pulled—and, after a time, he pulled more slowly.

He had intended to pull as far as Courtfield Bridge; but that meant a long stay on the river, and he changed his mind by the time he had got as far as Popper's Island. He circled round that island, and pulled back down the current towards the school again.

As he did so, his eyes fell on the figure of a man emerging from the woods along the river on the Lantham side.

He rested on his oars, staring at the man curiously.

The fact that the man was a swarthy

foreigner might have caused Smithy to give him a second glance—but not a third! But he stared hard—and grinned faintly.

The dark-faced man looked as if he had been in the wars. He was hatless, his thick, curly black hair untidy in the wind. His nose was swollen, and oozed red, and there was a black bruise on his dusky cheek.

Evidently he had had a heavy blow in the face, and it had damaged him. It looked more like the effect of a kick than a punch.

Having come out of the trees, the man moved along the path by the river, and Smithy could see that he was panting for breath, as if he had run hard in the wood. Every now and then he glanced back over his shoulder.

Had he been a native of those parts, Smithy would have supposed that he was probably a poacher who had fallen into trouble with keepers. The wood, which lay for miles between the river and the Lantham road, was partly enclosed, and the local game-preservers were very particular about the birds. But it was hardly possible that a swarthy Italian was poaching, in a remote rural district in the county of Kent.

The swarthy man glanced several times across the Sark, and suddenly spotted the Greyfriars junior in his boat.

He came to a halt, his eyes fixed on Vernon-Smith.

Suddenly he waved his hand, beckoning.

The Bouncer slid towards the bank. He had not a very sympathetic nature, but he could see that the foreigner had been rather badly knocked about, and he was willing to see what he wanted.

"Hallo!" he called out, as his boat nosed into the rushes. "Had an accident?"

"Will you take me across the water, signorino?" asked the swarthy man breathlessly. He came quickly down to the boat.

Vernon-Smith looked at him very keenly.

It was unlikely that the man was a poacher; but that he was in flight was perfectly plain.

The Bouncer was no fool; and he wanted to know from what the man was fleeing before he helped him across the river.

As the swarthy man approached, he backed, leaving a space of six or seven feet between the boat and the bank.

That action brought a savage glare into the black eyes that watched him.

"What's the trouble?" asked Smithy coolly. "I'd rather know what you're on the run for, first?"

The Italian did not answer. He made a sudden, tiger-like spring, cleared the space between the bank and the boat, and crashed in beside Smithy.

The boat rocked and shipped water, and the Italian, stumbling over, fell on Vernon-Smith, knocking him backwards.

The Bouncer gave a howl of rage.

He was a wary fellow, but he had not looked for anything of the kind, and that sudden spring, like the spring of a wild beast, had taken him quite off his guard.

He crashed over, the Italian sprawling on him. The next moment he grasped savagely at the man.

"You cheeky hound!" he panted.

A grasp much stronger than his own was laid on him in return. The Italian scrambled up, with the schoolboy in his grasp, and pitched him headlong out of the boat.

Vernon-Smith, flung at the bank,

crashed into the rushes, his legs in the water. The boat rocked wildly, and almost capsized.

Breathless with fury, the Bounder dragged himself out of the water and the crumpled rushes on the bank, and glared round.

The swarthy man was already at the oars and sending the boat shooting across the Sark.

"You rotten thief!" shrieked the Bounder, beside himself with rage. "Bring that boat back, you rascal!"

The man did not even look at him. He shot away like an arrow, and under the Bounder's enraged glare, the boat crashed on the opposite bank.

Leaping out of it, the Italian darted across the towpath, and disappeared into Popper Court Woods.

The boat, left to itself, drifted down the current.

Smithy was left on the wrong side of the river, clenching his fists with rage. For long minutes he stood there, dripping with water, daubed with mud, and breathing fury. It was impossible to get his boat back; and he had to walk more than a mile down the Sark, to get across the river at the village bridge. His feelings could not have been expressed in words as he started.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Smithy Is Sorry!

BILLY BUNTER grinned.

Bunter was sitting in a Rolls-Royce car at the door of the House when a muddy and untidy figure came in at the gates of Greyfriars.

Mr. Vernon-Smith had arrived at the school a quarter of an hour ago. He had been surprised, and not pleased, to find that his son was not waiting for him there.

The millionaire was in the House now, and Bunter's last glimpse of his face had apprised him that Smithy's pater was in a bad temper. Trotter, the page, was looking for Smithy all over the school; but there could be no doubt that the Bounder was out of gates.

Now Bunter saw him coming in.

The Bounder looked as if he had been hunting trouble. His trousers were soaked and muddy; he was muddy and untidy all over; and his face was black and bitter in expression. Wherefore did William George Bunter grin a fat grin?

Herbert Vernon-Smith came tramping wearily up to the House. He saw his father's car at once, and knew that Mr. Vernon-Smith must have arrived. He fully expected to find him angry at being kept waiting there—and did not care in the very least. It was the millionaire's fault that he had had that extremely unpleasant adventure on the river! At the sight of Billy Bunter sitting in the car, grinning, his eyes blazed. He had come in, in the very worst of tempers; and Bunter's grin had rather the effect on him of a red rag on a bull.

He stopped beside the car and glared at the fat Owl.

"What are you doing in that car, you footling freak?" he snapped.

"Sitting in it, old chap!" said Bunter cheerfully. "I say, your pater's rather waxy about your going out—"

"No business of yours, you fat idiot! Get out of that car, or I'll sling you out on your silly neck!" snarled the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Roll out, you fat fool!" Vernon-Smith dragged the door open. Tomlinson, who was standing like the statue

of a chauffeur as he waited for his master, glanced at him, but did not speak.

Bunter, however, spoke on his top note as the Bounder reached in and grasped him.

"Ow! Leggo, Smithy! You beast! I'm going in the car— Yaroooooh! Leggo! I tell you— Whooooop! I'm going—"

Bunter went.

In the Bounder's angry grasp he was hooked out of the car, like a fat winkle out of a shell. He sat on the hard, unsympathetic earth and roared.

"Ow! Beast! Wow!"

The Bounder scowled at him.

Why Bunter was in the car he had no idea, unless it was a last desperate attempt to get landed for the Easter holidays. If that was so, Smithy was the man to put paid to it without ceremony.

"Now roll away, you bloated barrel!" he growled.

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

"If you're waiting to be booted—"

"Yah!" bellowed Bunter. "Rotter! Wow!"

"Herbert!" It was a sharp voice, as Mr. Vernon-Smith appeared in the doorway. "Herbert, what are you doing?"

The Bounder looked round at him. Mr. Vernon-Smith was very much annoyed, and looked it. The Bounder was angry and resentful—and he, too, looked it.

"Yarooooh!" roared Bunter. "Keep him off! Wow!"

The millionaire came down the steps.

"Herbert, what—"

"I'm turning that fat fool out of the car!" said the Bounder sulkily. "You don't want him in it, I suppose?"

"Certainly I do!" snapped Mr. Vernon-Smith.

Smithy stared at his father.

"Well, I don't!" he snarled. "What do you mean, father? Is that fat slug sticking you for a lift—or what?"

"Ow! Beast! I won't come now!" howled Bunter.

"Where have you been, Herbert?" Mr. Vernon-Smith gave his dishevelled son a disapproving glare. "I have waited here a quarter of an hour—"

"I waited an hour before I went out," answered his son sulkily. "Did you want me to kick my heels about the school all day, with everybody gone?"

"You should have waited!" snapped Mr. Vernon-Smith. "What have you been doing? Falling into a ditch—or what? You cannot travel in that state! You will have to change—"

"I know that!"

"By gad!" exclaimed Mr. Vernon-Smith. "I have a great mind to leave you here, Herbert, and go without you!"

"I don't care if you do!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith opened his lips, evidently for a torrent of wrath, but he restrained it.

"Your sulky temper will cause you trouble, Herbert, if you do not learn to control it better," he said with unexpected mildness. "So you went out because I was delayed—"

"Yes, I did!" grunted the Bounder.

"I got fed-up with hanging about. If you hadn't time to come down, as arranged, I could have gone by train. I wish I had now."

The sulky Bounder was absolutely regardless of his father's anger; but Mr. Vernon-Smith did not break out in wrath, as he fully expected.

"I would box your ears, Herbert," he said quietly, "but I think you will be sufficiently ashamed of yourself when you learn the cause of my delay."

Smithy shrugged his shoulders. Tomlinson, with one eye on him, expressed nothing in his well-trained face; but he was thinking that if this disrespectful young rascal had been his son, instead of his master's, he would have given him a record hiding. But Mr. Vernon-Smith was unusually and unexpectedly forbearing.

"Some awfully important affair in the City?" asked the Bounder, with a sneer he did not take the trouble to suppress.

"No, Herbert," said his father; "an attempt on my life in my car on the Lantham road—and as narrow an escape as a man ever had."

Smithy gave a violent start.

"Father!" he exclaimed.

"What happened yesterday, Herbert, has been repeated, and this time my escape was narrower," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "Only an almost miraculous chance saved me from being riddled with bullets."

"Father!" stuttered the Bounder.

He almost staggered. He had gone tramping out in a sulky, resentful temper in the very moment when his father's life might have been snuffed out like a candle. What would he have felt like if—if—

"Oh, father!" stammered Smithy. "Oh, I'm sorry—I—" he choked.

The look on his face was more than sufficient to placate the millionaire. His voice was kind as he went on:

"Never mind, Herbert. I cannot be angry with you when I have been so near to leaving you an orphan."

"Oh!" breathed the Bounder. He could have struck himself in his remorse and repentance. "If—if I'd thought—if I'd even dreamed— But—but you said— You remember what you said on the phone— Oh, father!"

"I was in error," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "This second attempt shows that it is deliberate, and that I must be on my guard."

"But who— How—"

"The man must have known that I was coming down to the school to-day by car. He watched for me on the Lantham road, Herbert. But for that lad Bunter he would have succeeded and escaped unseen—"

"Bunter?"

"Yes. Bunter was there, and he intervened in time."

"Bunter did?" said the Bounder dazedly.

"Owing to Bunter's action, also, the man was seen, and can be identified," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "I have been able to give a complete description of him at the police station. I have every hope that he will be arrested to-day. Already Lantham woods are being searched. But go in and change, Herbert; I cannot remain here longer."

The Bounder looked at him, looked at Bunter, and went into the House, his brain in a whirl.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Plus Bunter!

THE Rolls rolled out at the school gates.

Herbert Vernon-Smith sat by his father's side, his face a little pale. Billy Bunter sat with a grin, almost a smirk, on his fat face. Smithy seemed scarcely to notice that the Owl of the Remove was in the car at all: his thoughts were wholly concentrated on what had happened to his father, and on what yet might happen. For, though he could not guess at the reason, it was clear that the millionaire's life

was in incessant danger so long as the unknown gunman remained at large.

Mr. Vernon-Smith was perfectly composed. He had a nerve of iron; but his face was grave and his eyes alert. In earlier days in other lands Samuel Vernon-Smith had known what danger was, and had known the feel of deadly weapons in his hands, little as he looked like it in his plump and portly middle age; and a nerve of tempered steel was required to endure without flinching the peril of sniping from a hidden hand.

The Bounder broke the silence.

"How did it happen, father? Tell me what happened."

In succinct words the millionaire told him.

Smithy breathed hard as he listened; he glanced at the fat Owl curiously as Bunter's part in the affair was described.

Bunter smirked.

True, Mr. Vernon-Smith was not describing his exploit as Bunter himself would have described it. Bunter would have made a much better story of it. Still, the facts were enough to make Bunter feel extremely pleased with himself, and to look forward with cheery confidence to something coming of it. Billy Bunter, as usual, was on the make.

"Well, my hat!" said the Bounder. "Fancy Bunter— You must have been in a terrific funk, old fat man."

"Oh, really, Smithy—" said Bunter indignantly.

"But what was the man like, father?" asked the Bounder. "You say you saw him through Bunter pitching him out into the road—"

"Completely!" answered Mr. Vernon-Smith. "An Italian—"

Smithy almost jumped from his seat. "An Italian!" he gasped. He remembered the man by the river.

"Yes, unmistakably Italian. He is marked, too," said Mr. Vernon-Smith with grim satisfaction. "I landed my boot on his villainous face when he was trying to pick up the revolver; he will be badly bruised, I fancy—"

"Oh!" gasped the Bounder. There was no doubt now.

"Had he got away with it he would have been in little danger," went on the millionaire. "Had he not been seen, he had only to escape through the wood and take a train at the nearest railway station; there was nothing to connect him with it if we had not seen him. But as the matter stands he hasn't much of a chance."

"He—he hasn't?" stammered Smithy.

"Scarcely! The police at Courtfield have lost no time, of course. I took Inspector Grimes and three of his men to the spot in the car before coming on to Greyfriars," explained Mr. Vernon-Smith. "All the keepers, too, for miles round will be warned. If the man shows himself on the open roads before dark, or at any railway station, he will be known at once and seized. There cannot be many Italians in this quarter, and his face must be badly marked, too. He will be known anywhere. If he keeps to the woods till nightfall they will have him; he is shut in between the Lantham road and the river, and, unless he may be able to swim the river—"

"Oh!" panted the Bounder.

This was one more result of his sulky, evil temper! It was the man who had attempted his father's life, whom he had, inadvertently, helped to escape!

It was very unlikely that the fugitive gunman would have been able to swim the Sark—but the Bounder had been the

cause of his reaching the safer side of the river. But for him the wretch might already have been run down by the searchers on the Lantham side.

"Herbert, what—" The millionaire looked at his son.

"We're passing Courtfield!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith. "Tell Tomlinson to stop at the police-station."

"But what—"

"I've seen the man!" gasped Smithy.

"Good gad! Is it possible?"

The millionaire spoke to the chauffeur, and the car slowed down in Courtfield High Street. Mr. Vernon-Smith regarded his son curiously and keenly.

"You've seen him—an Italian with a bruised face—while you were out of the school?" he asked.

"Yes," groaned Smithy. "Oh, if I'd known—if I'd only known! He got my boat away, and got across the Sark, father."

Mr. Vernon-Smith compressed his lips hard.

He did not speak for a few minutes. The look on Smithy's face disarmed him.

"Very well, it cannot be helped now, Herbert!" he said, very quietly. "You could not, of course, know anything of what had happened—"

"It's my fault!" muttered the Bounder miserably. "If that brute gets clear it's my fault! If you're still in danger, it's my fault! If I hadn't been a silly, sulky fool—if I'd stayed in and waited—"

The millionaire smiled faintly.

"Too late to think of that now, Herbert," he said. "At least, what you can tell the police will be useful, and will set them on the track again."

"Oh, what a fool I've been!" muttered Smithy. "My rotten temper, as usual—"

"You should keep your temper better, old chap!" remarked Billy Bunter. "It's always getting you into trouble, Smithy."

The Bounder gave him a glare.

"You fat idiot!" he snapped. "Shut up!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"That will do, Bunter!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith sharply.

"Well, I jolly well think—"

"Say no more, please!"

Bunter grunted.

This, Bunter considered, was not the way for a man to talk to the fellow who had saved his life only a few hours ago. However, he said no more.

The car stopped at the police station, and Smithy alighted with his father and went in. Bunter waited in the car.

He had not very long to wait. In ten minutes they came out of the police station, and the Rolls rolled on its way. As it neared the railway station Mr. Vernon-Smith glanced at Bunter.

"Is that your station, my boy?" he asked.

It was—if Bunter had had any use for railway trains that day. But he hadn't.

It was all very well for Mr. Vernon-Smith and his son to be thinking entirely about their own affairs. Bunter's affairs were of much more importance, little as they seemed to realise it.

Although it occurred to neither the millionaire nor his son, the one really important matter in the universe at that moment was Billy Bunter's Easter holiday!

But if they were not thinking about that, Bunter was. Bunter had been giving it quite a lot of thought.

So he shook his head cheerfully.

"I've lost my train long ago, sir," he answered. "I'll keep on in the car as far as London, if you don't mind."

Smithy gave him a look. He opened his lips and closed them again. Billy Bunter's exploit that day made it impossible for even the Bounder of Greyfriars to tell him what he thought of him.

If Mr. Vernon-Smith did not read the fat Owl's thoughts, Smithy did. Bunter was going to make capital out of this, to the extent of hooking on for the hols.

As Smithy had made arrangements for Easter with the nutty crowd at Highcliffe School, that was irritating enough. Still, in the peculiar circumstances, he did not quite see what he could do.

He shut his lips hard, and said nothing.

Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles and grinned. He could guess what the Bounder would have liked to say—still, as the Bounder could not say it, that did not matter.

"That will make you rather late home, my boy!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, that's all right, sir!" said the fat Owl breezily. "The fact is, I had arranged to go home with Wharton to-day, and stay the night at his place, only there was a misunderstanding. My people won't be expecting me to-day, as the matter stands."

"Oh!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith, giving him a rather curious look.

"Of course, if it's a lot of trouble for you to put me up for the night, I dare say I can find an hotel!" said Bunter, with difficulty.

Mr. Vernon-Smith smiled.

"I shall be very glad to put you up for the night, Bunter," he answered. "You are more than welcome."

The Bounder's lips moved again—and again he shut them. Billy Bunter favoured him with a triumphant blink.

"And I will let Tomlinson run you home in the car to-morrow, Bunter," added Mr. Vernon-Smith kindly.

"Oh, thanks!" gasped Bunter. "I—I won't trouble you to that extent, sir! I'll phone home for the Rolls. That's all right."

Once safely landed in the mansion in Courtman Square, London, Billy Bunter had no doubt, in the circumstances, of being able to consolidate his position there. He was an old hand at that game!

And if he telephoned home to Bunter Court—otherwise, Bunter Villa—for the Rolls, and waited till the Rolls came for him, the prospect was that he would be a fixture at Mr. Vernon-Smith's town mansion for the term of his natural life!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Cut Off!

"MASTER HARRY—"

"Yes, Wells?"

"The telephone, sir!"

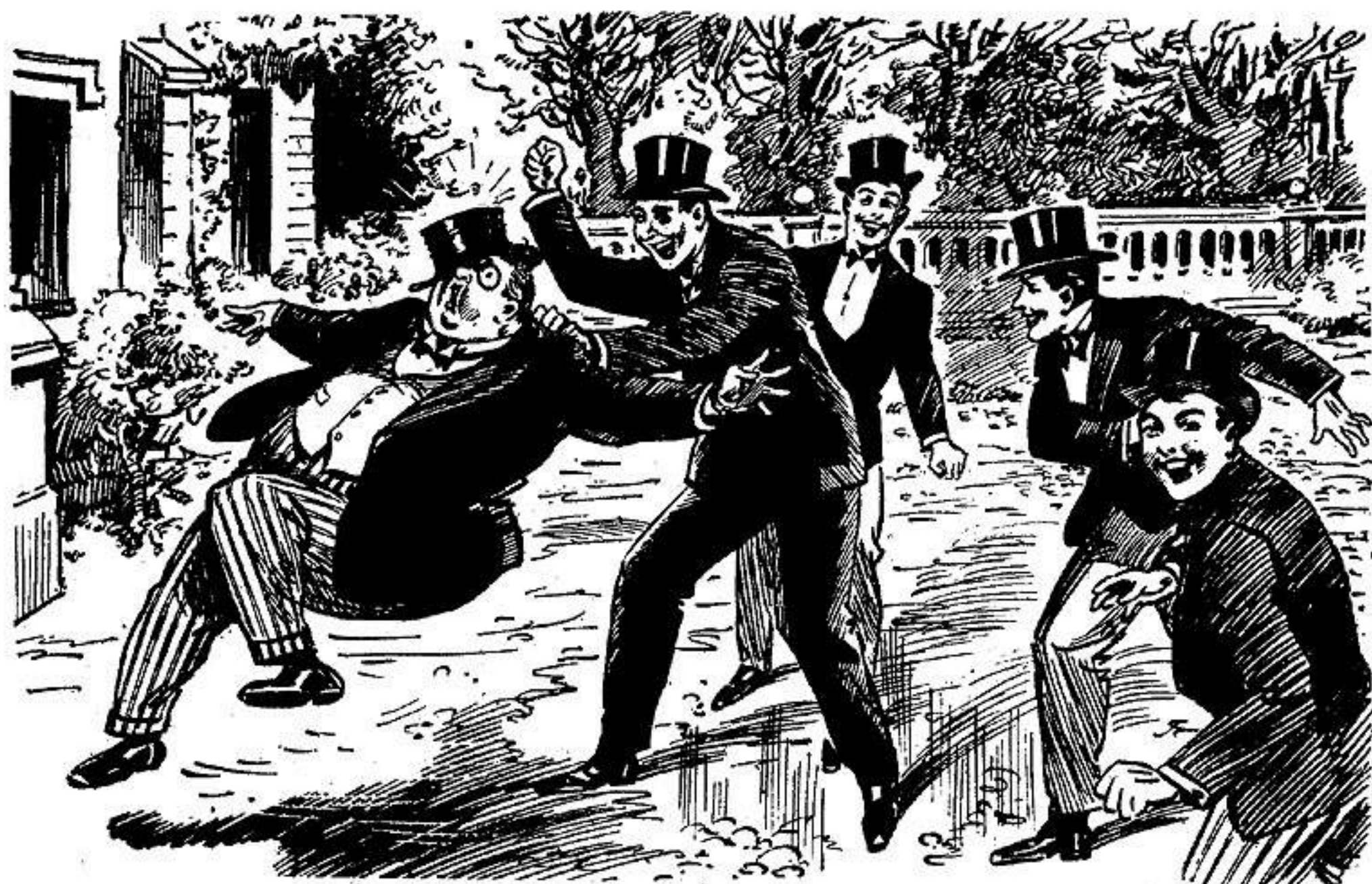
Wells, the butler at Wharton Lodge, coughed slightly. "Master Bunter, sir, on the phone!"

Harry Wharton was strolling on the terrace at Wharton Lodge, with Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, after lunch. He made a step towards the door to go in, as Wells stated that he was wanted on the telephone. But he stopped again, as Wells mentioned the name of Bunter.

"Oh!" said Harry.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh grinned a dusky grin.

After having dropped the Owl of the Remove on the Lantham road the previous day, the Famous Five supposed that they were done with William



Billy Bunter was rolling up the drive contentedly, when he felt a sudden grab on his fat shoulder. Crash! Ponsonby's fist landed on his hat, squashing it over one of his fat ears. "Ow! Beast!" roared Bunter. "Oh crikey!"

George Bunter till next term at Greyfriars.

Wharton was expecting Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Bob Cherry to come along in a day or two, and join him for the holidays. He was not expecting Bunter.

But this telephone call looked as if the unexpected was going to happen!

Harry Wharton frowned.

However, he decided that he had better go in and take the call. So in he went and picked up the receiver.

"Hallo!" he grunted into the mouth-piece.

"Is that you, Wharton?" came a well-known fat squeak. "Keeping a chap hanging on a trunk call! I've had to take a second call!"

"No need for you to have taken the first that I know of!" answered Harry.

"Beast!"

"Is that all?"

"No, it isn't! Never mind the expense—I can afford it!" said Bunter, from the other end. "I dare say a few trunk calls on the bill would make your uncle see red—what? A trifle for me. Still, we can't all be rich, can we?"

"Fathead!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Any more?" asked the captain of the Remove.

"Yes. I say, I'm phoning from Smithy's place, in London."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Wharton.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! What are you sniggering for, you silly ass?"

"Ha, ha, ha! I've just guessed why you can afford trunk calls, old fat man!" chuckled Wharton. "But are you sure they won't make Smithy's pater see red?"

"Beast!"

"I've heard that one! Is that the lot?"

"I say, Wharton, you might listen to a chap! I'm staying in London with Smithy at present. His pater's not a

bad old bean—he admires me no end—"

"I don't think!"

"You see, I saved his life," explained Bunter.

"His whatter?"

"His life."

"Oh, my hat! How did you save it? Did you leave off talking before it bored him to death? Was that it?"

"Jealous, as usual!" sneered Bunter. "If you've read the papers, you've seen about an attack on Smithy's pater. Well, I was there. I seized the scoundrel."

"What are you calling Smithy's pater names like that for?"

"Eh? I don't mean I seized Smithy's pater, you fathead! I seized the other scoundrel—I mean, I seized the scoundrel just as he was blazing away with a revolver, and bore him—"

"Did you bore him as much as you're boring me?"

"You silly ass! I bore him to the earth. Grasping the automatic, I wrenched it from his murderous hand—see?"

"Not quite. Has Smithy been taking you to the pictures?"

"Eh? No!"

"Then what put that silly rot into your silly head?"

"It happened!" yelled Bunter. "It happened yesterday on the Lantham road. Old Smith was fearfully grateful. He patted me on the shoulder, and said: 'Gallant lad! If your friends, fellows like Wharton, were plucky like you, they'd be a credit to Greyfriars, same as you are!' Those were his words. And then—"

"Then you woke up!"

"No, you idiot! It really happened, you fathead! I said: 'It's nothing to me, Mr. Vernon-Smith. I'm only glad I was here, instead of a funky fellow like Wharton.' You see, I saved his life, and he begged me to put in the

Easter holidays at his mansion. I'm here now—"

"How on earth did you manage to stick on to Smithy?" asked Harry. "I should have thought he was the last man at Greyfriars to stand for it."

"Well, he's jolly well got to, as I shaved his father—I mean, I saved his father!" Bunter gave a fat chuckle. "Old Smith's fearfully good-tempered, and Smithy can go and eat coke, see? What I mean is—Smithy is fearfully anxious to have me here. It gives him a leg-up socially to have a fellow like me home for the holidays, as you know."

"I don't."

"I mean, same as it does you when I come to Wharton Lodge."

"Oh crikey!"

"But what I want to tell you is, that I shan't be able to give you a look-in these hols, Wharton, after all."

"Hurrah!"

"Beast! I mean, I sort of half-promised; but after you left me behind, going to Lantham yesterday, you can't expect it. I refuse to come."

"Good!"

"While you're having a rotten time in your humble home, you can think of me, splashing about with millionaires," went on Bunter. "I don't care how much Smithy scowls, so long as his pater stands for it. He, he, he! I mean to say, Smithy is fearfully keen to have me here—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle!" sneered Bunter. "I can jolly well tell you the grub's first-class, and lots of it. I can have a car when I like. I shall put in the whole vac with Smithy. It's going to be gorgeous! I thought I'd tell you, so that you'd know what a jolly good time I'm having. I'm fearfully obliged to you for leaving me behind yesterday, otherwise I should have been landed at your rotten little show, with your old

chump of an uncle, and old frump of an aunt, and your noisy mob from the Remove. Yah!"

"There is one rotten thing about a telephone," remarked Wharton; "a fellow can't boot the fellow at the other end."

"Yah!"

"Well, I'm glad you're booked for the hols, old fat man, though I can't guess how you landed on Smithy."

"I've told you—"

"I can't guess, all the same."

"If you mean you don't believe me, Wharton—"

"You've got it!"

"Beast! Well, I've no more time to waste on you. I thought I'd tell you you'd done me a good turn. He, he, he! I fancy I shall have a good time with Smithy, though he's rather an ill-tempered cad, and—Yaroooh!" went on Bunter's voice unexpectedly. "Leggo my neck, Smithy, you beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wharton.

Bunter, at the other end, had evidently been interrupted. It sounded as if he had been interrupted by the Bounder's grip on the back of his fat neck.

"Urrrrggh! Leggo! Yooooogh!" came a gurgle over the wires, and then sudden silence. Bunter, it seemed, had cut off.

Harry Wharton put up the receiver, and went out, chuckling, to rejoin the Nabob of Bhanipur on the terrace. Bunter, it seemed, was at the millionaire's town house, and he had stated that he was going to pass the vac with Smithy. But to judge by the way that talk on the telephone had ended, the prospect was a little doubtful.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Pressing Engagement!

"HERBERT!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith spoke rather sharply.

The Bounder scowled.

"Bunter—" went on Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Bother Bunter!" grunted Smithy.

"I think, Herbert, that even if you do not like that lad, you might endeavour to treat him with a little civility, when he saved your father's life!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith.

Smithy was silent.

"It seems, from what the boy has told me," went on the millionaire, "that something has gone amiss with his arrangements for the Easter holidays. I gather that he was going home with Wharton, but there was some misunderstanding or dispute, and it fell through."

The Bounder grinned sourly.

"In the circumstances, he is not expected home," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "It places him in an awkward position; and, after all, he is your schoolfellow at Greyfriars, Herbert. And he rendered your father a very great service, at very considerable risk to himself. Naturally, when he explained the matter to me, I told him that you would be glad to have him as your guest for the school vacation. Why not?"

"I don't want him."

Grunt from the millionaire.

"I know what he did," said the Bounder. "No other Greyfriars man would have wanted to make capital out of it, only that fat blighter! I don't see letting him stick on me for the vac."

Grunt again.

"I've asked some decent fellows for the holidays at Seahill Park," went on THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1522.

Smithy. "I've promised them a good time. Bunter will spoil it all."

"If they are Greyfriars boys they will be used to his ways."

"They're Highcliffe men."

Mr. Vernon-Smith frowned.

"I'd rather you had asked boys from your own school, Herbert. You may do as you choose, but I have seen your Highcliffe friends, and don't like them, especially Ponsonby, if he is one of them."

"Pon's all right, on a holiday."

"I am sorry your friend Redwing is away, but you might have asked boys like Wharton, or Cherry, or Bull."

"I see enough of them in the term," grunted the Bounder. "And I had a row with that gang last day of term, too."

"I need not ask whose the fault was!" grunted Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, mine, of course!" sneered the Bounder.

"I have very little doubt of it, Herbert!" said his father dryly. "But, as I have said, I give you carte blanche for the holidays. Fill Seahill with all Highcliffe, if you choose. I shall be there only for week-ends. But I want you to treat Bunter well."

"If you've told him he can come, I suppose he can," said the Bounder discontentedly. "Pon will have to stand him somehow."

"I doubt whether Ponsonby would have done what Bunter did, at all events," said Mr. Vernon-Smith, with a grunt. "But perhaps saving your father's life is a small matter in your eyes."

The Bounder winced.

"You don't think that, father," he said. "I'll stand Bunter. I'll make the best of him. But look here, I don't want to go down to Sussex and leave you in London. So long as that dago is loose you're in danger. I'd rather wash out the party at Seahill, and stay here with you till the police get hold of that scoundrel."

Mr. Vernon-Smith's frowning face softened, but he shook his head.

"Not at all, Herbert. I shall stay at my club for a few days till I come down to Sussex. I shall be on my guard, you may depend; but there is little danger. I shall not allow your holiday to be interfered with. Larkin is already there, and all preparations are made for you and your friends. All I want you to do is to show that you are not ungrateful for the service Bunter rendered your father."

"Oh, I'll play up!" said Smithy, but with very little enthusiasm.

Mr. Vernon-Smith looked at his watch.

"I have an appointment at three," he said. "I must go! I shall not see you again before you leave, Herbert. Good-bye, my boy!"

The millionaire shook hands with his son and went out to his car, already waiting at the door.

Herbert Vernon-Smith stepped to the window and watched his father step into the car and drive away.

His face was clouded. Twice an unknown assassin had fired on the millionaire—why, was not known, though Smithy had no doubt that the attempt on Mr. Vernon-Smith's life had something to do with his extensive financial schemes. The gunman was still at large—partly owing to the Bounder himself. So long as the wretch was at liberty the shadow of danger was over Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith.

The uneasy thought was in the Bounder's mind as he watched the portly millionaire drive away, that he might be looking on his father for the last time.

Two attempts on his life had not shaken the millionaire's nerve in the very least, and he had made very little change in his habits. Smithy had been in earnest when he declared that he would willingly wash out the holiday party on the Sussex coast and remain with his father.

For several minutes after the car had turned out of the square and disappeared the Bounder remained at the window with a moody brow.

But his thoughts gradually turned from his father to himself. On the subject of Billy Bunter he was feeling angry and resentful.

He had asked Ponsonby, Gadsby, Monson and Vavasour, of the Highcliffe Fourth, for the holiday at the sea. He had little liking for them, and they had as little for him—at school they were on fighting terms, as often as not. But they were the fellows for a holiday—such a holiday as the Bounder contemplated, far from the eyes of the masters and prefects.

He was sorry that Redwing was not with him; yet not wholly sorry, for the absence of his best chum gave him a chance to indulge the kink of black-guardism in his nature. Redwing could hardly have stood Pon & Co.—and certainly he would never have joined in their manners and customs. He would have been a very wet blanket at the sort of party the Bounder had planned.

And a fat swab like Bunter would be in the way, and a general nuisance. Pon & Co. would sneer; which was annoying. And the Bounder prided himself on never being done—and Bunter had done him.

Soft asses like Lord Mauleverer, easy-going fellows like Harry Wharton or Bob Cherry, might get landed with Bunter for the holidays; Smithy was neither soft nor easy-going, and despised fellows who were. Now he was landed with Bunter—and he would have given a good deal to boot him!

"I say, Smithy—"

He looked round, scowling, at the sound of a fat voice. Billy Bunter had rolled into the room, and he blinked at Herbert Vernon-Smith through his big spectacles with a wary blink.

Bunter was "booked" for the hols, but it was on rather unusual and not wholly comfortable terms. Smithy was his host—but he had to keep a wary eye open for his host's boot, which could not be considered quite a satisfactory state of affairs for any guest.

"Well?" grunted Smithy.

"I've had a talk with the old bean," remarked Bunter breezily. "He seems keen on my spending the holidays with you, Smithy. Well, I don't mind. I shall have to turn down Tom Merry and D'Arcy, and cut out the week I was going to give Wharton—"

"You fat Owl!"

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

"Oh, shut up!"

"Wharton was asking me to come along, when you interrupted me on the phone yesterday!" said Bunter, with a glare. "I've a jolly good mind to ring him up and accept, now."

"Don't let me stop you!" said the Bounder sarcastically.

"Well, I can hardly do that, after turning him down!" said Bunter. "Otherwise, I should certainly do so. I can't say I like your manners, Vernon-Smith."

"Like them or lump them!" grunted the Bounder.

"If you don't want me for the hols, Vernon-Smith—" said Bunter.

"You know I don't!" said the Bounder coolly.

Billy Bunter breathed wrath. The

Owl of the Remove was not thin-skinned, but this was too much, even for Bunter. "Oh, all right!" he said. "I'll clear. Your pater was so pressing that I said I'd come down to Sussex with you—I could see that he was glad for you to have one decent chap among that rotten Highcliffe crew you've asked. But I'm not keen on it—don't flatter yourself that I am. You can have your mob of card-sharpers to yourself, Smithy! I'll go!"

Billy Bunter turned and walked to the door.

The Bounder made a movement.

Nearly—very nearly—he stepped forward to plant his boot on Bunter's tight trousers and accelerate his departure.

But he refrained. His affection for his father was almost the one soft spot in the Bounder's hard heart. Little as he was used to regarding any wishes but his own, he could not disregard his father's. He stood and stared in angry silence at the fat Owl as he rolled to the door.

Bunter paused, with his hand on the door. Smithy, who had fully expected him to pause there, sneered. The fat Owl blinked back at him—and the Bounder remained grimly silent. For a long minute Bunter paused—then, with a final glare through his big spectacles, he opened the door and went.

Smithy remained where he was, at the window, with a black brow. Bunter was going and that was what he wanted. But his father's words came back uncomfortably into his mind.

He crossed the room swiftly and ran out at the door. Bunter was going along the Hall—slowly!

"Bunter!" snapped Vernon-Smith.

The fat junior looked round.

"Don't be a silly ass!" growled the Bounder. "The car will be ready in half an hour for Sussex—you're coming."

"If you mean that you really want me, Smithy—" said the fat Owl, relenting.

"Oh, wash that out!" snapped the Bounder. "You can come! That's what you want! Now shut up and give me a rest!"

Billy Bunter blinked at him through his big spectacles, with a blink of devastating scorn.

He blinked at his feet, then at his face; then at his feet again, and then once more at his scowling face. Having thus looked him up and down with inexpressible contempt, Bunter turned to the door.

"That's not good enough for me, Vernon-Smith," he said over a fat shoulder. "It may be good enough for your Highcliffe friends—it won't do for me. I'm not the fellow to butt in where I'm not wanted, I hope."

"You fat fool—"

Bunter waved a fat hand at him.

"That will do!" he said haughtily. "I'm going! I'll drop your father a line to explain—"

"Hold on!" hooted the Bounder.

"Stop, you fat owl!"

"Shan't I!"

"I tell you—"

"Yah!"

"I tell you, you can come!" howled the Bounder.

"And I jolly well tell you that I don't want to, unless I receive a proper invitation!" retorted Bunter. "If you want me, you can say so. In that case, I will consider it. I have too many friends to care much whether I come or not, as you know. If you really want me, I'll see what I can do for you—that's the best I can say, Vernon-Smith."

The Bounder looked at him as if he could have bitten him. But he could not

(Continued on next page.)

The STately HOMES of GREYFRIARS

OLD CHINA

By

The Greyfriars Rhymester



(1)

From far away in the Flowery Land
Of mandarin and coolie
Wun Lung has come, I understand,
"To hon'able Greyfriars schoolee!"
He brought with him, or so it seems
To me (I'm sentimental!)
An atmosphere which simply teems
With echoes oriental.

Wun Lung, Chinaman,
Muchee, muchee sat;
Puttee in a stew-pan
Tasty mice and fat!

Read what our long-haired poet
has to say about the home of Wun
Lung, the quaint Oriental of the
Greyfriars Remove.

(2)

Yes, sometimes when I hear his yells
As he is whopped by Loder,
I seem to hear instead the bells
Of temple and pagoda!
And often when I smell his stews
Of tasty rats and mice,
I think of scented avenues
Through fields of growing spices.

(3)
And when I see his placid face
So typical of China
And like no other in the place,
Except Hop Hi, his minor,
I see the spreading fields of rice
With almond blossom blowing,
The mountain tops of snow and ice,
The yellow river flowing.

(4)

"Most interesting!" you'll remark.
"As dreams, no dreams are finer!"
But we're completely in the dark
About his home in China.
We'd like to hear some facts, you know—
It's merely a suggestion!"
I quite agree, and so I'll go
And ask Wun Lung the question.

(5)
I've just come back! And, by the way,
You may have heard a rumour
That Chinese people can display
A curious sense of humour.
It wasn't so in this 'ere case,
Wun Lung was most confiding:
He told me all about the place,
The home where he's residing.

(6)

There is, he says, a willow tree
With catkins all a-quiver,
The catkins are so big, says he,
They nearly hide the river!
Beyond its gnarled and massive trunk
Are fruitful trees of cherry,
And on the river there's a junk
Which seems to be a ferry.

(7)
And there's a bridge across the stream
With three tall narrow arches,
On top of which, with eyes a-gleam,
A fat old figure marches!
Before him goes another one,
A third fat figure follows,
While high above them, just for fun,
Fly two ungainly swallows!

(8)

An apple tree is growing there.
The apples! Gosh, how splendid!
As big as footballs filled with air,
On one thin branch suspended!
A crooked fence goes all along,
And near some little villas
There is the temple of King Kong
On three tall massive pillars!

(9)
Well, that description's very clear,
But isn't it amazing?
And what is really still more queer,
I fancy I've been gazing
At some such scene—I don't know where!
Perhaps I only dreamed it!
But Wun Lung said his home was there,
And that was truth—or seemed it!

Next Week: THE LAD FROM LANCASHIRE.

face his father if he turned the fat Owl down—as no doubt Billy Bunter was perfectly aware. Smithy had to get this down like a pill—and it was a very nasty pill, but he got it down.

"I'm asking you," he said. "I—I—I invite you to Seahill Park for the hols, Bunter!"

"Well, old chap, if you put it like that, I think I might come!" said Bunter thoughtfully. "I don't expect much from you in the way of manners, of course. You city people are hardly my style, and a fellow can make allowances. Look here, if you really want me, Smithy—sure you really want me to—"

"Yes!" gasped the Bounder.

"Then I'll overlook your rotten bad manners, and come!" said Bunter. "I won't refuse a really pressing invitation! It's all right, Smithy—I'll come."

And Bunter came!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Pon is Playful!

CECIL PONSONBY of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe raised his eyebrows. Pon seemed surprised.

"Is that the show?" he asked.

"That's it, sir!" said the chauffeur.

"Gad!" said Pon, addressing his friends in the car. "Rather decent for the Vernon-Smith lot, what?"

"Absolutely!" agreed Vavasour.

"Oh, they've got tons of money!" remarked Gadsby.

"And like splashin' it about!" said Monson.

Seahill Park—one of the many properties of Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith—was quite an imposing edifice.

From the gateway where the car was turning in, a long avenue of oaks and beeches led up to the house, in the distance.

There was an extensive park, and the farther wall was on the edge of the beach, with golden sands and the blue Channel beyond.

The house was a large building, with innumerable red chimney-pots glimmering in the bright April sunshine. The curving drive from the gates was a quarter of a mile long.

The gates stood wide open, but a lodge-keeper came out and touched his hat as Pon's car turned in. Pon & Co. were not going to admit it, but they were rather impressed. Pon's own place was hardly on this scale—and this was only one of Mr. Vernon-Smith's residences. Certainly, it looked as if there were "tons of money" about!

It was, in fact, because there was plenty of money about that the nuts of Highcliffe had accepted Vernon-Smith's invitation for Easter. Smithy was nicknamed the "Bounder" at his own school, not wholly without reason—and in the eyes of the Highcliffians he was an absolute bounder, whom they regarded from lofty heights of superiority. But if they disdained Smithy they did not disdain the prospect of annexing some of his ample cash.

"Hallo, what on earth's that?" asked Gadsby, staring at a fat figure that appeared on the drive ahead.

"A wanderin' porpoise!" suggested Monson.

"Absolutely!" grinned Vavasour.

Ponsonby knitted his brows. He had only a back view of the fat junior, who was walking up the drive, but he knew Billy Bunter at once.

"Good gad! Has Smithy asked that

fat frog here?" he exclaimed. "That's a bit too thick! I never knew there were to be any Greyfriars cads here except—"

"Except our jolly old host!" grinned Gadsby.

"And that fat bloater is the limit, even for a Greyfriars cad!" said Ponsonby. "We're not standin' this, you men. What the thump has Smithy got him here for, I'd like to know! Like his cheek!"

"Absolutely!"

Billy Bunter blinked round at the sound of the car behind him. The April sunshine gleamed on his big spectacles. None of the party was pleased to see him there. They felt indignant at the idea of Smithy having the neck to land this fat bounder on them. If they could stand Smithy they weren't going to stand his Greyfriars pals—least of all, Bunter. There was a limit!

"I say, you fellows—" began Bunter, blinking at them. Short-sighted as he was, the fat Owl could read the expressions in the faces of the lofty nuts of Highcliffe, and was not gratified thereby. If Pon & Co. were going to be unpleasant, Bunter could be unpleasant, too.

"What the dooce are you doin' here, Bunter?" demanded Ponsonby, throwing open the car door, and staring at the fat Owl far from politely.

"Staying with my pal Smithy!" answered Bunter cheerfully. "What the dickens are you doing here, Ponsonby?"

"Smithy's asked us, as I suppose you know, as you're here—"

"Well, it's rather thick!" said Bunter. "I suppose Smithy can ask whom he likes, but he might have told me he was getting a mob of Highcliffe outsiders here. This is rather letting me down."

"Wha-a-t?" gasped Ponsonby.

"You cheeky fat frog—" exclaimed Monson.

"You potty porpoise!" growled Gadsby.

Billy Bunter waved a fat hand at them.

"You can cut all that out!" he said. "I know what your manners are like at Highcliffe—half of you would be sacked if you were at Greyfriars. Keep your rotten manners for your own school, where they don't matter—see? When you meet Greyfriars men something a little better is expected. If you're not jolly civil I shall tell Smithy I object to your being here at all."

Pon & Co. regarded Bunter with almost ferocious looks. Bunter gave them a lofty blink through his big spectacles and turned haughtily away.

He flattered himself Pon & Co. were not getting much change out of him.

"The fat, frowsy, cheeky scoundrel!" muttered Pon, as the Bunter rolled on. "After him, and bag him! We've got him to ourselves here, and we'll jolly well make an example of him!"

"Hold on, for goodness' sake, Pon!" gasped Gadsby. "If he's Smithy's guest and he must be, as he's here—"

"I don't care!"

"There's a limit, old man—" murmured Monson.

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Fellow-guest, and all that—what?"

"Bag the fat freak, I tell you!" snarled Ponsonby.

"But, I say, what will Smithy think?" exclaimed Gadsby.

"I don't care a bean what he thinks! Lend me a hand with that fat frog, will you? I'll teach him to give Highcliffe men lip!"

Ponsonby cut after Bunter. His

friends—a little dubiously—cut after Pon. The chauffeur sat and stared.

Billy Bunter, satisfied that he had put the Highcliffe nuts in their proper place, was rolling up the drive contentedly, when a sudden grab on his fat shoulder spun him round.

"Ow!" squeaked Bunter.

Crash!

Ponsonby's fist landed on his hat, squashing it over his fat ears! Bunter gave a roar.

"Ow! Beast! Oh crikey! You've smashed Smithy's hat! Wow! You'll have to pay Smithy for that hat! Ow!"

But Billy Bunter, the next moment, forgot the damage to the hat, in the damage to himself. His fat leg was hooked, and he went down with a bump.

He yelled wildly as he bumped. Then he rolled over and over.

Pon & Co. warmed to the work. They chortled as they rolled the helpless fat junior over.

Billy Bunter gasped, and spluttered, and squeaked frantically. He was quite helpless in the hands of the four raggers. Hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels, he rolled and roared.

At the side of the drive was a puddle under the trees, left by recent April showers. Bunter rolled into the puddle.

Splash!

"Urrrrgghh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Pon & Co.

"Gurrrrrgghh! Oh, you beasts! Urrgh!" gurgled Bunter.

"I think that will do!" chuckled Ponsonby. "Let's get back to the car!"

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

Chuckling, they walked back to the car, and got in. The chauffeur, grinning, drove on. As the car passed Bunter the fat junior sat up—in the puddle!

Muddy and untidy, panting for breath, his fat face crimson with rage, where it was not thick with mud, the Owl of the Remove looked an extraordinary object!

The Highcliffians stared at him, roaring with laughter, as they passed him in the car. Still howling with merriment, they disappeared up the drive towards the mansion in the distance, leaving Billy Bunter sitting in the puddle, spluttering and spluttering, as if he would never leave off spluttering!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Smithy's Holiday Party!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH stood looking out of the high arched doorway into the April sunset.

The Bounder was in evening clothes, and held a cigarette between finger and thumb. A diamond gleamed from his spotless shirt-front, and another from his tie—Smithy liked an expensive glitter. Larkin, the butler whom Mr. Vernon-Smith had sent down from his town house, lurked in the spacious hall, and what he thought of a schoolboy smoking in the doorway was not indicated on his impassive, plump face.

During his father's absence, Smithy was monarch of all he surveyed at Seahill Park, in Sussex—servants, and cars, and motor-boat, and everything else, were all at his orders; and that useful article, money, was laid on like water or electricity.

The Bounder had booked a high old time for that holiday—Pon & Co. were coming, and they were going to make the fur fly.



Ponsonby & Co. joined Vernon-Smith in the hall just as a fat figure came squeelching in. "Bunter!" snapped the Bounder. "What the deuce have you been up to, you fat ass?" "Urrggh!" gasped Bunter. "I'm all wet! Those rotten cads rolled me in a puddle!"

Even that rowdy crew would have to pay some regard to appearances when Mr. Vernon-Smith came. The millionaire, indulgent as he was to his only son, had a limit for him, when he was present. But until he came, Smithy was his own master, and was going his own way—a way that would have earned him the "sack," short and sharp, had he been at school, instead of on holiday.

But the Bounder was not looking, or feeling, particularly bucked, all the same. He had just been on the telephone to his father, and had been glad and relieved to hear that nothing had happened in town. But the moment he hung up, a feeling came over him that he might have heard his father's voice for the last time—and he very nearly rang up again.

He refrained from doing so, however—he was not going to show weakness. Standing in the doorway, looking out, he wished that Pon & Co. would blow in. He had, so far, no company at the house, except Bunter's—and he saw as little of Bunter as he could. He hoped that in the uproarious company of the young blackguards of Highcliffe he would be able to drive the haunting fear from his mind of some tragic happening at a distance.

He wondered, however, whether his father had been right, and whether he would have done better to ask fellows like the Famous Five instead of the Highcliffe nuts. They were a strenuous mob. The time would have gone in boating, swimming, cycling, tennis, climbing the cliffs, rambling in the woods, instead of bridge and banker, cigarettes and late hours. At the bottom of his heart, Smithy preferred their ways to Pon & Co.'s ways. And

he knew that his anxiety for his father would have been easier to bear, with a healthy mind in a healthy body.

But he shrugged his shoulders as he thought of it. He had rowed with that lot at the end of the term, and he was fed-up with them, anyhow. He was going to have a jolly good time, kicking a loose leg now that he was safe from masters and prefects.

A car came up the drive and halted. Ponsonby & Co. alighted, and there was quite a cheery meeting. They were a very elegant and well-dressed party, and they put on their best manners to the Bounder. At the same time, Pon's eye lingered for a second on Smithy's diamonds, and Smithy, who was as keen as a hawk, did not fail to notice it.

Still, Pon & Co. were very agreeable. They came in with the Bounder in a merry crowd. Smithy was glad that Bunter was not present at the moment, and he did not mention him. Neither did Pon & Co., and he remained unaware that they had already met his other guest.

Quite a magnificent suite of rooms had been prepared for the Highcliffe guests. They changed for dinner, and came down to join Smithy in the hall—just as a fat figure, dripping with mud, came rolling wearily in.

Smithy stared at Billy Bunter.

Ponsonby & Co. exchanged a grinning look, though three of them, at least, were feeling a little uneasy.

Pon's view was that Vernon-Smith was a "bounder," vastly honoured by a visit from such aristocratic personages as himself and his friends, and that it did not matter much how they treated him.

Still, his friends could not help thinking that there was some sort of a

limit, and they wondered rather uneasily how Smithy was going to take this. That fat freak was, after all, his guest.

"What the deuce have you been up to, Bunter?" snapped the Bounder, staring angrily at the hapless fat Owl.

"Urrggh!" gasped Bunter. "I'm all wet! I'm all muddy!" He glared at Ponsonby through muddy spectacles. "You beast! You rotter! I jolly well wish Bob Cherry was here! He would give you a hiding, you cad! Ooogh!"

"Who's that, Smithy?" asked Pon airily.

"You know Bunter!" grunted Vernon-Smith.

"But what's he doin' here, old man?"

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "I'm staying with Smithy, as I told you. Look here, Smithy, if you think I'm going to stand this, you're jolly well mistaken—see? Look at me!"

"What do you mean, you fat ass?" Then Smithy understood. "Have you men been raggin' Bunter? Is that it?"

"We found him wanderin' about the place," said Ponsonby. "He was rather cheeky—"

"Yah!" roared Bunter. "Cad!"

"Shut up, Bunter!" muttered Smithy.

"Shan't!" roared Bunter. "Look at me!"

The Bounder compressed his lips. For Bunter he did not care a straw; Pon & Co. could have ragged him to the top of their bent without worrying him in the least. But they had ragged a guest of his, which was a different matter. A very unpleasant expression came over his face as he looked at them. If they fancied that they could take the high hand with him, they were going to learn that that was an error.

Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour read his expression, and looked at Pon. Pon had landed them in this, and it was for Pon to get them out of it. But Pon was equal to the occasion.

"Is Bunter really stayin' here with you, Smithy?" asked Pon.

"Yes!" growled Smith.

"I told you so!" yelled Bunter.

"Well, he told us so; but, naturally, we didn't believe him," explained Pon, in his airy way. "We thought he was bargin' in, you know; he's a bit of a bargee, isn't he? Wouldn't have dreamed of touchin' him if we'd known. We apologise all round, old man."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"You rotters!" roared Bunter, quite regardless of staring servants and the Bounder's angry discomfort. "You rotten Highcliffe cads—"

"My dear chap," said Ponsonby, "all a mistake!"

"That's a lie!" roared Bunter.

"Oh!" gasped Pon.

Even the airy Pon did not know what to say in reply to that.

"That will do, Bunter!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "Go and get changed! Dinner in a quarter of an hour!"

"Look here, Smithy—"

"Go and get changed, I tell you!"

"If you think—"

"That's enough!" said the Bounder, with a dark look.

And Billy Bunter, with a snort of angry indignation, rolled away up the stairs—to get a change, which really he badly needed.

Smithy had decided to accept Pon's explanation. But he was not in a good humour, and his manner was brusque, almost surly, till the gong sounded for dinner.

Pon & Co. exchanged surreptitious glances, indicative of their opinion of the manners of their host.

At dinner, however, good humour was restored, and quite a cheery chat was going on when Bunter rolled in—late, for once, for a meal.

Bunter was in evening clothes, but a very obvious tightness about his attire hinted that it had been made for a much slimmer person.

Rather to Smithy's relief, he was grinning, and seemed quite to have recovered from his indignation and wrath. Three courses had been disposed of when Bunter arrived. But Larkin had to begin again at the beginning for Bunter; he was not going to miss anything in the edible line. However, he soon caught up the others; slow in other matters, Bunter was a rapid dealer with foodstuffs. And he was grinning over his provender, as if in enjoyment of a good joke.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Bunter, when he had eaten enough for four, and taken the keen edge off his appetite.

None of the Highcliffians heeded him. If Smithy chose to have such a rank outsider about the place, he could not expect Pon & Co. to take any notice of him. They carefully ignored Bunter.

"So I made it spades—" Pon went on. He was telling a bridge story.

"What were you saying, Bunter?" asked the Bounder coolly, cutting across Pon's remarks. It pleased him to put the superb Pon in his place.

"He, he, he!"—from Bunter. "I say, you fellows, you spoiled my clothes, sticking me in that puddle! Lucky I'd borrowed some of Smithy's, wasn't it?"

The Bounder laughed. Pon & Co. carefully looked as if they were unaware that Bunter was in the room at all.

"And one good turn deserves another, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,522.

don't it?" went on Bunter cheerfully. "I suppose you never borrowed clobber when you came here, Pon?"

Pon gave him a look, taking note of his fat existence at last.

"What the deuce do you mean?" he snapped. "Do you think I'm the fellow to borrow clothes?"

"Well, I fancy you'll wish you had soon!" said Bunter. "One good turn deserves another! He, he, he!"

After which, Bunter devoted himself to food, leaving the Highcliffians to guess what he was driving at—if they were interested. But they were not, and they carefully ignored Billy Bunter during the remainder of dinner.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Gets His Own Back!

"WH-A-A-A-T!" stuttered Cecil Ponsonby.

He could hardly believe his eyes.

He stood in the doorway of his room at Seahill Park, and stared into the apartment, his eyes-popping at what he saw.

It was a large and well-appointed room, and it had been in apple-pie order when Pon had left it to go down to dinner. Now it wasn't.

Pon's clobber—extensive and expensive—had been placed in drawers and wardrobes by well-trained hands. But other hands had been there since.

Drawers were pulled open, their contents dragged out. In the middle of the floor was a heap of garments which had, a short time ago, been extremely elegant, and which had cost Pon's father, the baronet, quite a lot of money. Now those garments were far from elegant, and did not look as if a second-hand merchant would have given much money for them.

They were crumpled and rumpled, and wherever it was possible to tear them, they were torn. All over them was scattered ash—evidently shovelled from the fireplace, where a log-fire burned. Trousers, once elegant, jackets and waistcoats and coats, once the delight of a tailor, lay in that ghastly heap, utterly havocked. Over them were scattered collars, twisted out of shape, ties in sections, handkerchiefs twisted and torn. A silk hat surmounted the pile, with the top knocked in.

Everything, or nearly everything, that Ponsonby had left in his room had been dragged to that stack, rumpled and crumpled and torn, and smothered with wood-ash.

Ponsonby stood gaping at the wreck. He stepped into the room, still gaping. Never had a fellow been so utterly taken by surprise and so utterly enraged.

His eyes fell on a cheval-glass that faced him. On that glass was daubed an inscription, evidently by a finger dipped in ink:

"HOW DO YOU LIKE IT YORE-SELF, YOU KAD?"

Ponsonby gasped with rage.

He understood now why Bunter had been so late for dinner. He understood the remarks Bunter had made at the table. This was Bunter's handiwork!

Pon had thought it quite a good idea to rag the fat Owl, and leave him sitting in a puddle. The fact that it ruined the clothes Bunter was wearing did not matter to him in the least. But now that the same measure had

been meted out to his own clothes it seemed to matter a lot. His face whitened with fury as he stared round the room.

"Comin' down, old man?" Gadsby looked in. "Smithy's waitin' for us in the billiards-room— Oh, great pip! What—"

Gadsby's eyes popped at the heap of wreckage.

"Look!" panted Pon. "Bunter's done this—"

"Oh gad! That's what the fat idiot meant, then. Oh crikey!" Gadsby gasped and whistled. "Thank goodness he let my room alone!"

"I—I—I'll smash him! I—I—I—" Ponsonby choked with rage.

"Hold on, old man!" said Gadsby hastily. "After all, it was a bit thick raggin' that fat ass, as he was a guest here—"

"You fool!" Pon's elegant manners seemed to have deserted him. "Think I'm standin' this?"

"Well, Bunter had to stand it—"

"I'll smash him!" yelled Ponsonby.

He rushed from the room.

Gadsby whistled again as he followed him. Really, as Bunter had declared, one good turn deserved another, and Pon might have expected something back. Certainly, however, he had not expected this, or anything like it. Almost foaming with rage, he rushed to the stairs.

Monson and Vavasour, in the hall below, stared at him blankly.

"Pon, old man, what's the row?" gasped Monson.

"Where's Bunter?" hissed Pon.

"In the billiards-room with Smithy. But I—I say—"

Ponsonby rushed past.

The billiards-room opened from the end of the hall. The Bounder was there, cue in hand, idly knocking the balls about, while he waited for the Highcliffe fellows to join him. Billy Bunter sat on a settee by the wall, with a cheery fat grin on his face.

Bunter was thinking of the state of Pon's room, and that the dandy of Highcliffe would think twice, if not thrice, before he started any more ragging. Bunter's idea was that, when it came to ragging, he could keep his end up all right.

But the grin faded from his face as Pon rushed into the room, with crimson face and blazing eyes.

"Here, you keep off!" squeaked Bunter in alarm, and he leaped to his feet, and bounded round the billiards-table.

Vernon-Smith dropped the end of his cue and stared at Ponsonby.

"What the deuce—" he ejaculated.

Pon did not heed him. He rushed round the end of the billiards-table after Bunter.

Bunter scuttled along the farther side in haste, and came round Smithy's end. He dodged past the astonished Bounder.

"I say, keep him off, Smithy!" he howled in passing.

After him came Ponsonby, rather like a bloodhound.

But Vernon-Smith grabbed at the Highcliffe junior as he passed in his turn.

"Let go, you fool!" roared Ponsonby, dragging at his arm.

"What—"

"Let go, I tell you!"

The Bounder's jaw squared. Instead of letting go, he compressed his grip, till it seemed to Pon that his bones were cracking in it.

In the doorway appeared Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour, with startled faces. Bunter, at the other end of the

table, leaned on it, panting for breath—wary and ready to start again, if Pon got away from the Bounder.

"Pon, old man—" gasped Vavasour. Really, the Highcliffe nuts were quite ashamed of their great chief and leader at that moment. The superb Pon's manners were just then deplorable.

"Will you let go my arm, Vernon-Smith?" panted Ponsonby. "I'm going to smash that fat cad—"

"Yah!" came from Bunter, the length of the billiards-table. "Yah! Cad! How do you like it yourself? Beast!"

"That fat freak's been raggin' Pon's room, Smithy!" Gadsby hastily explained. "He's mucked up all his clobber—everything's in rags and tatters—"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Smithy. "Didn't he muck up my clobber?" roared Bunter. "Think I'm going to let a Highcliffe cad rag me? Yah!"

Ponsonby, with a desperate wrench, tore his arm loose. He raced down the side of the table. Bunter raced up the other.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Vernon-Smith. "Go it, Bunter! Here we go round the mulberry-bush! Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter flew! After him flew Ponsonby! Considering the weight he had to carry, the fat Owl put up a

remarkable turn of speed. But Pon was gaining on him.

The Bounder, roaring with laughter, did not intervene again. Twice they passed him, and thrice—and then Pon's outstretched hand gripped a fat shoulder.

"Now, you fat rotter—" panted Pon.

"Yaroooooh!" Thump, thump, thump!

Vernon-Smith, still chuckling, ran along the table, and grasped Pon by the arm again.

"That will do, Pon!" he said.

"Let go!" "Rats!"

Pon wrenched at his arm. The Bounder exerted his strength—which was twice Pon's—and dragged him headlong away from Bunter, spinning him to the wall.

Ponsonby bumped on the wall, gasping, and slid down to a sitting position on the floor. He sat there gurgling for breath.

"Yow! Ow! Wow!" roared Bunter.

"Look here, this is pretty thick, Smithy!" exclaimed Monson.

"Is it?" said Smithy, coolly. "I don't see it myself! If Pon rags Bunter and spoils his clothes, why shouldn't Bunter do the same to Pon? More power to his giddy elbow, if you ask me!"

Ponsonby staggered to his feet. He was panting with rage, and all his polished manners had quite vanished.

"Get out of the way, Vernon-Smith!" he roared. "I'm going to punch that fat cad till he bursts!"

"Are you?" said the Bounder. "You're going to punch me first then! Get on with it!"

Ponsonby looked as if he would; but Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour rushed in, gathered round him, and drew him away. They led him out into the hall, where they calmed and soothed him. Billy Bunter collapsed on the settee, spluttering for breath; and the Bounder, laughing, resumed knocking the billiard balls about. It was more than an hour before Pon was able to resume some semblance of his polished manners—and even then they were not as good as new!

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

While the Cat's Away!

LARKIN coughed.

It was ten in the morning. Herbert Vernon-Smith had come down to breakfast. Pon & Co. came down at the same time. They found Billy Bunter going strong.

When Billy Bunter honoured Harry Wharten & Co. with his distinguished (Continued on next page.)



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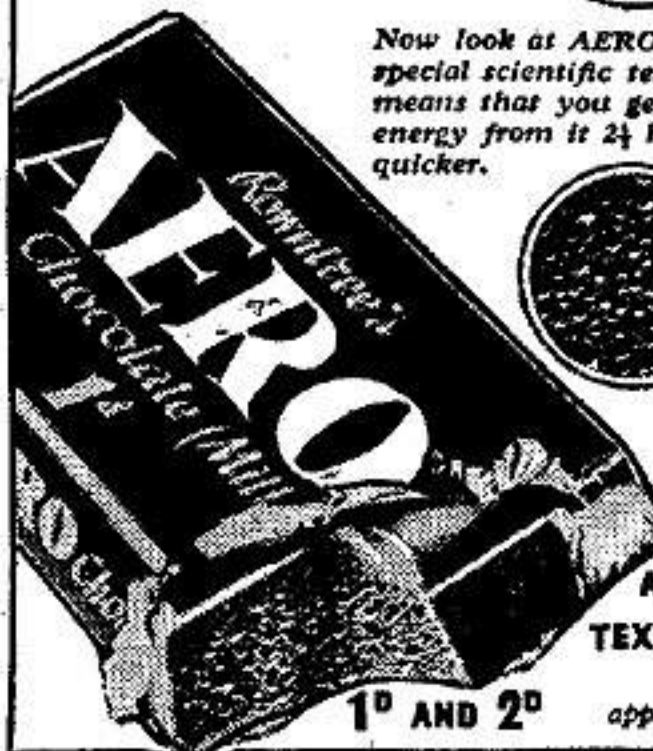
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company in the holidays, he was always down hours after the strenuous Co. It was quite different at the mansion on the Sussex shore. Bunter had been down half an hour when the rest of the house-party appeared—yawning, pale, cross-tempered, and ready to snap one another's heads off.

Bunter was nearly every known kind of an ass; but even Bunter had sense enough to go to bed at night and sleep. Vernon-Smith and his nutty friends had sat up till one in the morning. Billiards had been followed by bridge, and bridge by banker, with cigarettes going all the time. Which had the natural result of turning them out in the morning late, and tired, and peevish.

Having been down half an hour, Bunter had been breakfasting for that length of time; he had not finished yet!

The Bounder came in, Pon and Monson lounging with him, and then Gadsby. Vavasour had not yet turned out. Smithy gave Larkin a scowl as the butler, with a newspaper in his hand, uttered an apologetic cough.

"Coffee!" snapped Smithy.

"Yes, Master Herbert! But—"

Without waiting to hear what Larkin had to say, the Bounder lounged past him, and threw himself into a chair. A footman poured out coffee. Larkin followed his master's son, apologetically, to the table.

"Master Herbert, if you would glance at the newspaper—"

"Oh, rot! Don't bother!" grunted the Bounder.

Larkin coloured faintly.

"Your father, sir—"

Vernon-Smith's manner changed at once. The coffee-cup was at his lips—he set it down so hurriedly that it overturned, the coffee streaming over the table. He almost tore the paper from Larkin's hand.

"My father—somethin' in the paper—" he breathed.

"Yes, Master Herbert! I—"

"You fool! Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I knocked at your door three times, sir, but—"

"Where is it—where—"

Larkin pointed out the paragraph with a plump finger. The colour drained from the Bounder's face as he looked.

Pon and Gadsby and Monson exchanged glances. Pon hardly troubled to conceal a sneer.

"Somethin' up in the City!" he murmured to his friends. "Some sort of smash, what?"

"These City people go smash awfully suddenly!" murmured Gadsby. "Bankrupt, I shouldn't wonder!"

"Oh gad! Nice for us, landed here, if it's that!" muttered Monson.

Ponsonby shrugged his elegant shoulders. If it was that, and if the horn of plenty was going to run dry, Seahill Park was not likely to be honoured much longer by the dandy of Highcliffe. Peace had been patched up, the previous evening, after the episode of the rag in Pon's room—but Pon had not forgotten—he was not the fellow to forget offences. If the City financier had come a crash, and there was nothing more to be gained from the

Bounder, it would have been a pleasure to Pon to turn him down in the most cutting way he could.

Heedless of the three and their muttering, Vernon-Smith glued his eyes to the newspaper. Larkin stood in an attitude of respectfully sympathetic attention.

"The car, Larkin!" said Vernon-Smith, his voice husky.

"Your breakfast, sir—"

"Don't be a fool! The car, I tell you!" snarled the Bounder. He threw the newspaper on the floor and leaped from his chair.

Billy Bunter blinked at him in astonishment as he ran to the door. In his surprise, Bunter forgot, for a moment, his fifth breakfast.

"I say, Smithy—" he squeaked.

"Anythin' up, old man?" drawled Ponsonby.

His sarcastic tone hinted at what he thought of this display of excitement on the part of the Bounder. According to Pon's code, fellows never displayed emotion of any kind—that sort of thing was not done. He had displayed some himself, the previous evening, but perhaps he had forgotten that.

Vernon-Smith paused a moment, and threw a word over his shoulder.

"I've got to run up to town. You fellows carry on—you'll be all right. Larkin will look after you."

He was gone the next moment.

"Oh gad!" said Ponsonby.

The Highcliffe nuts looked at one another, with expressive shrugs.

"Greyfriars manners!" murmured Gadsby.

"Well, if the old bean's bankrupt—"

"What the deuce is it in the paper?" said Ponsonby. "We'd better know. It depends on that, whether that rotten outsider is goin' to find us here when he gets back."

The dandy of Highcliffe picked up the paper. He fully expected to see some announcement of a "smash" in the City.

Instead of which, a startling headline met his eye.

"ATTACK ON A MILLIONAIRE!"

"Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, the well-known financier and millionaire, had a narrow escape yesterday evening. A shot was fired at him as he was leaving his club. Details are not yet known, but it appears that the shot was fired from a passing motor-car, which then drove on at great speed, and disappeared before it could be stopped. The police, we understand, have the number of the car. Mr. Vernon-Smith, we are glad to state, was not injured, the bullet barely grazing his shoulder. This is Mr. Vernon-Smith's third narrow escape from mysterious attacks in the course of little more than a week."

"Oh, my hat!" said Ponsonby. "Somebody pottin' at the old bean! I've seen somethin' about it in the papers before, only I'd forgotten. Somebody he's diddled in the City, I suppose."

"But what's the matter with Smithy, then?" asked Monson. "There's nothin' there about a smash, or anythin'."

"Might be fond of his father, and a bit upset!" suggested Gadsby, with a touch of sarcasm.

Ponsonby laughed.

"Smithy's a rather hard nut to crack," he said. "Hardly that! He seems to be gone, though."

There was the buzz of a car on the drive. Smithy, without his breakfast,

The Book You Can't Put Down!

"Happy landing, Mr. Pilot! As long as you don't sit on a church spire, you're O.K." Anyway he's brought his "Schoolboys' Own Library" with him and that's saving him from worry. These books are like that—full of adventure and amusement that cheer you up when you're blue. Read this grand yarn—

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was gone. The car went with a rush and a roar. Whether he was, or was not, "a bit upset," as Gadsby suggested, Smithy was losing no time in getting to his father.

Quite regardless of Smithy's feelings, whatever they might happen to be, Pon & Co. sat down to breakfast. Vavasour came down and joined them. Billy Bunter, still eating, blinked across the table at them, rather uneasily.

Smithy was gone—apparently for the day. Pon & Co. were still there—and a day with Pon & Co. without the Bunder, was a rather alarming prospect for Billy Bunter!

He noticed that the four nuts glanced at him several times, grinning, and spoke together in low voices. He did not like the look in Pon's eye at all.

There was still an inch or two of cubic space unfilled within Billy Bunter's fat circumference. But he cut short his many breakfasts, and rose from the table.

Pon gave him a glance.

"Not goin', Bunter?" he said. "Wait for us, old bean! We'll have a rippin' time together—without Smithy to butt in."

"Oh, really, Ponsonby—" stammered the fat Owl.

"We'll make a jolly day of it!" grinned Monson. "We'll take you for a walk round the lake to begin with, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Monson—"

"And pull you out if you fall in!" said Gadsby.

"Absolutely!" chuckled Vavasour.

"Beasts!" said Bunter. And he made for the door.

Bang!

"Gentlemen!" exclaimed Larkin, as a cushion whizzed and landed on the back of Bunter's fat head.

"Yoo-hoop!" roared Bunter. He staggered, and fell on his hands and knees.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Highcliffians.

"Ow! Wow! Yow!" roared Bunter. "Gentlemen—gentlemen!" exclaimed Larkin.

Ponsonby gave the butler a cool, insolent stare. Without deigning to take any further notice of him, he stepped towards the sprawling fat Owl, his coffee-cup in his hand.

As Bunter staggered up, that cup was tilted over, and the hot coffee swamped down the back of a fat neck.

"Yarooooooh!" bellowed Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the nuts.

Billy Bunter bolted out of the breakfast-room, yelling. Larkin and his myrmidons stared in horrified amazement. Pon went back to the table, laughing.

"That's a beginnin'," he remarked. "I shouldn't wonder if that fat freak gets tired of this show before the day's out. What?"

The chuckling nuts agreed that it was probable.

The same thought was in Billy Bunter's fat mind. While the cat was away, the mice would play—and it was clear that the Highcliffians were going to give Bunter a high old time during Smithy's absence. And Billy Bunter, after mopping the coffee out of his fat neck, rolled out of the house, and rolled away to the garage.

When, after dawdling over their breakfast and the cigarettes that followed it, Pon & Co. went to look for Bunter, they found him not. Bunter had taken a car out—and the grinning nuts wondered whether he had hit for home, or whether he would be coming back. In the latter case, they were prepared to make Bunter wish that he had hit for home, and stayed there!

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Bob Cherry!

BOB CHERRY stared.

He was standing at the garden gate of Cherry Place, in Dorsetshire, when a handsome car came whizzing up the road, and stopped.

A fat face, adorned by a pair of big spectacles, blinked from the car. A fat hand was waved to Bob.

He could only stare. He had not expected to see Billy Bunter. Much less had he expected to see him in a whacking car with a liveried chauffeur. But that was how he saw him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob.

Billy Bunter stepped from the car. He was looking unusually well dressed. His fat face had, as usual, a trace of grubbiness, but, so far as clothes went, Bunter had a newly swept and garnished look. Bob Cherry regarded him with surprise and interest.

Harry Wharton and the nabob at Wharton Lodge, were aware that Bunter had somehow landed himself on Smithy for the Easter vac. But Bob Cherry had not seen his friends since Greyfriars had broken up, so he had heard nothing about it. Unaware that Bunter had hooked on to Smithy, Bob did not guess that the handsome coat was Smithy's, or that Bunter was wearing one of Smithy's best hats. Neither did he know, of course, that the handsome car was one of the half-dozen kept at Seahill Park, a place of which he had never heard. He could only blink as Bunter dawned on him in all his glory.

"Glad I've caught you at home, old chap," said Bunter affably.

"You've only just done it, old fat man," answered Bob. "I'm off to-day—starting in an hour."

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter. "I say, old chap, wash it out, and have the day with me—what?"

Bob grinned and shook his head. He was due at Wharton Lodge that afternoon, and he certainly was not disposed to wash it out, and have the day with Bunter. But he was more and more surprised. Any Greyfriars man seeing Bunter in the holidays would have supposed, as a matter of course, that the fat Owl was butting in to stay. But this, it seemed, was not what had brought Billy Bunter to Cherry Place.

"Sorry, old fat bean; can't be done!" said Bob good-naturedly. "You see, Wharton's expecting me to-day."

"Oh, blow Wharton!" said Bunter.

Bob Cherry laughed.

"The blowfulness is not going to be terrific, as Inky would say," he remarked. "Is that Mauly's car, Bunt?"

"I'm not staying with Mauly," answered Bunter. "This is one of our cars from Bunter Court, Cherry."

Bob chuckled. He was surprised to see Bunter arrive in such style, unless he had succeeded in "sticking" the long-suffering Lord Mauleverer. But he had no doubt that Bunter was sticking somebody.

"Well, look here, old chap!" said Bunter. "I'll tell you what! I've come about sixty miles to see you, and I don't want to lose sight of you all at once. I'll give you a lift over to Surrey, to Wharton's place. What about that?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob.

"Better than a stuffy train—what?" said Bunter.

"Yes, rather," agreed Bob. "But what—"

"Come on!" said Bunter. "Shove your bags on, and come!"

"Bat—" said Bob dubiously.

Certainly a run across country in that handsome car was ever so much more attractive than a train journey—especially as there was a lot of changing trains on the way. But after the way Bob and his friends had dropped Bunter on the Lantham road on breaking-up day, he had a natural reluctance to accepting a favour from the fat Owl.

"It's all right, old chap," said Bunter. "I really want you. Look here, we'll stop at Seahill Park for lunch."

"Where's that?"

"Place in Sussex where I'm staying. Topping place!" said Bunter. "After that I'll run you on into Surrey—see?"

"But—"

"Dash it all, old man, you can't turn me down, when I've driven specially out sixty miles to see you!" said Bunter warmly.

"Well, if you put it like that—" said Bob.

"I do put it like that," said Bunter. "We've always been pals, old fellow, haven't we? Is it a go?"

"Oh, all right!" said Bob. "But won't you be jolly late for lunch?"

"Oh, that's all right!" said Bunter. "I had brekker rather late, you know. I can lunch any time I like—whole place at my orders. Besides, I've had a snack in the car."

"I've just had my lunch."

"Have another with me, when we get in," said Bunter. "I can tell you the grub's tip-top. As good as I get at home at Bunter Court. Look here, get your bags on the car, and let's get off. I don't want to be later for lunch than I can help, of course."

"But is Seahill Park on the way to Wharton's place?" asked Bob.

"Well, it might be a few miles off the way, but that's nothing. My car will do sixty easily," said Bunter breezily. "I'll land you all right. Just tell them to shove your bags on, and let's get going—what?"

"Oh, all right!" said Bob.

He could not help being astonished. It was quite astonishing to see Billy Bunter rolling about in an expensive style—and still more astonishing for him not to be on the make. If the fat Owl had motored sixty miles to see him, it would have been altogether too ungracious to refuse his proffered hospitality. So, astonished as he was, Bob Cherry made up his mind to it.

A quarter of an hour later, therefore, Bob's bags were on the car, and he was seated in it with Billy Bunter, and the car was eating up the miles for Sussex.

"Jolly, ain't it?" said Bunter, as fields and trees and hedges flashed by.

"Topping!" agreed Bob.

"Bit better than your pater's Ford—what?"

Bob made no reply to that.

"You'll like Seahill Park," said Bunter. "Tremendous place; crowds of servants, all at my orders—anything I jolly well like. This is only one of the cars kept there. What are you grinning at?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"And if there's a row, you're the fellow to stand by a pal, ain't you?" said Bunter.

"Eh? I hope so. But what the dickens—" Bob stared at the fat Owl. "Are we going to have a row with anybody?"

"Oh, no! Still, if those rotters play any tricks—"

"What rotters?"

"Oh, nobody!" said Bunter vaguely. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,522.

"I mean to say—that is—nobody. I'm fetching you because I like your company, old chap, not because I'm afraid of those measly cads—"

"What measly cads?" asked the astounded Bob.

"Oh, nobody!"

Which mystified Bob Cherry more than ever, and made him wonder considerably what sort of a place Seahill Park was, and what he was going to see there.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Punches for Pon!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Ponsonby & Co. looked round. They were in the billiards-room at Seahill Park. Bright April sunshine did not tempt them out of doors. Pon and Gaddy were playing billiards, with a "quid" on the game. Monson, with a cigarette in his mouth, marked for them and Vavasour strolled vacantly about the room, with his hands in the pockets of his elegant trousers.

Pon, about to take a shot, paused, as a fat voice squeaked in at the doorway from the hall.

He stared at Billy Bunter.

As the Owl of Greyfriars had not come in for lunch, Pon & Co. had concluded that he had had enough, and gone for good. But here he was; and if he had come back for more, they were quite prepared to hand it over.

"Oh, you!" said Ponsonby grimly; and he put down his cue.

"Never mind that fat ass," said Gadsby. "Get on!"

"We're goin' to make that fat freak tired of us before Smithy blows in again," answered Pon coolly.

"Yah!" said Billy Bunter, with a sniff of contempt. "Dirty cads from Highcliffe! Yah! How much did you welsh Smithy out of at cards last night, Pon? That's what you're here for, ain't it? Yah! Gang of card-sharpers! You're in luck to be at Highcliffe! You'd be sacked from any decent school—dirty lot of smoky cads! Yah!"

Pon & Co. gazed at Bunter dumb-founded.

Bunter was, according to programme, going to have it, whether he asked for it or not. But it was surprising to hear him asking for it in this way.

"Sneaking lot of funks!" went on Bunter. "One Greyfriars man could handle the lot of you! Member the time when Bob Cherry thrashed you and Monson, Pon, and you both ran for it? Yah! I've a jolly good mind to boot the lot of you!"

"Oh, gad!" gasped Monson. "Is he mad?"

"I think he must be," stuttered Pon. "Collar the potty porker! By gad, I'll make him tired of life before I've done with him!"

He led the rush at Bunter in the doorway.

Bunter backed quickly, but not quickly enough. Pon's grasp was on him, and he gave a terrified yell:

"Ow! Help! Rescue, Greyfriars! Back up, Bob, old man! Help!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

Bob Cherry, standing in the hall, stared in blank amazement at the sight of Bunter, staggering out of a doorway in Ponsonby's grip, the other three Highcliffians clutching at him.

Larkin had just taken Bob's coat. Bob, surprised to see Mr. Vernon-Smith's butler, whom he knew by sight, was wondering what the dickens it all meant, when the row suddenly started.

"Rescue!" shrieked Bunter. "Bob, old chap—rescue!"

Bob gripped Larkin by the arm.

"What the dickens is all this?" he exclaimed. "What's this place, Larkin?"

"Mr. Vernon-Smith's Sussex mansion, sir," said Larkin.

"Oh, my hat! Smithy's place!" gasped Bob. "But—but what—Is Smithy here?"

"Yaroo!" roared Bunter. "Help!"

"Master Herbert was called up to town suddenly this morning, sir," said Larkin. "His guests seem to be—ahem!—a little troublesome while he is away—hem!"

"I say, you fellows, leggo! Bob Cherry, you beast!" shrieked Bunter.

"Back up! Rescue, Greyfriars! Yaroo!" You ain't afraid of Highcliffe cads, are you? Help!"

Bob Cherry ran forward.

It was dawning on him why Bunter had brought him there—miles and miles off the way to Wharton Lodge. He had heard at Greyfriars that Smithy was having a Highcliffe party for the holidays; and he could see now that Bunter had somehow hooked on to Smithy—and was on hostile terms with Smithy's other guests. Evidently the fat Owl had brought him in as a defender! But, whether he liked Bunter's astute trickery or not, he could not stand by and see the fat and helpless Owl handled by Highcliffe fellows.

"Stop that!" rapped Bob.

Ponsonby gave him a glare.

"What are you doin' here, you Greyfriars cad? Smithy never asked you, if he asked Bunter! Get out of it, before you're chucked out!"

"By gad, it's rainin', Greyfriars cads!" said Monson.

"Ow! Wow! Leggo!" wailed Bunter. "Ow! Help! Rescue! Wow!"

"Stop that, I tell you!" roared Bob.

And, as Ponsonby paid no heed, he grabbed the dandy of Highcliffe by the collar, spun him round, and sent him crashing on the floor.

Ponsonby yelled with rage as he crashed.

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Wow! I say—Wow!"

Ponsonby scrambled up, red with rage.

"Back me up!" he panted, and he hurled himself at Bob Cherry.

Gadsby and Monson backed him up, and then Vavasour.

For two or three minutes they were all round Bob, punching, hammering, thumping, handing out punishment that might have made any fellow stagger.

Bob Cherry took it all in his stride, as it were.

And all the time he was hitting out, and he was hitting hard.

Monson was the first to go crashing down. A moment later, Vavasour was sent staggering across him.

Pon and Gaddy were still attacking hotly. But if Bob had handled four of the nuts, he was well able to handle two. An upper-cut that nearly lifted Gadsby's head off flung him out of the conflict—and he sat on the floor nursing his chin and moaning.

Then Bob gave all his attention to Ponsonby.

The dandy of Highcliffe was not keen on a scrap man to man. He backed and dodged and twisted, and Bob followed him up, hitting out grimly. At the door of the billiards-room, Pon fairly turned and ran for it.

Crash!

Bob Cherry's boot landed on him as he ran, and almost lifted him off his feet. There was a crash and a yell as the dandy of Highcliffe landed beside the billiards-table, on his features.

Four sprawling Highcliffians were down and out. Bob Cherry, victorious, panted for breath.

Billy Bunter gave a fat chuckle.

"He, he, he! I say, you fellows, do you want any more? He, he, he! That's how we punch at Greyfriars!"

Bob turned to him.

"You fat owl!" he snapped. "Why didn't you tell me this was Smithy's place?"

"You wouldn't have come if I had, old chap! He, he, he! I say, those Highcliffe cads don't want any more! What about lunch?"

"Fathead! I'm going!"

"Look here, you beast—"

Bob Cherry walked out. Billy Bunter gave the sprawling, gasping Highcliffians a blink—and rushed after him. He grabbed Bob's arm in the doorway.

Bob shook off the fat paw, and tramped out. Billy Bunter gave a blink back at the Highcliffians through his big spectacles. Then he rolled out after Bob.

"I say, old chap, won't you stay till Smithy comes back?" squeaked Bunter.

"I say, the grub's fearfully good—"

"I'm going!"

"Then I'll go, too!" said Bunter.

And he went.

Pon & Co. were left to doctor their damages—which were extensive and painful. Until the Bounder came back, to stand between him and vengeance, Billy Bunter sagely decided to give them a wide berth—and it was undoubtedly, fortunate for him that he did! But Pon & Co. had not seen the last of him, by any means—Billy Bunter was sticking to Smithy!

THE END.

(Meanwhile, what of Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, the millionaire? Is his life still in danger, or— There's a surprise in store for the Bounder, and a surprise for you, too! Be sure to read: "THE SHADOWED MILLIONAIRE!" the next yarn in this thrilling new series.)

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SIR GOUTY'S RETURN!

Doctor Birchmall's sins begin to find him out in this week's laughable instalment of Dicky Nugent's serial:

"THE ST. SAM'S TREZZURE HUNT!"

RESKEWED!

Crash! Bang! Wallop! "What's that?" asked Jack Jolly.

The kaptin of the St. Sam's Fourth tried, as he spoke, to raise himself on one elbow to listen more intently. But his effort was not very successful. Jack Jolly was used to overcoming handicaps; but even he found it pretty hard to overcome the handicap of being bound hand and foot.

Bang! Wallop! Crash! "There it is again!" cried Frank Fearless, straining at his bonds. "I wonder what the dickens such a noise can mean at this early hour of the morning!"

"Probably it's the dawn breaking," suggested Merry, somewhat gloomily. "A hopeless dawn it is for us, too! With no hoop of reskew—"

Wallop! Bang! Crash! "It's not the dawn—it's the door!" yelled Bright, eggstodily. "Help! Police! Reskew!"

The prisoners fairly trembled with eggstodily, as they reckoned that the noises they had been hearing were footsteps and that those footsteps had halted outside their door.

A breathless hush descended on them, as they heard a key turn in the lock. Was it to be yet another disappointment? Was it merely to be Doctor Birchmall, alias Mr. Smith, again, come to serve them out with their frogal repeat?

It was not! To the great relief of the St. Sam's juniors the face that peered into the room when the door opened was that of the man whose return was the last thing they had eggpected.

"Sir Gouty!" cried Jack Jolly. "It's Sir Gouty Greybeard!"

"Hooray!" The fellows were wild with delight! On the other hand, Sir Gouty's dial was white! He stared at the prisoners in sheer amazement.

"Bai Jove! St. Sam's boys!" he eggscclaimed. "What on earth are you doing here, what, what?"

"Please, sir, we're prisoners."

"Yaas, so I gathah! Tell me, then, are you the prisoners who wrote me a message on the back of an envelope?"

Jack Jolly's face beamed.

"Then it worked!" he cried. "I was the one who did it, sir—though I had no idea where the envelope mite be going."

Sir Gouty's face darkened. "But that envelope came from my trusted privit secretary, Mr. Smith!"

"I dare say it did, sir," larfed Jolly. "He's the chap who kidnapped us!"

"For why?"

"Because we knew too much about the way he was running your grato trezzure

hunt, sir!" replied Jolly. "He wanted us out of the way while he wangled it for himself and Serownger!"

"Bai Jove! And to think I had faith in such a raskal!" cried Sir Gouty sadly. "I placed my trust in him—and he trussed you up! The man must be an absolute villan! As like as not he is not Mr. Smith at all!"

"He isn't!" grinned

The liveried funkies who were attending on his needs went out to order up more breakfast.

He had scarcely quitted the bed-room before there was a sound of footsteps rushing up the stairs. "Mr. Smith!" frowned severely.

"I shall really have to give these servants a ticking-off!" he muttered. "Turning the place into a giddy bear-garden—"

Then Sir Gouty's secretary broke off. The door was flung open. To his utter horror the five fellows he imagined to be still prisoners in the empty wing rushed into the room. But "Mr. Smith's" horror at that was as nothing to the horror he felt as he reckoned at the back of them, of all people in the world, Sir Gouty Greybeard!

"Bai Jove! So there you are!" cried Sir Gouty. "You dubble-dyed deceiver!"

"He's more than dubble-dyed, sir!" grinned Frank Fearless. "He has to dye his whiskers in blue-black ink regularly every morning to keep them the right culler!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Collah him, boys!" shouted Sir Gouty.

Jack Jolly & Co. made a rush.

But "Mr. Smith" was not to be caught so easily. Long weeks spent evading the perlice had made the headmaster of St. Sam's as slippery as an eel.

As the heroes of the Fourth rushed at him, he jumped out of bed like a jack-in-the-box, sending his bed-tray flying. The result was that, as Jack Jolly & Co. charged, they were met by a barrage of eggs and



JUST LIKE SMITHY!

Bounder's Latest Exploit!

For a wet afternoon indoors, there's nothing to beat lariat-throwing.

So Smithy says, anyway. Or he said it last Wednesday afternoon, anyway. Whether he still says it after what happened is doubtful!

Smithy chose the Remove passage for his practise-ground. He obtained Stott to act as his target. He gave a display of lariat-throwing which lookers-on found jolly entertaining if not very instructive.

The fact is, the art of lassoing is one of the very few things which the Bounder has not mastered. His efforts to lasso Stott were distinctly funny. Stott stood at the top of the stairs and Smithy aimed at him from the other end of the passage. Smithy lassoed the banisters, several door-handles, and a gas-bracket. But he didn't lasso Stott.

The crowd grew more and more hilarious as Smithy kept on trying.

That's what led to the disastrous climax.

The Head happened to be working on the floor below, and it put him off his stroke. In the end he came upstairs to investigate.

Isn't it a perfect marvel, the way beaks always bob up at the worst possible moment? Dr. Locke did it all right on this occasion! He came round the stairs just as Smithy's lariat sailed out. The inevitable happened. It settled down over his shoulders, Smithy pulled, and the Beak pitched forward, roped like a steer in the wild and woolly West!

Smithy got "six."

Not a bad get-out, considering. As Bob Cherry put it, IT WAS JUST LIKE SMITHY!

Smith. He struck me as being a proper frawd—not at all like me!"

"Oh, crums!"

"I am amazed that you should eydentify him with me for a single instant," went on the Head loftily. "I admit—ahem!—that I have been dodging the perlice for some time myself. But I am moresinned against than sinning. In any case, Mr. Smith's beard was blue-black in culler, whereas mine is a vonnerable white. Lucky I pored the contents of the milk bottles over it before I answered the door!" he added to himself, with a feint snigger.

Sir Gouty and his supporters scratched their heads in puzzlement. The Head, they had to admit to themselves, was a jolly tuff nut to crack.

"Then you deny that you are Mr. Smith?" asked Sir Gouty.

"How can I be?" asked the Head blandly. "My name is Birchmall—Alfred Birchmall—headmaster of St. Sam's!"

"Ho, it is, is it?" rasped a stern official voice at that moment. "Then, Halfred Birchmall, I arrest you in the name of the lor'!"

A pair of handcuffs snapped over the Head's wrists, and Doctor Birchmall found himself staring into the grinning face of P. C. Podge.

"I've bin waitin' all these weeks behind that there 'edge!" grinned the constable, jerking his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of the drive. "I noo you'd turn up in the end!"

(Look out for the last hilarious instalment of this record-breaking serial in next week's number!)

"MAKE PUNISHMENT FIT CRIME!"

Strange Sentence at Woodshed Sessions!

Mr. Tom Brown, newly-appointed Judge at the Woodshed Sessions, caused a sensation this week. He informed the Court at the opening that it would be his policy always to make the punishment fit the crime—and his first attempt to do it caused a riot in Court!

Prisoner in the case, Percy Bolsover, described as pugilist, was charged with allowing a smoky chimney in Study No. 10, contrary to the Remove passage bye-laws, section umpteen.

Bolsover, who was extremely violent, was carried into court, struggling wildly in the arms of half a dozen burly officers, and had to be gagged before the evidence could be heard.

Mr. Frank Nugent, inspector of nuisances, deposed that he was called to the Remove passage by complaining neighbours and found the area around Study No. 10 thick with smoke. On investigation, he found the chimney of No. 10 belching out large quantities of smoke and soot. By appearances, it had not been swept for years. The reason for this, he ascertained, was that Bolsover's playful habit of knocking all visitors senseless on arrival had made the sweep chary of entering the study when he was going his round in the Remove passage.

"Stop!" interrupted the Head, frowning fiercely. "I refuse to be insulted further, Sir Gouty—even though you are a Guvver-nor! I have met this Mr.

"There he goes!" yelled Sir Gouty. "Aftah him!"

The chase began again, this time with Mr. Lickham and several others from the Skool House joining in at the rear.

Their quarry had vanished by the time they reached the Head's house. There was no sign of anybody wearing pyjamas and a nitecap.

Sir Gouty rang the front-door bell.

After a brief interval, the door opened.

The visitors fairly blinked then. Standing in the doorway, fully dressed in his Sunday worst, and with his mortar-board stuck on his head at a jawnty angle, was Doctor Alfred Birchmall!

"Good-morning, gentlemen!" he grinned.

"Bai Jove! How did you get dressed so quickly?" gasped Sir Gouty Greybeard.

Doctor Birchmall gave him a look of fained surprize.

"I don't quite follow you, Sir Gouty!" he said.

Sir Gouty snorted.

"You know perfectly well you have only just arrived here from my house—and that you arrived wearing only a nitecap and pyjamas! You know that for weeks you have been posing as 'Mr. Smith,' and that you have occupied the position of my privit secretary!"

"Stop!" interrupted the Head, frowning fiercely. "I refuse to be insulted further, Sir Gouty—even though you are a Guvver-nor! I have met this Mr.



M. Napoleon Dupont, French citizen, co-tenant of Bolsover in No. 10, gave corroborative evidence. Speaking in broken English he said that the chimney badly needed cleaning, wasn't it, but the big Bolsover he frighten them away with himself.

Having been ungagged and told to defend himself, Bolsover loudly demanded a bludgeon or a battleaxe.

Judge (sternly): "Is it true that your behaviour frightened away the sweep?"

Bolsover: "Pah! That's all rot. I didn't really hurt the last sweep that called. All I did

was to knock him down with a dictionary and kick him out of the study. It was just high-spirited fun. No harm in it!"

Judge: "That'll be all, prisoner, I think. Will somebody go and get a paulful of soot?"

Mr. Nugent: "There's a paulful here that we collected from Bolsover's chimney. What do you want it for, your honour?"

Judge: "You'll see in a minute!"

Turning to the prisoner he then said: "Prisoner at the bar! I find you guilty of having a smoky chimney in the first degree. The sentence of the Court is that your head be buried in Mr. Nugent's pail—a punishment which I consider in every way 'sootable'!"

Amid scenes of wild excitement the officers in charge of the prisoner then up-ended him and pushed his head into the pail.

If it had finished at that, all would have been well. Unfortunately for the Court, however, Bolsover broke loose immediately afterwards. To the utter horror of the Court he then seized the pail and tipped it up over the head of the Judge.

Bolsover is still at large. As we go to press, police-officers are combing the School House for him, and there is going to be a real dust-up when they find him.

Meanwhile, interviewed in the bath-room, Judge Brown says, that his determination to make the punishment fit the crime is unshaken.

All we can say is that if it goes on as it has started, it's a black outlook for him!

THEY'LL ARGUE IT OUT IN THE "HERALD"!

Great New Feature Coming!

Readers of the "Greyfriars Herald" hardly need to be told that between Harry Wharton and Herbert Vernon-Smith there is a never-ending battle of ideas.

High-spirited fellows both, they are sometimes firm friends and sometimes bitter enemies. But at all times, their views on a variety of topics are as the poles asunder.

They hardly ever meet without arguing about something. If it's not about footer or cricket, it's about lessons and masters or Remove politics, or the rights and wrongs of cigarette-smoking and card-playing.

Hitherto their arguments have been confined to verbal exchanges in Form-room, rag, and pavilion.

But now, in response to requests both from fellows who have heard their arguments at Greyfriars and others outside who would like to hear them, they have agreed to stand on a larger platform and put down their views on a number of questions on paper for the "Greyfriars Herald."

There's a treat in store for you when these two old rivals get going. Watch out for the first exhibition of their verbal fireworks in a fortnight's time!

MR. SMITH'S GETAWAY!

"James! My coffy!"

"Yessir!"

"And order another ration of eggs and bacon, man! Dash it all, you've only served me three eggs and half-a-duzen rashers!"

"Which I'm sorry, sir, I'll order them at once!"

"You'd better!"

"Mr. Smith" was enjoying himself. Troo, he was feeling rather worried. His failure to obtain the fifty-

