

GREYFRIARS SCHOOLBOYS' EXCITING HOLIDAY ADVENTURE!

The Magnet 2^d

*Billy Bunter's
Own Paper*



**GREYFRIARS
TO THE
RESCUE!**

The black sheep of the Remove, the scapegrace of Greyfriars, Vernon-Smith has at least one redeeming quality—affection for his father—as he proves conclusively in this thrill-packed yarn—

The BOUNDER'S PERIL!

By FRANK RICHARDS



A grasp like iron pinned Vernon-Smith down, and he glared up, in helpless rage, at a swarthy face that grinned down at him!

Featuring HARRY WHARTON & CO., the World-Famous Chums of GREYFRIARS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

How Did Bunter Know?

"DON'T go out, you fellows!" "Eh? Why not?" "I want you. I—I'm enjoying your society, you know!" said Billy Bunter.

"What?" ejaculated the Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove, all together. They gazed at Billy Bunter.

That fat youth was reclining in a deep armchair in the hall at Wharton Lodge. Harry Wharton & Co. were standing in a group by the open doorway, into which the bright April sunshine streamed.

They had almost forgotten that Bunter was there.

For the last ten minutes or so they had been discussing what they were going to do with the remainder of the morning. Billy Bunter had taken no heed, except to bestow an occasional blink on them through his big spectacles.

Having decided on a ramble in the woods till lunch, the chums of the Remove were making a move, when Bunter's fat squeak reminded them of his existence.

His statement that he was enjoying their society was, no doubt, flattering; but it did not carry conviction. Bunter's statements seldom did.

"What do you mean, you fat ass?" inquired Bob Cherry politely.

"I mean what I say," answered Bunter, sitting up in the armchair and blinking at the chums of the Remove. "Don't go out! It's such a pleasure to see you fellows in the hols! I've missed you fearfully since Greyfriars broke up. I shall be leaving here this morning, you know."

"Is the enjoyfulness of our esteemed

society terrific?" asked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin.

"Oh, yes, rather!" said Bunter.

"You're such nice chaps, you know!"

"Oh, my hat!" said Harry Wharton.

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

"Never mind what he means—let's get out!" said Johnny Bull.

"Let's!" agreed Harry Wharton.

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter

jumped up from the armchair. "Don't

go out, I tell you! I—I really want

you! Besides, suppose a telegram came

for you, Wharton?"

"A telegram!" repeated the captain

of the Greyfriars Remove blankly.

"Yes. You wouldn't like to miss it,

would you?"

"I'm not expecting a telegram, fat-

head!"

"Well, telegrams often come unex-

pectedly," argued Bunter. "Of course,

I don't know anything about it. How

could I? Still, I shouldn't wonder if

there was a telegram or something for

you this morning."

"You howling ass!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Is he off his rocker?" asked Bob

Cherry.

"Is he ever on it?" grunted Johnny

Bull.

"I say, you fellows, can't you sit down

for a bit?" asked Bunter peevishly.

"You've been playing tennis this morn-

ing already. What do you want to be

always buzzing about for? It may come

any minute—"

"It!" repeated Harry. "What?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Bunter hastily.

"How should I know? Still, if there

was a telegram, or anything, you want

to be here when it comes, don't you?"

"Well, my hat!" said Harry. "Look

here, Bunter, isn't it time you got off?

You're risking being late for lunch at

Smithy's place. It's a good step from here to the coast of Sussex."

"Oh, never mind lunch!" said Billy

Bunter. "I'll chance that! I never

think much about food, as you know."

"Oh crikey!"

"The car's waiting," said Bob. "It's

been waiting over since you came back

from Wimford, half an hour ago."

"Let it wait!" said Bunter. "I'm

not ready yet. I say, you fellows, how

would you like to pack into the car with

me and come back to Seahill Park? It's

a magnificent place, everything of the

best, lots of servants, lots of cars, and

the grub's first-rate. What about it?"

The Famous Five chuckled.

They had no doubt that the fat Owl

of the Remove would have liked to take

them back in the car with him, whether

he enjoyed their society or not.

Billy Bunter was spending his Easter

holidays under rather unusual and

remarkable conditions.

Having hooked on to Herbert Vernon-

Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, for

Easter, Bunter had fancied himself in

clover at Seahill Park, that magnificent

establishment of Mr. Vernon-Smith's on

the Sussex shore.

But the arrival of Smithy's other

guests—Pon & Co. of Highcliffe School—

had put quite a different complexion on

affairs.

When Smithy was off the scene, the

Highcliffe knuts ragged Bunter, and he

had found it too exciting altogether.

Hence his presence at the moment at

Wharton Lodge.

The Bounder having been away the

previous night, Pon & Co. had started

in to make Bunter feel that life at Sea-

hill Park was not worth living.

So he had cut across to Harry

Wharton's home in Surrey, and

using one of Mr. Vernon-Smith's cars for the trip.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said the fat Owl, as the juniors chuckled. "It's ripping at Smithy's place—ever so much better than your poor little show, Wharton."

"Thanks!" said Harry, laughing.

"The only drawback is Smithy having those Highcliffe cads there," went on Bunter. "But if you fellows were there with me, think they'd dare to start any ragging?"

"Not likely!" grinned Bob.

"Of course, that's not why I want you to come!" added Bunter hastily. "I want you because we're pals, you know."

"Are we?"

"Yes, old chap, and I want to give you a good time. I can do anything I jolly well like there. It's a chance for you fellows to see something a bit decent, after what you're accustomed to, you know."

"Doesn't he put it nicely?" chuckled Bob.

"The niceness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"But I think," added Bob, "that on the whole we won't barge into Smithy's place without being asked, what? Fancy Smithy's face if we did!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, that's all right!" assured Billy Bunter. "Smithy's pater likes me no end, you know, and he gives me early blong—"

"Not carte blanche?" chuckled Nugent.

"Carte blong," said Bunter. "That means a free hand, you know. I can ask my friends if I like, see?"

"Not quite," said Harry Wharton. "We're quite satisfied with our humble quarters, old fat man, and don't want to go millionairing with Smithy—especially without being asked."

"Well, suppose the old bean asked you?" said Bunter. "If you're so jolly particular, I suppose an invitation from Mr. Vernon-Smith would make it all right—what?"

"Well, that's not likely to happen, fathead!"

"That's all you know," said Bunter. "You might get a telegram from old Smith, asking you to come—see?"

"Fathead!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. He stared out of the open doorway. On the drive appeared a lad in uniform, on a bicycle. "That's a telegram for somebody."

"Well, my hat! How did Bunter know?" ejaculated Harry Wharton, in great astonishment.

"I didn't know, old chap!" said Bunter. "Never knew anything about it. Hadn't the faintest idea you were getting a telegram this morning. How could I?"

Harry Wharton looked at him. Then he ran out to meet the telegraph-messenger. He came back with a telegram in his hand.

"It's for me!" he said.

"You'd have missed it if you'd gone out," said Billy Bunter, "just as I told you."

"How did you know it was coming?"

"Oh, I didn't know! Never knew anything about it, of course. I say, old chap, don't jaw; open it and see what's in it," advised Bunter.

The Famous Five stared at Bunter. Obviously he had known that that telegram was coming. How, was quite a mystery. The Famous Five were all interested, as Harry Wharton opened the buff envelope and took out the telegram within.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Spoof!

HARRY WHARTON glanced at the telegram, and held it up to the general view of the Co. They all read it—with keen interest.

Billy Bunter watched them—grinning. "Well, my only hat!" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

"By gum!" said Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five stared at that telegram. It was addressed to Harry Wharton, at Wharton Lodge, and ran:

"Dear Wharton. Delighted if you and your friends will come back with Bunter, and stay with my son for the rest of Easter. Samuel Vernon-Smith."

"I say, you fellows, what does old Smith say?" chirruped Billy Bunter.

Harry Wharton looked round at him. The Famous Five were reading the telegram at a little distance from the fat Owl. They had all seen the message on it—Bunter hadn't! So it was surprising for him to ask what "old Smith" had said!

Really, Bunter's knowledge of that telegram was quite uncanny. He had known that it was coming. That was curious, to say the least. Now, without looking at it, he knew that it came from Mr. Vernon-Smith, the Bounder's father. That was more curious. It was, in fact, curiousest and curiousest, as Alice said in Wonderland!

Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, is looking forward to having a high old time with his sporty cronies from Highcliffe—until he falls into the hands of his father's ruthless enemy!

"All right, what?" grinned Bunter. "You're coming, eh?"

"You know what's in this telegram?" exclaimed Harry.

"Oh, no! Haven't the foggiest!" said Bunter hastily. "How should I know what was in it, when I've never seen it? Still, if Smithy's pater has asked you to Seahill Park, you ought to come. The food's splendid—"

"Jolly civil of the old bean," said Frank Nugent. "I suppose he must have spoken to Smithy before sending this?"

"Well, he'd hardly ask us there without Smithy wanting us, I suppose," said Harry. "But—we had a row with the Bounder, last day of term, and Smithy doesn't forget such things in a hurry. Blessed if I quite make it out."

"Oh, never mind Smithy," said Billy Bunter. "Tain't his show, anyhow—it's the old bean's. He can ask you if he likes! Smithy's got his Highcliffe pals—and I shall have some Greyfriars pals—see? I can fix it all right with the old bean, when we get there! Leave that to me!"

"What is there to fix, fathead, if we go?" demanded Harry Wharton. "If we accept Mr. Vernon-Smith's invitation, it's got nothing to do with you!"

"Oh, hasn't it?" said Bunter warmly. "I—I—I mean, of—of course not! Quite so! I say, what about packing? The car's waiting."

"We haven't settled that we're going yet, fathead—"

"Oh, rot!" said Bunter. "You can't turn down an invitation like that! You don't want to stick in a measly little hole like this place, when you've got a chance of going to a magnificent seaside residence—"

"You fat ass—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Harry Wharton looked at the telegram again. He was puzzled, and rather pleased—but more puzzled than pleased.

It was very kind of Mr. Vernon-Smith—and a change-over from Wharton Lodge, to the seaside mansion in Sussex, was rather a welcome idea, by way of a change for the holidays. But Harry had not forgotten the Bounder's uncertain temper—and he was dubious, and his friends shared his dubiety.

Then, looking at the telegram, the captain of the Remove gave a sudden yell of surprise and wrath. He turned on Billy Bunter.

"You fat scoundrel!" he roared.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You spoofing porker—"

"I—I—I say—yaroooooh!" bawled Billy Bunter, as Wharton, rushing at him, grabbed him by his fat neck, and banged his head on the wall. "Ow! Leggo! Wow! Yarooooooop!"

"What the thump—" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in amazement.

"Wharton, old man—" gasped Nugent.

"What the esteemed dickens—"

Harry Wharton did not heed. His face was red with anger, as he banged the fat head of the fat Owl.

Bang, bang, bang!

"Yarooooh! Yooop! Yoo-hoop!" roared Bunter. "Oh crikey! Leggo! Beast! I say, you fellows, dengginoff! Rescue! Urrgh! Ow-ow!"

"Harry—"

"What—"

The captain of the Remove released Bunter at last, bumping him down on the floor with a heavy concussion.

Bunter sat and spluttered.

"The podgy rascal!" exclaimed Wharton, turning back to his chums. "We might have gone—might actually have gone—"

They stared at him in amazement.

"Well, what if we did?" asked Bob. "I suppose Mr. Vernon-Smith knows whether he wants us or not, doesn't he?"

"He knows nothing about it!" howled Wharton. "This telegram never came from him at all."

"Wha-a-t?"

"Who, then—"

"Bunter!" roared Wharton. "It's a dodge to get us over there, to keep those Highcliffe cads off him. My hat! Suppose we'd barged in—"

"But what—how—" gasped Nugent.

"Look!"

Harry Wharton held out the telegram, pointing with his forefinger to a line which was not part of the message, and which they had not noticed in reading the message.

But they noticed it now:

HANDED IN AT WIMFORD 10 a.m.
"W-W-W-Wimford!" stuttered Bob Cherry.

"Handed in at Wimford!" gasped Johnny Bull. "Why, that's only two or three miles from here—in Surrey—and Smithy's place is fifty miles away, on the other side of Sussex—"

"That's why that fat villain went down to Wimford in the car this morning," gasped Harry. "It was to send us this spoof telegram, with Mr. Vernon-Smith's name signed to it."

"Oh crikey!"

"If it came from Mr. Vernon-Smith, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,524.

it would be handed in at Seahill, in Sussex. That's how that fat scoundrel knew that it was coming—and knew what was in it—because he sent it himself, not half an hour ago—"

"Oh crumbs!"

The Famous Five fairly gasped. They glared at the fat Owl, who was still sitting on the floor, gurgling and rubbing his head.

Bunter, evidently, had overlooked the fact that the name of the telegraph office where a wire was handed in was entered on the Post Office form. It had, in fact, escaped the notice of the other fellows, for the moment.

"You—you—you fat frump!" hissed Bob Cherry. "You'd have landed us all at Smithy's place, thinking we'd been asked there—"

"Ooooooogh!" gurgled Bunter.

"Fancy old Smithy's face, when we trickled in!" exclaimed Nugent. "And his father's, too!"

"That podgy scoundrel—"

"Bump him!"

"Jump on him!"

"Boot him!"

"Burst him!"

"I—I—I say, you fellows," Bunter jumped up, and dodged. "I—I say, it's all right! I can ask friends to Seahill Park if I like—I tell you, the old bean gives me carty blong. I can fix it all right with Mr. Vernon-Smith, as I told you, as soon as we get there. I only sent that wire because you're so jolly particular! I mean, I never sent it—"

"What?" yelled Bob.

"Of course I never did!" gasped Bunter. "It came from Mr. Vernon-Smith, all right! You can take my word for that!"

"Oh scissors!"

"I never went down to the post office in the car," explained Bunter. "I—I simply went for a—a—a drive! I never stopped at the post office while I was in Wimford. Besides, I wasn't in Wimford! I went in the other direction. That telegram came from Sussex all right—"

"From Sussex, and handed in in Surrey!" roared Bob.

"Well, they're always making mistakes at post offices," argued Bunter. "Or—or perhaps old Smithy was out in his car, you know, and—and stopped at Wimford to send it—or—or something! Anyhow, it's all right! You fellows come back with me, and old Smith will be glad to see you. He says delighted, in that telegram, you know."

"Kill him!"

"Beast! I say, you fellows, I really want you to come back with me," gasped Bunter. "Never mind if Smithy doesn't want you—I want you! Those Highcliffe cads rag a chap, every time Smithy's away—and he's been away twice, and may be away again—see? I can fix it with the old bean. He can hardly refuse to let me have my pals with me there. Besides, he's asked you himself in that telegram—he says he'll be delighted—"

The Famous Five glared at Billy Bunter. They might quite possibly have accepted that supposed invitation had they not spotted in time that it was spoof. And the bare idea of butting-in on the sarcastic, sardonic Bounder, uninvited, roused their deepest wrath.

Outside, the Seahill Park car was waiting, with the chauffeur who had brought Bunter over the previous evening. It had been waiting since Bunter had driven down to Wimford—for what purpose they now knew! But it was not going to wait any longer!

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"Collar him!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Chuck him neck and crop into the car!"

"Good egg!"

"I—I say, you fellows—Yoo-hoop!" roared Billy Bunter, as he was collared and run headlong out of the doorway.

Williams, the chauffeur, stared. Heedless of his stare, the Famous Five whirled Bunter along to the car.

Johnny Bull pulled the door open. The other four heaved Bunter up and hurled him in.

Bump!

"Yaroooh!"

Bunter landed in the car, with a crash and a roar.

Johnny Bull slammed the door on him.

"Start!" said Harry.

"Yes, sir!" grinned the chauffeur.

"Ooooh—woogh—ooooh!" came spluttering from the car. "Ow! Beasts! I won't have you at Smithy's place now—wow! Yah! Rotters! Cads! Ooooooogh!"

The car rolled away with Billy Bunter. A fat face looked back, and a fat fist was shaken. Then the Owl of the Remove was gone from Wharton Lodge, leaving the chums of the Remove grinning.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Hand of the Enemy!

"**N**ONSENSE!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith.

He spoke in a very decided tone. Mr. Vernon-Smith was a very decided gentleman.

The Bounder looked worried.

Father and son had returned to Seahill Park that morning from London by train. Mr. Vernon-Smith was now seated at a roll-top desk, in a room adjoining the library, which he used as a study and business-room when he was at his Sussex mansion.

The desk was covered with documents, and a telephone stood on it. The millionaire had just replaced the receiver on the instrument when his son came in at the open french window.

That window looked out on a shrubbery, circled by shady old trees. It was quiet and secluded and no intrusive footstep ever entered there when the millionaire was in residence. Whether in the City, or in the country, or anywhere else, Samuel Vernon-Smith had multifarious business matters to attend to—and he was seldom or never idle.

At the present time he was engaged in forming a syndicate to take up a concession in Kenya, and he was busier than ever—and he frowned when his son came in. Even Herbert was superfluous when Mr. Vernon-Smith was deep in finance. No one else in the numerous household would have dared to disturb him.

"Look here, father—" said Vernon-Smith uneasily.

"Nonsense!" repeated the millionaire. "I have left London, Herbert, at very great inconvenience to myself—as a concession to your fears for my safety. I can carry on here, but I must not be disturbed. As for wasting a thought on that foreign rascal who has attempted my life, I shall do nothing of the kind!"

"But—"

"Since this danger has threatened me, I have carried a revolver," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "I have not forgotten how to use it, though it is very many years since I was in a land where men carried weapons. If that Italian scoundrel should put in an appearance again, I will shoot him down like a dog!"

"If he gives you a chance!" growled the Bounder. "He's tried to pot you half a dozen times from behind trees or corners—"

"Well, he cannot pot me, as you call it, here in my own house!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "And now—I am busy, Herbert!"

"You know as well as I do that that dago is still after you, father!" said the Bounder. "You've found out his game now—he's after the N'gombo Concession in Kenya. He will get hold of it, too, if he pushes you off the earth. Why not engage a detective—"

"Nonsense!"

"A private detective, if you like—a reliable man to stay in the house and keep watch and ward—"

"Nothing of the kind!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith decidedly. "I will not honour the rascal by taking so much notice of him!"

The Bounder grunted.

"He might get into the grounds here and snipe at you when you go out for a stroll!" he said. "You ought to have a man on guard!"

"Nonsense!"

"Your life's in danger, father!"

"My financial affairs will be in danger, at least, if I waste time in idle talk!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "And you have your guests to consider, Herbert. I shall see little or nothing of them; but if you ask schoolboys to stay with you here, you must give them some attention!"

"Oh, Pon & Co. are all right! They've gone for a walk," said Vernon-Smith. "Never mind them now."

"And Bunter—"

"Blow Bunter!" growled the Bounder.

Mr. Vernon-Smith spun round on his swivel chair and stared at his son with a stern brow.

"Where is Bunter?" he rapped. "I have not seen him since we returned. I asked you to give that boy as good a time as possible here, Herbert. You show a great concern for my safety, but you seem to forget that Bunter intervened, and caused that assassin to miss his aim when he fired on me near Greyfriars School. Giving him a holiday here is not a great reward."

"Larkin says he went off in a car last evening," answered Smithy. "I dare say he's butted in on Wharton—he did last time I was away. He will be back all right for lunch."

"Well, I should like you to treat him well," said the millionaire. "There is such a thing as gratitude, Herbert, and the boy saved me from injury, if he did not actually save my life."

"Oh, he's getting on all right here! He thinks only of grub, and there's tons of grub!" said the Bounder carelessly. "Never mind Bunter."

Smithy had a suspicion as to Billy Bunter's motive for clearing off while he was away. But he did not mention that to his father. Mr. Vernon-Smith had no great liking for the Highcliffe fellows, and he would certainly have been very much annoyed had he been aware that they lost no opportunity of ragging the fat Owl of Greyfriars.

"Well, well, don't forget what we owe to the boy!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith, and he spun his chair round again. "And now, Herbert, go and join your friends—you are neglecting them, and I am busy."

The millionaire spoke with his back to Smithy, and he was already taking the receiver off the telephone for another call.

The Bounder gave his portly back an

irritated stare, and lounged across to the french windows.

He stepped out into a path that led away through the thick shrubberies, with a clouded brow.

Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith gave hardly a thought to the danger that had dogged his steps all through Easter—partly because his mind was crammed with financial affairs, partly because he had a nerve of iron and was constitutionally fearless. So far as he thought of his enemy at all, he thought of him with careless contempt.

But Smithy could not take it so coolly and carelessly. The black sheep of the Remove, the scapegrace of Greyfriars, had at least one redeeming quality—affection for his father. A

ear, and he stopped and looked round. Nobody was allowed in the little garden on which the millionaire's study opened at the back of the mansion; but it sounded as if someone was there.

"Is that you, Pon?" called out Vernon-Smith. It occurred to him that his Highcliffe friends might have come to look for him.

Vernon-Smith left the path and stepped through the thicket of big rhododendrons from which he had heard the sound.

The next moment he uttered a gasping cry as he glimpsed a dark, swarthy face, with startled, flashing black eyes.

For a split second the Bounder of Greyfriars stared blankly at the dark face of the Italian—the face of the

and rolled him out of sight in the shrubbery. Then, with the crouching step of a beast of prey, he crept up the path towards the open french windows of the room where the millionaire sat at the roll-top desk. The black eyes glittered in at the window, and the automatic was gripped hard in the dusky hand.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

A Highcliffe Rag!

"THAT Greyfriars freak!" said Ponsonby.

He stopped on the long avenue at Seahill Park, and stared at a car that was turning in at the gateway from the road.



"Smithy's father never sent this telegram!" roared Wharton. "It was handed in at Wimford by Bunter. That's why that fat villain went down to Wimford in the car this morning. It was to send this spoof telegram with Mr. Vernon-Smith's name signed to it!" "Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter, sitting on the floor, gurgling and rubbing his head.

peril that threatened himself would not have shaken the Bounder's nerve in the least: but his father's peril haunted and troubled him.

Unwillingly, Mr. Vernon-Smith had agreed to stay in the Sussex mansion till the police succeeded in tracking down the Italian who sought his life—his rival for the N'gombo Concession in East Africa. He had only agreed to that because Smithy was determined not to leave him so long as the danger lasted, and he would not spoil his son's Easter holidays.

But in conceding so much, Mr. Vernon-Smith considered that he had conceded enough. The idea of employing a detective to watch over his safety in the crowded mansion made him snort with scorn. The Bounder had urged it—without success.

Smithy went slowly down the path through the shrubbery. He was, as his father had said, neglecting his guests, and he was going to look for the Highcliffe fellows.

A rustle in the shrubbery caught his

sniper who was seeking his father's life—a face he knew only too well.

Then he made a desperate backward leap as the Italian sprang towards him. A moment more, and he would have been speeding back up the path, to shout a warning to his father.

But that moment was not granted him.

Swift as he was the swarthy scoundrel was swifter. He was on the schoolboy with a spring like a tiger's, and something hard and heavy struck the Bounder on the back of the head.

He pitched forward, and fell on his face.

It was the heavy butt of an automatic pistol that had struck him down. The Italian, breathing hard, bent over him, the weapon raised for another blow, if it had been needed.

But it was not needed. Herbert Vernon-Smith lay like a log at his feet, stunned and senseless.

"Va bene!" breathed the man from Milan.

He grasped the senseless schoolboy.

Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour grinned at the sight of the fat junior sitting in the car.

There was something rather comic in the way Billy Bunter was spending his Easter holidays.

A guest, who was not wanted by his host, and was ragged by his fellow guests at every opportunity, could hardly have enjoyed those holidays to the full, even at so magnificent an establishment as Seahill Park.

Smithy did not want Bunter there, but he acceded to his father's wishes. Pon & Co. did not want Bunter there, and they coolly disregarded any wishes but their own.

At school the Highcliffe knuts were up against Greyfriars all the time. They could stretch a point in favour of the wealthy Bounder. But they were not stretching any points in favour of a fellow like Bunter—a hooker-on, and a picker-up of crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.

Twice during absences of Vernon-Smith.

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Smith, Bunter had bolted from that palatial abode, to escape ragging at the hands of Pon & Co.

Each time they had rather expected that he would be fed-up and stay away. But he turned up again like a bad penny. And here he was again,

"I suppose he's goin' to haunt us these hols," remarked Gadsby. "We shall never see the last of him!"

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Smithy may clear off again," grinned Monson. "If he does, we'll take jolly good care to bag that fat cad next time, and stick him out on the rock in the bay, to be cut off by the tide. If that doesn't feed him up, nothin' will!"

"Smithy won't be clearin' off again in a hurry," said Ponsonby. "From what I hear, he's persuaded his father to spend the rest of Easter here with him—on account of that gunman who's been pottin' at him. But—"

Ponsonby glanced up the long avenue towards the house.

No one was in sight.

It was a quarter of a mile from the mansion to the gates, and the avenue wound through tall oaks and beeches.

"Stop the car!" said Pon.

"I—I say, Smithy won't like it!" said Gadsby. "And—and the old bean's about now. We can't—"

"The old bean's stickin' in the house, with his rotten financial schemin'," said Pon. "And Smithy's not here. They won't even know that Bunter has come back, if they don't see him. And they won't see him if he goes for a walk with us, and we leave him high and dry."

Pon's comrades looked a little dubious. Ragging Bunter while Smithy was away was one thing; but ragging him while Smithy and his father were in the house was rather another.

But Ponsonby had his way, as he

generally did with the knotty Highcliffe crowd.

He stepped out into the middle of the avenue, and held up his hand to the chauffeur, who slowed down.

Billy Bunter sat up and took notice at once.

A moment ago Bunter's fat thoughts had been concentrated chiefly on lunch. He had had a quick run across from Surrey; and it was not yet lunch-time. But his thoughts dwelt on that meal in happy anticipation.

But he forgot lunch at the sight of the Highcliffians in the shady avenue. He glared at them through his big spectacles, and squeaked hastily to Williams:

"Don't stop! Drive right on! Stamp on the gas! Get on—do you hear?"

"But, sir—"

"Drive on, I tell you!" roared Bunter.

Williams was in rather a difficulty. He would willingly have driven on at Bunter's order. But Pon & Co. had lined up in front of the car. He could not drive over them.

He sounded his horn, but the fellows in front did not stir. They were quite well aware that Williams would not run them down. He had to stop or slaughter them, and he stopped.

"You silly chump!" yelled Bunter, in angry alarm. "Will you drive on? Do you hear me, you fool?"

"Can't run over the young gentlemen, sir," said Williams.

"Get on, I tell you!" yelled Bunter. "I'll speak to Mr. Vernon-Smith about this, if you don't get on! I'll have you sacked! Do you hear?"

Williams, really, could not drive on, with four fellows bunched in front of the car, all of them guests of his master's son.

"P'raps they only want to speak to you, sir," he suggested.

"You silly idiot! Drive on!" howled Bunter. "I'll get you the sack if you don't!"

That mode of address was not calculated to enlist Williams' sympathy. He did not answer; he sat tight.

Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour stood in front of the halted car, to make sure that it did not stir.

Ponsonby, grinning, came up to the door.

Billy Bunter blinked at him apprehensively.

"So you're back," said Pon cheerfully.

"Ye-e-es, old chap!" gasped Bunter. "Jig-jig-jolly glad to see you again, old fuf-fuf-fellow!"

"Glad to see you, old bean," said Pon affably. "We've rather missed you."

"Absolutely!" grinned Vavasour.

"Let the car go on, and walk up to the house with us, will you, Bunter?" went on Pon, in the same affable tone.

"N-n-no!" gasped Bunter. "I—I'm rather tired. I—I want to see Smithy, too. I—I'll walk another time, old chap, with pleasure. N-n-not just now."

"Lovely mornin' for a stroll," said Pon, opening the door of the car. "Can't I persuade you to step out and walk, Bunter?"

"Oh, do, old chap!" said Monson.

"Come on, old fellow!" said Pon, taking hold of Bunter's fat arm. "I'll help you out, old bean. You want a little help to lift your weight—what?"

"Look here—"

"Comin'?" grinned Pon, pinching the fat arm.

Bunter gave a squeak.

"Beast! Leggo! I'm not coming!" he hooted. "Look here, you Highcliffe cad, leggo my arm! Beast!"

Ponsonby, grinning, jerked at the fat arm. Billy Bunter rolled out of the car, spluttering.

The dandy of Highcliffe kept hold of the fat arm. He was not going to give Bunter a chance of bolting, if he could help it.

But, as it happened, he couldn't.

Billy Bunter struggled to wrench his arm away.

Pon compressed his grip on it, till the hapless fat Owl squeaked with pain. In sheer desperation, Bunter kicked.

He kicked blindly; but his boot landed on Pon's shin, and it landed hard. The yell that came from Cecil Ponsonby rang far and wide over the park.

He released Bunter and staggered away, howling with pain. Standing on one leg, he lifted the other, and clasped his damaged shin with both hands in anguish.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He gave Pon one terrified blink, and bolted. The dandy of Highcliffe had intended to rag him, anyhow. But what he would do if he got hold of Bunter again, after his shin had been hacked, did not bear thinking of.

The fat Owl ran for his life up the avenue.

Gadsby jumped at him as he went, and the desperate fat Owl swung out a fat fist, which fairly crashed in Gadsby's face, and sent him spinning.

Monson, rushing on, stumbled over him as he sprawled, and they mixed up on the earth.

Bunter tore on.

"Ow! Yow! Wow!" Pon was yelling frantically. "After him! Collar him! I'll smash him! Get hold of him, you fools! Ow!"

Williams, sitting at the wheel, stared. Like most of the numerous staff



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employed at Seahill Park, he had been surprised by the manners and customs of Master Herbert's guests. But it was no business of his to interfere in the extraordinary proceedings of those guests. He sat and stared as Bunter flew wildly up the avenue, with Vavasour on his track, and Gadsby and Monson picking themselves up and joining in the chase.

Ponsonby was left standing stork-like on one leg, clasping the other, and spluttering with rage and pain, as the fleeing fat Owl and his pursuers vanished up the long avenue.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter's Hat Trick!

"**O**H crikey!" gasped Bunter. He flew.

Bunter was no sprinter, but circumstances alter cases. With fierce pursuit at his heels, the fat Owl of the Remove could put on speed, and he did. He puffed and he blew, but while he blew he flew.

He had a hope of sighting Smithy or Mr. Vernon-Smith on the avenue but neither of them was to be seen.

Fast behind him came the scudding footsteps of the Highcliffians.

He blinked back over a fat shoulder. Vavasour was hardly a dozen yards behind. Farther back, Gadsby and Monson were coming on. They were keen to collar Bunter before he got within sight of the house.

Bunter was equally keen not to be collared. But, fast as he flew, the Highcliffians were gaining.

"Oh lor!" gurgled Bunter.

He had not expected this. He had taken it for granted that it would be all right if he returned after Mr. Vernon-Smith had returned. Evidently he had taken a little too much for granted.

He pounded and panted on, but he knew that he would never reach the house ahead of the Highcliffians. And as he charged round a winding bend in the avenue he suddenly darted off the drive among the trees that lined it.

Panting, he parked himself behind a big oak.

It was his only chance. For the moment he was out of sight of the enemy, and if they ran on without spotting that he had stopped, he had a chance.

A moment or two later Vavasour came speeding round the curve.

He shot onward.

There was another winding curve ahead, and no doubt Vavasour took it for granted that Bunter had gone round it.

Anyhow, it did not occur to him that the fat junior had stopped, and he tore on; and a moment later, Gadsby and Monson tore on after him, past the big oak that screened Bunter.

"Oh crikey!" breathed the fat Owl of the Remove.

He gasped with relief as the racing footsteps died away up the avenue towards the distant mansion.

Leaning on the trunk of the oak, Billy Bunter pumped in breath. He mopped his perspiring brow.

But he lingered only long enough to recover his breath. He knew that they would soon spot his strategy, and come harking back for him. Still gasping, the fat Owl cut away across the park, leaving the avenue behind.

In the distance he heard calling voices. The Highcliffians were hunting him, already aware that he had dodged off the drive.

The fat Owl hurried on.

He dared not venture back to the avenue, or to the terrace in front of the house, where he would be in full view.

Where Smithy was, where Mr. Vernon-Smith might be, he had not the faintest idea. But he dared not let the Highcliffians spot him till he was in the protecting presence of one or the other. He threaded his way through shrubberies round the mansion, with the intention of getting in at some open door at the back, while the Highcliffians were hunting him in the front. If those unutterable beasts, Harry Wharton & Co., had come back with him in the car this would never have happened. But as it was, only strategy could save him.

Wind was short, but Billy Bunter did not halt till he was at the back of the imposing mansion of Seahill Park. There he leaned on a tree by a shady path and pumped in breath.

The path where he had stopped ran through great masses of rhododendrons towards the house. That it was Mr. Vernon-Smith's private garden, on which the french windows of his study opened, Bunter was not aware; neither would he have cared had he known. Keeping clear of Pon & Co. was the urgent, pressing matter—much more urgent than respecting the privacy of a busy financial gentleman.

Having recovered his breath once more, Billy Bunter rolled on along that path, hoping that it led to a door.

He stopped suddenly, staring through his big spectacles at something that lay on the edge of the path.

It was a straw hat, with the crown smashed in.

Bunter blinked at it.

Certainly it did not belong to any of the Highcliffians; they were nowhere near. It must be Smithy's hat. But why the Bunder had left it there was rather a puzzle.

He picked it up, blinking at it. Undoubtedly it was Smithy's hat; his initials were stamped inside. The top was smashed right in, evidently by a terrific blow.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter.

If Smithy had been wearing that hat when that blow fell on it, he must have captured a fearful knock!

Bunter blinked round him. There was no sign of Smithy to be seen. That a stunned and senseless figure lay within six feet of him, hidden in the rhododendrons, Bunter had not the faintest idea.

With the hat in his fat hand, he rolled on towards the house, and came in sight of the open french windows of Mr. Vernon-Smith's study.

Then he stopped again, staring so hard that his little round eyes seemed on the point of bulging through his big, round spectacles.

He was staring at a figure in the open window.

A man was there, his back to Bunter, half-crouching, as he peered in. Of his face Bunter could see nothing, but he had a glimpse of black hair under a hat.

His fat heart almost missed a beat.

There was something familiar to his eyes in that agile, half-crouching figure. It recalled the Italian he had seen watching the Lantham road on the day of breaking-up at Greyfriars School—the gunman who had watched for Mr. Vernon-Smith's car, and fired on it when it came.

Bunter's fat face was drained of colour as he realised that it was the same man.

He stood rooted.

The man crouching at the open french window, was watching someone within—someone who evidently was not looking

towards the window, or he would have seen the man there.

Bunter could guess whom he was watching. He could not see into the room, but he guessed that Mr. Vernon-Smith was there, and that the eyes of the assassin were fixed on him.

The fat junior hardly breathed.

On the grassy path his footsteps had made no sound. The Italian had heard nothing, and had not turned his head. Bunter was not ten feet from him.

As the fat Owl stood rooted, pale with terror, the Italian moved. His right arm rose, and something glimmered in the April sunshine.

Bunter knew only too well what it was. It was a firearm, and it was being trained on the man who sat within, his face turned from the window, unconscious of danger, while the wings of the Angel of Death rustled over him.

Then Billy Bunter acted—suddenly, without even thinking. His arm went up, Smithy's crushed straw hat in his hand. With all his force he flung it at the back of the Italian's head.

Crash!

The missile struck the back of the black, greasy head, and the startled man toppled over. He went headlong into the room, the automatic exploding as he fell.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Shot for Shot!

BANG!

Samuel Vernon-Smith bounded. Sitting at his roll-top, he was speaking into the telephone, his back half-turned to the french window. Far away in London, some other financial gentleman was listening to his instructions.

That financial gentleman in London was probably surprised by the suddenness with which Mr. Vernon-Smith cut off.

The roar of the automatic, as the Italian pitched headlong into the room, caused Mr. Vernon-Smith to wheel round in his chair, dropping the receiver as he did so.

He spun round.

His eyes started at the sight of the sprawling man; sprawling on his face in the french window, his legs outside.

The Italian's hat had fallen off, revealing thick, black hair. Beside him, as he sprawled, lay another hat—a schoolboy's straw hat!

Only for a split second did Mr. Vernon-Smith stare. Then his hand shot to a drawer of the desk and whipped a revolver therefrom. The look on his face was not that of a City financier. It was such a look as Samuel Vernon-Smith might have worn in old half-forgotten days, when he had "packed" a gun in a wild land.

The Italian sprawled—but only for a moment. He was up again, with the nimble agility of a wildcat, his black eyes ablaze.

But even as he leaped to his feet, the millionaire pulled trigger, firing on him with as little compunction as he would have felt in shooting a mad dog.

The bullet cut a lock of black hair from the Italian's head. The next would have gone through the head itself—had not the swarthy rascal made a swift backward leap from the window. As it was, the bullet missed by hardly an inch.

The automatic was still in the swarthy hand. Had the rascal been prepared for a desperate fight to the death, he had as much chance as Mr. Vernon-Smith. But he was not there for that.

Man to man, weapon to weapon, the man of the weaker race quailed, and fled.

The millionaire rushed to the window, the revolver smoking in his hand, his face grim, ruthless.

He fired again from the window as the desperate rascal leaped away into the shrubberies.

Had the Italian run by the path he would have remained exposed to the fire, and there was not the slightest doubt that the millionaire would have shot him in the back as he ran. But he leaped into the thick shrubberies, hunting cover like a hunted beast.

Mr. Vernon-Smith rushed out of the french window, firing into the shrubberies as he rushed.

Crack, crack! rang the revolver.

Then, with set teeth, he darted in pursuit.

But Mr. Vernon-Smith, whose nerve was of iron, was portly and stout, shorter of wind than of courage. He halted, panting.

In the distance there was a rustle. Up went his arm—and he fired as he saw a scrambling figure on the top of a distant wall.

But the figure was gone in a moment.

Mr. Vernon-Smith gave an angry snort.

He had had the narrowest escape of his life; but he was not thinking of that. He was intensely exasperated by the escape of the man from Milan.

He tramped back to the french window of his study.

Larkin, the butler, was in the room now—the firing had been heard. Larkin's plump face stared out at him.

Mr. Vernon-Smith hastily thrust the revolver into his pocket. He was a practical business man, and bated the slightest spot of the melodramatic.

"What—what—" Larkin was stammering.

"That Italian rascal again!" grunted Mr. Vernon-Smith. "No harm done! He must have crept to my window—What is that, Larkin?"

The butler had picked up the straw hat.

"Master Herbert's hat, sir!" said Larkin. "It has been damaged—"

"Herbert was with me not ten minutes ago!" grunted Mr. Vernon-Smith. He stared round, and for the first time observed a fat figure rooted on the path through the shrubbery. "Who—Is that Bunter?"

"Oh crikey!"

"What the dickens are you doing here, Bunter?" exclaimed Mr. Vernon-Smith testily. "You should not come in this way. This is my private room!"

"Oh lor'! Oh—ooogh!" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I say, is—is—is he gone?"

"Did you see the man? Yes; he is gone! Pull yourself together, boy!" added Mr. Vernon-Smith, with a touch of contempt. "There is no danger!"

"Oh lor'!" stuttered Bunter. "I—I saw him, you know, and chuckled Smithy's hat at him—oh crikey!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith jumped.

"You did what?" he exclaimed. It had not occurred to him yet to wonder why the Italian had tumbled headlong into the room—though that tumble had undoubtedly saved his life.

"Oh dear!" mumbled Bunter. "He—he was just going to shoot—oh crikey—and I got him on the back of the napper with that hat, and pitched him over—oh crumbs!"

"Good gad!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith, while Larkin stared at the Owl of Greyfriars. "I think I understand! I am much obliged to you, Bunter—for
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the second time, my boy! By gad! But what the dooce were you doing with my son's hat? Where is Herbert?"

"I—I don't know!" gasped Bunter. "I haven't seen him! I picked up his hat on the path, and I was going to give it to Smithy when I saw him, and then I—I saw that beast—"

Mr. Vernon-Smith's face changed. He made a rapid stride towards Bunter.

His son had left him and gone down that path—and Bunter had picked up his hat there, knocked in by a violent blow. A terrible fear was in the millionaire's heart that his son had fallen in with the lurking assassin.

"Take me to where you picked up that hat—quick!" he snapped.

"I—I say—"

"Quick!" roared Mr. Vernon-Smith, in a voice that made Bunter jump.

"Oh, yes!" stuttered Bunter. "This way!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith hurried after him down the path, Larkin following.

The fat junior halted at the spot where he had found the hat.

"Here!" he began. "Smithy wasn't here! I saw the hat—"

Mr. Vernon-Smith stared about him. There were signs of trampling feet in the shrubbery beside the path. With a white face, the millionaire tramped into the shrubbery. The next moment there was a cry:

"Larkin—here!"

The butler hurried after him.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Billy Bunter, and his eyes almost popped through his spectacles, as Mr. Vernon-Smith and Larkin emerged from the shrubbery carrying between them the Bounder of Greyfriars, stunned and senseless.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Taken for a Walk!

SNORE!

"Oh, listen to the band!" grinned Gadsby.

The Highcliffe knuts grinned—with the exception of Ponsonby.

Pon, with a bruise on his shin, and an ache there, was not feeling disposed to grin at anything.

It was a warm April afternoon the following day.

Pon & Co. were not precisely enjoying themselves. They were at Seahill Park for a rowdy holiday with the Bounder—and with an eye to annexing some of his ample wealth through the medium of banker or bridge.

Mr. Vernon-Smith's presence had a rather restraining influence on their activities in that line, though they saw little of him.

To make matters worse, Herbert Vernon-Smith had gone to his room that afternoon with an aching head. He was not available, even had he felt disposed to play "the giddy goat" while his father was in the house.

Possibly Pon & Co. were sorry for their Greyfriars pal's injury; but if so, it did not seem to trouble them very much.

They spent an hour after lunch knocking the balls about in the billiards-room; but without Smithy to stake fivers on the game, they were soon bored with billiards.

They strolled out of the house, peevish and discontented. They could have found a little amusement in ragging Bunter—but the fat Owl seemed to have disappeared.

Then, as they slouched along a path at a distance from the house, a sound like the rumbling whirl of thunder fell on their ears, proceeding from a little summer-house.

It was the deep and resonant snore of William George Bunter.

Billy Bunter had done well at lunch. As he had told the Famous Five, at Wharton Lodge, the grab at Seahill Park was first-class. Bunter was the man to do it justice.

Perhaps he had done it a little more than justice. Loaded well above the Plimsoll line, the fat junior rolled away to the secluded summer-house, for the rest he really needed after his exertions.

He would have preferred to take his nap in the hammock on the lawn; but that was in sight of the windows of the billiards-room, where the Highcliffe knuts had gathered. He doubted whether he would have reposed in peace in that hammock if Pon & Co. had spotted him there.

Now, however, they had spotted him.

Had Bunter slumbered in silence, Pon & Co. would have sauntered on, never knowing that he was in the summer-house.

But at the sound of that hefty snore they halted and looked in with grinning faces.

Billy Bunter was reclining, or, rather, sprawling, on a rustic seat, his eyes shut behind his big spectacles, his mouth open.

He slept, and he snored, unconscious of danger.

Ponsonby's eyes glittered at him.

"By gad!" he breathed. "This is our chance!"

"Looks like it!" chuckled Monson.

"I say, don't forget the old bean!" said Gadsby uneasily. "He won't like us ragging that fat blighter—he's been making rather a fuss of him—"

"And Smithy—" said Vavasour doubtfully.

"The old bean can go and eat coke, and Smithy can do the same!" said Ponsonby coolly. "I'm gettin' a bit fed-up with these Smiths, anyhow. We're not gettin' the time we expected here. We were rather fools to come."

"Smithy's worth while," said Monson. "The cad's stacked with tin!"

"First he lands that fat blighter on us, and then he lands his pater!" growled Ponsonby. "And I can't say I like an Italian gunman hanging about the place, either. I'm pretty sure he's the man I ran into in the dark one night last week, who gave me a crack on the head. Not the sort of thing a fellow wants in the holidays."

"Well, we're in jolly good quarters here," said Gadsby, "and I suppose Smithy's pater won't stick here for ever. If he's come here to dodge that gunman, he's had no luck—the man got after him here! They've got a bobby patrolling the place, since what happened yesterday."

Ponsonby was looking round. Except for roofs and chimney-pots, the mansion was shut off from view by trees and shrubberies. Smithy was in his room—his father, doubtless, was deep in financial business in his study—there was no danger of interference.

"Get that fat cad!" said Pon briefly.

"Oh, all right!"

They stepped into the summer-house.

Billy Bunter snored on, dreaming, perhaps, of the gargantuan lunch he had packed away. Certainly he was not dreaming of danger.

Ponsonby, who carried a light walking-cane under his arm, took it in hand, and tapped the Owl's fat little nose with it.

There was a murmur from the sleeping beauty!

"Urrrggh!"

But he did not awaken. Bunter was a good man at slumbering. In that line,



In sheer desperation, Bunter kicked, and his boot landed on Ponsonby's shin. "Yaroooh!" yelled the cad of Highcliffe, clasping his damaged shin. "Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. He gave Ponsonby one terrified blink and bolted.

Rip Van Winkle had nothing on William George Bunter.

Tap!

"Wurrrrgg!" murmured Bunter, at the second tap.

The knuts chuckled.

"My hat! That chap can sleep!" said Gadsby. "Give him another!"

Tap!

"Ooooooh!" gasped Bunter, awakening this time, as Pon gave him quite a severe tap. "Oooogh! Those beastly gnats—ow!"

He rubbed his fat nose.

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

Bunter gave a startled jump. He jammed his spectacles straight on his fat nose, and blinked at Pon & Co. in alarm.

"Oh crikey!" he ejaculated.

He jumped up. But there was no escape for the Owl of Greyfriars. Four grinning young rascals blocked the way.

"I—I say, you fellows—" gasped Bunter.

"Comin' for a walk, old man?" grinned Monson.

"N-n-no! I—I—I'm going to see Smithy, and ask how he is. I—I'm rather anxious about Smithy—"

"You must try to bear your anxiety a little longer, old bloated bean!" said Ponsonby. "You're comin' for a little walk now."

"Beast!" gasped Bunter. "You lemme alone, you Highcliffe cads! I'll jolly well ask Smithy's pater to turn you out, see? I'll jolly well go straight to old Smith, and say—yarooooop!"

A swipe from the cane cut Bunter short.

"Have another?" grinned Ponsonby.

"Ow! Beast! Yow!"

"Better shut up, if you don't want any more! Pin his fins, you men!"

Gadsby and Monson linked their arms in Bunter's. They walked out of the summer-house, with the quaking fat Owl between them.

"I—I say, you fellows—" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, I—I'll go for a walk if you like, but—but leggo my arms—"

"Sure you wouldn't go for a run, instead of a walk, if we did?" asked Gadsby.

"Beast!"

"Get on!" said Ponsonby.

"Look here, I won't go!" yelled Bunter, struggling. "I—yoo-hooop!"

Leave off, you beast! Ow! I wish Bob Cherry was here, you cad! Wow! If those beasts had come, you wouldn't dare to—yoo-hooop!"

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

"Ow! Wow! Yow!" roared Bunter, as Pon's cane whacked on his tight trousers. "Ow! Leave off! I'm coming, ain't I? Ow!"

And Bunter came. There was no help for it! He rolled away, his fat arms linked in Monson's and Gadsby's, Ponsonby and Vavasour following, Pon ready with the cane to touch him up when he lagged.

By a shady path under the old trees, the party reached the wall that enclosed the park on the side towards the sea.

There was a gate that gave directly on the sands, and Ponsonby opened it.

The grinning knuts walked out on the beach, with the dismayed Owl in their midst.

It was a glorious view that met their gaze—if Bunter had cared for it, which he did not at all. It was a vast bay, circled by shelving sands, shut in at either end by high cliffs, honeycombed with caves.

Harry Wharton & Co., had they been there, would have found plenty of pleasant occupation, in clambering over the cliffs, and exploring the deep caves. But cliff-climbing and exploring were not to the taste of the Highcliffe knuts. They had not gone out on the shore at all, except every now and then to bathe. Now, however, they were going out, for a different purpose!

They tramped down the sands, a swipe from Pon's cane helping Bunter on every now and then. From the shore, a long spit of sand ran out into the bay, to a distance of nearly half a mile, ending in a mass of rocks, on which stood a fishing-hut, which belonged to Seahill Park. The foreshore in that spot was the property of Mr. Vernon-Smith, and barred to the general public. Not a soul was in sight, in either direction, as the party crossed the sands to the sea.

"Oh, you beasts!" groaned Bunter.

He knew the intention of the Highcliffians. As they reached the long spit of sand, the fat Owl struggled again.

At low tide, that pathway to the rocky islet was above water. But when the tide came in, it was deep under the waves, and anyone stranded on the rock was cut off from the land. And the tide now was near the turn.

Whack, whack!

"Ow! Wow! Beast! Yow!"

Bunter rolled on. With many chuckles, the four Highcliffe juniors walked him out to the low rock in the bay. It was hardly half an acre in extent, and the wooden hut, used for fishing tackle and such things, was the only building on it.

Ponsonby unlatched the door and threw it open.

"Roll him in!" he said.

"I—I say, you fellows—" howled Bunter.

A kick helped Bunter into the hut. He rolled in, stumbled, and sprawled.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Pon & Co.

"Ow!"

Billy Bunter sat up, gasping, and blinked at them. He knew what they intended to do; yet he could hardly believe that they would have the nerve, and reckless brutality, to strand him on that rock.

Three of them, perhaps, might have relented—but Ponsonby was adamant. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,524.

Twinges of pain in his bruised shin did not have an anesthetic effect on the dandy of Highcliffe.

"Stick there, you fat porker!" said Ponsonby. "The tide will be up in an hour. It won't be down again till after dark. I advise you not to try that path in the dark—it's a bit dangerous if you do! You'll be home with the milk in the morning, old fat bean! Think what an appetite you'll have for brekker."

"Beast!"

"Do you lots of good to miss a meal or two?" chuckled Monson. "You took enough on board at lunch to last you for days and days!"

"Oh, you rotter!" groaned Bunter.

"You were told that you weren't wanted here," said Ponsonby. "If you stick where you're not wanted, you Greyfriars freak, you can take what's comin' to you! Tie his legs with one of those ropes, Gaddy—keep him safe till the tide's up."

There was plenty of tackle of all sorts in the hut. Gadsby took a rope, and knotted it round Bunter's fat legs, tying it behind him.

Bunter had a good hour's work ahead of him, to get loose. By that time, the incoming tide would be washing over the sandy path to the shore.

Pon & Co. turned away, and left him.

"I say, you fellows—" yelled Bunter desperately.

Pon slammed the door of the hut. The four Highcliffians walked off the rock, and followed the sandy path, over which trickles of water were already creeping.

Pon was grinning with vindictive satisfaction—but Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour looked, as they felt, uneasy. They were hard-hearted young rascals, but not quite Pon's equal in that line.

"I—I say—" muttered Gadsby.

Pon gave him a look.

"Well?" he sneered.

"I say, it's rather thick! Look here—"

"Don't be a namby-pamby fool, Gaddy! After a night out on that rock, I fancy that fat freak will get fed-up with this place, and clear!"

"I dare say. But—"

"It's rather thick, Pon!" muttered Monson.

"Absolutely!" murmured Vavasour.

Ponsonby yawned.

"Time we got back," he remarked.

"Smithy may feel fit for a little game by this time. You fellows comin', or standin' there cacklin' like geese?"

Pon's friends followed him in silence.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

In the Dark!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH threw down his cards, and pressed his hand for a moment to his aching forehead.

The sound of the dressing-bell was heard from afar.

In the Bounder's handsome room a party was gathered. Mr. Vernon-Smith probably supposed that his son was lying down, resting his bruised head. It would have been better for the Bounder had he been doing so. As a matter of fact, he was sitting at a card-table in his room, with Pon & Co. sitting round it, and they had been card-playing for a couple of hours or more.

Safe there from the parental eye, the scapegrace of Greyfriars had been indulging in the "rowdy" pursuits for which he had asked the Highcliffe fellows to the house.

Pon & Co. had sought him in his quarters, and found him in a savage temper and by no means pleased to see

them. But the hardy Bounder hated to play the invalid, and he chose to make light of a tap on the head—severe tap as it had been. With iron endurance, he sat and played cards and smoked cigarettes, because he did not choose to let the Highcliffe gang spot a sign of weakness in him.

With a splitting headache and feeling utterly "rotten" from head to foot, he was not likely to enjoy that game.

But he sat it out, in an atmosphere of smoke, till the sound of the dressing-bell gave him an excuse for "chucking" it. Involuntarily he pressed his hand to his aching head, but withdrew it at once as he caught Pon's sarcastic glance. His eyes gleamed.

The effect of his injury was chiefly to make Smithy bad-tempered, and the society of the knuts had not improved his temper. The wretched cards had been almost swimming before his eyes by the time he was able to get rid of them.

"Feelin' bad, old man?" asked Pon. Possibly he intended his tone to be sympathetic, but he could not help a sarcastic note creeping in. "That Italian merchant gave you rather a knock yesterday."

"No!" snapped the Bounder.

"You had a nasty crack, old chap," said Gadsby, the least unfeeling of the four. "I'd have kept that bandage on to-day—"

"Rot!"

"Well, we'd better go and change, I suppose," drawled Ponsonby. "Give you your revenge any time you like, Smithy."

Grunt!

Smithy, generally good at cards, had had bad luck; his game had been bad, as was not to be wondered at, considering the state he was in. Pon & Co. had done very well that afternoon—very well indeed.

Smithy scowled after them as they went, smiling, out of his room. He did not care a straw for the money he had lost, but he hated to be beaten, even in a trivial card-game, by fellows he despised from the bottom of his heart. He was utterly out of sorts, and he knew that they did not care a hoot—indeed, he suspected that Pon was amused.

His face was pale and almost drawn when he came down to dinner.

Pon & Co. lounged in, as easy and elegant as ever—a contrast to the Bounder. His father gave him a sharp and anxious look.

It had been a heavy blow to the millionaire when he found his son senseless in the shrubbery. He had forgotten even finance and the N'gombo Concession in his anxiety for his son till the doctor from Seahill had seen him. Now his anxiety revived.

"Your look ill, my dear boy!" he exclaimed. "Have you had a good rest this afternoon?"

Pon bestowed a wink on his friends, unseen by the millionaire. The Bounder coloured uncomfortably. He would have felt and looked better had he taken his father's advice and rested quietly in his room. Card-playing and smoking had certainly done him no good.

"Oh, I'm all right, father!" he answered. "Bit of a headache, that's all."

"I think perhaps Dr. Peck had better see you again—"

"No fear! I'm all right! I'm not made of putty!" grunted Vernon-Smith.

He did not notice and did not care in the least that Billy Bunter did not roll in for dinner.

But Mr. Vernon-Smith noticed the fat Owl's absence. Seldom, or never, was Bunter late for a meal.

"Please call Master Bunter, Larkin!" he said.

Larkin dispatched one of his myrmidons to Bunter's room. Mr. Vernon-Smith supposed that his fat guest had not heard or heeded the dinner-gong. But the footman came back with the information that Bunter was not in his room, and did not appear to be in the house at all.

Dinner proceeded without Bunter.

Mr. Vernon-Smith was surprised, but it did not occur to him to be alarmed at all. A guest at Seahill Park was at liberty to cut "tiffin" if he liked, and the millionaire only supposed that Bunter had gone on some excursion from which he was late in returning.

The Bounder did not give the fat Owl a thought, and Pon & Co., if they thought of him, kept their thoughts to themselves.

Mr. Vernon-Smith did not linger at table. A large package of African maps had arrived for him that afternoon, and a bundle of documents dealing with the N'gombo Concession, and he was keen to get going on them. He left Smithy and his party at their dessert, but he paused to ask a question as he went.

"Any of you lads know any Portuguese?"

"Any what, sir?" ejaculated Ponsonby, in astonishment.

"Portuguese," said Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Sorry, no!" said Pon. "We don't have Portuguese in the curriculum at Highcliffe, sir."

And the knuts grinned at the idea.

"I suppose not!" grunted Mr. Vernon-Smith. "Same with you at Greyfriars, Herbert—what?"

"Quite!" said the Bounder, with a grin. "I can oblige with bad Latin and worse French; that's the sum total of a Public-school education, father, so far as languages go."

Another grunt from the millionaire.

"I have a bundle of documents in Portuguese to deal with," he said. "The original concessionaire at N'gombo was a Portuguese. I shall have to get a man down from London—some man who hasn't had the advantage of a Public-school education!" added Mr. Vernon-Smith sarcastically.

And he went away to his study, leaving Smithy and his guests to their own devices—which meant a change from dessert to cigarettes as soon as he was gone.

"Hundred up, Smithy?" asked Pon, when they left the dining-room.

"Yes, if you like."

The knutty party adjourned to the billiards-room. The windows of that apartment on the terrace stood wide open, letting in the balmy breath of the dusky April evening.

Gadsby looked out across the starlit woods that surrounded the mansion in the direction of the sea. Far away the rolling waters could be seen glimmering.

He was thinking, rather uneasily, of the fat junior stranded on the rock in the bay. The tide was up, swirling round that lonely rock, and deep over the sandy path to the shore. Gadsby could not feel quite easy in his mind, and Monson and Vavasour shared his feelings to some extent.

But Ponsonby was very bright and cheery. He chalked his cue, with a smile on his face.

Smithy, with a throbbing head, was not in the least inclined for billiards; he would have preferred a walk in the cool gardens, but he was not going to say so.

Pon was very keen. In the Bounder's present rotten state, the dandy of Highcliffe had no doubt of beating him as easily at billiards as at bridge. And a

fiver was a fiver! Smithy's ample supply of fivers was his chief, if not his only, attraction for his friends from Highcliffe.

"You men seen anything of Bunter?" the Bounder asked abruptly.

"Bunter?" repeated Pon, while his friends exchanged glances.

"They said nothing, leaving the lying to Pon. It came easily to him.

"It's odd that the fat cormorant has cut tiffin," said Smithy, with a sharp look at Ponsonby. "He never does."

"Not what one would expect of him, is it?" said Pon blandly. "Perhaps he hasn't recovered from lunch yet. He did rather well, I remember."

"I've told you fellows that he's to be let alone here!" grunted the Bounder.

"I don't want him here any more than you do, but my father's rather particular about it. And from what I've been told, it was jolly lucky that he was here—yesterday, at least! Has he gone?"

"No such luck, I'm afraid!" said Ponsonby, shaking his head.

"If you've been ragging—"

"My dear man, I wouldn't touch the fat blighter with a barge-pole! I hope none of you fellows has been ragging Bunter!" said Ponsonby, glancing round at his friends. "Ready, Smithy?"

Smithy nodded. He was suspicious; but he did not, as a matter of fact, care very much what might have happened to keep Bunter away from dinner. He gave his attention to the game.

The Bounder had a skill at billiards that was no great credit to him. But his skill was gone now.

He concentrated on beating Pon—not because he cared anything for the stake on the game, but for the satisfaction of disappointing his honoured guest.

But it was useless. His head was aching, his eye uncertain, his hand unsteady.

Pon ran him out with ease, and winked at Monson as he pocketed a five-pound note.

Smithy throw down his cue, with a scowl, and went to the doorway, and

stood looking out into the April starlight.

"Play, old man?" asked Monson.

"No!" grunted the Bounder.

The Highcliffe knuts exchanged a sarcastic glance, indicative of their opinion of their host's manners.

Monson started a game with Pon—which was not wholly satisfactory; the Highcliffe knuts had not come there to win one another's cash!

Smithy glanced round at Gadsby and Vavasour.

"Anybody like a walk?" he asked. "It's lovely outside!"

Gadsby yawned.

"Well, I'm markin' for Pon!" he said.

"Too much fag, dear boy, absolutely!" said Vavasour.

The Bounder grunted and stepped out on the terrace, leaving the Highcliffe fellows to themselves.

The cool air made his burning forehead feel better. He descended the steps to the lawn and strolled round

(Continued on next page.)

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the house. The click of billiards balls from the open windows died away behind him.

With his hands in his pockets, a half-smoked cigarette in his mouth, the Bounder strolled round to the garden on which his father's study windows looked. A burly figure loomed up in the shadows—that of the Seahill constable, who was now on duty at the millionaire's mansion.

Satisfied that his father was well guarded, Smithy walked away again by a dusky path under the old trees.

He was in no hurry to return to the society of his Highcliffe friends. He was, in fact, getting rather tired of Pon & Co. with their slacking ways and sordid greed.

His "rowdy" holiday was not panning out as he had anticipated; partly because of the shadow of peril that hung over his father, partly because Smithy, at heart, was not half the blackguard he supposed himself to be. His father had told him that he would have done better to ask a Greyfriars party for the holidays instead of the Highcliffe crew; and Smithy was beginning to realise that his father was right.

Tramping moodily under the shadowy old trees, the Bounder was thinking of his father's danger, which was seldom out of his thoughts. He was not even dreaming of danger to himself.

It came—suddenly, taking him completely off his guard. There was a stealthy step in the darkness under the trees, and he was gripped from behind.

Before he knew what was happening he was down on the earth, with a knee planted in the small of his back.

He struggled and panted:

"Pon, you fool—"

He supposed, for a moment, that it was a "rag"—that the Highcliffe fellows had followed him and collared him by way of a joke.

But the next moment he knew!

"Silenzio!" came a deep, threatening whisper.

A thrill ran through Herbert Vernon-Smith from head to foot. That whispered Italian word told him all.

Pinned down, helpless in the darkness, he was in the grasp of his father's enemy!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Held by the Enemy!

THE grip on the Bounder was like iron.

He struggled—but he was in the hands of a man twice, or thrice, too strong for him. His resistance only made him realise his utter helplessness. But he twisted his head round to look up.

The figure was dim and shadowy, half seen in the gloom, but he had a glimpse of glinting black eyes in a swarthy face.

It was the Italian; the man from Milan, who called himself "Nessuno," or "Nobody"—his name, his identity, unknown.

Even with a police-constable patrolling the place the man was there, lurking in the deep shadows. But he had found the millionaire guarded against him—and he had turned the attack on the millionaire's son. What did he intend?

"You hound!" breathed the Bounder.

"Silenzio, signorino!" came the hissing whisper again.

A hand closed over the Bounder's mouth.

Smithy struggled desperately, resisting with every ounce of his strength, though his efforts blinded him with pain.

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in his throbbing head. It was futile—the grip on him was overpowering. He would have shouted, in spite of the fierce warning whisper, but the hand on his mouth kept him silent—and it stirred only to thrust a gag between his teeth.

Then, quietly and coolly, a cord was knotted round his wrists, and another round his ankles.

The Italian rose—Vernon-Smith lying helpless at his feet.

The Bounder's eyes blazed up at him. What did the dastard intend? Again and again he had sought the life of the man who held the option on the N'gombo Concession—but it could not serve him to harm the financier's son. What could he intend? It was not fear, but bitter and savage rage that filled the Bounder's heart and gleamed from his eyes.

In silence the man stooped and lifted Vernon-Smith. He was flung over a shoulder like a sack and carried as easily as an infant.

Softly, silently, the man from Milan tramped along the dusky path under the trees. Smithy's throbbing brain was in a whirl. He knew the direction the man was taking—that of the gate in the sea-wall. Why was the Italian carrying him down to the sea?

In spite of his courage and his nerve Vernon-Smith felt a chill at his heart. For what reason could the dastard be bearing him down to the dark waters—what reason but one?

Swiftly he was carried by the dusky path—swiftly but silently.

They reached the gate, and passed out on the beach.

The deep murmur of the sea was in the Bounder's ears now. The tide was in, washing almost up to the sea-wall. A shudder ran through him at the thought of sliding, bound and powerless, into the merciless waters.

Only too well he knew that, if his death served the Italian's purpose, his life would count as no more than a gnat's. But what purpose could it serve? It would not drive the millionaire to surrender the N'gombo Concession. Far from that. But what else could the swarthy villain intend?

In silence the Italian carried him down the sands under the glimmer of the spring starlight. He stopped on a shelf of rock that jutted from the beach, beyond which was deep water.

The Bounder shut his teeth on the gag! Was it coming now?

He was lowered—not into the water, but into a boat that was tied up to the rock.

He lay on his back in the bottom of the boat as the Italian stepped in after him and cast loose the painter.

The boat rocked out on the water. It rocked and tossed on the surge of the tide.

The man from Milan pushed off with an oar, and sat down to row. His black eyes, glinting in the starshine, fixed on the pale, furious face that glared up at him. A faint smile came over the swarthy Italian's face, and he leaned towards the bound schoolboy and removed the gag from his mouth. On the waters that washed the lonely beach they were far beyond the chance of a shout being heard.

"You hound!" panted the Bounder. He gave a wrench at his bonds, but the pang that shot through his head as he did so caused him to desist. "Oh, you rotter!" he panted. "If I had my hands loose—"

The Italian pulled at the oars, pulling out to sea. The shore and the dark mass of woods surrounding Seahill Park became a blur in the starlight. Round the boat washed the glimmering sea.

"What's your game, you cur?" hissed the Bounder. Unless the man was taking him out to deep water, to sink him there, he could not guess.

"Do not fear for your life, signorino—at least, not yet!" said the man from Milan quietly. "Possibly you know nothing of the affairs of the Signor Vernon-Smith—"

The Bounder interrupted him savagely.

"I know all about the N'gombo Concession, you rascal!" he said between his teeth. "I know that tin deposits have been discovered at N'gombo, on the border between Kenya and Abyssinia, and that a crew of Italians would like to steal it, now that they have stolen Abyssinia. And I know that N'gombo will never fall into your clutches."

"Vedremo, vedremo!" said the man from Milan. "We shall see. I have offered to buy, but the signor will not sell. His death would serve my purpose—but I have failed. But what he will not concede, to save his own life, he may concede to save his son's."

"Oh!" gasped the Bounder. He began to understand.

"Do you not think so, little signor?"

"Not if I can help it!" said Vernon-Smith between his teeth. "Sink me in the sea if you choose—I would go down a hundred times before I would give in an inch!"

"You are the son of your father, signorino—he answered me in just such words!" smiled the Italian. "Cospetto! If the signor shall refuse you will have a chance of showing your courage, for you will sink in the sea before the dawn rises! I think that the signor will not refuse when he learns that his son's life is the price of the N'gombo Concession! Ma, vedremo, vedremo!"

He said no more, but pulled steadily at the oars, in silence—the Bounder, silent also, watching him, with gritting teeth, and eyes that burned with helpless rage.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Bad for Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER jumped. His fat ears pricked up like those of a startled rabbit.

For long, long hours no sound had reached the fat junior, stranded on the lonely rock, but the wash of the waves. But now there came another sound—a sound of hope. It was the plash of oars on the water.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Hours and hours had passed since the Owl of the Remove had been stranded by the Highcliffians. He had freed himself, after long wriggling, to find the tide in, deep over the spit of sand that led shoreward. For quite a long time Billy Bunter had roamed over the lonely rock, like a caged animal. So long as the daylight lasted he nourished a faint hope of being seen by somebody from the shore. When darkness fell he went dismally into the fishing hut and reposed his fat limbs in a deck-chair there.

The prospect before him was really awful!

Already he had missed dinner—which was bad enough. Ample as Bunter's dinner was at Seahill Park, he was accustomed to clamping it down with an equally ample supper before he went to bed. He was going to miss supper also! His next meal was going to be breakfast on the morrow! And even that might be late—it depended on the tide!

The tide, in now, and washing deep



The straw hat struck the Italian on the back of the head, and the startled man toppled forward. Bang! The roar of the automatic, as the gunman pitched headlong into Mr. Vernon-Smith's room, caused the millionaire to wheel round in his chair!

over the sand, almost as far up as the sea-wall ashore, would be out long before morning. But Bunter was not the fellow to attempt that narrow, sandy path in the dark.

It was full of gullies, pitfalls, easy enough to avoid in the daytime, but into any one of which a fellow might tumble headlong in the dark. Even when the sea retired, and left the path uncovered, Billy Bunter was not going to set foot on it till dawn came. And if the tide was in again then, his next meal was likelier to be lunch than brekker! It was awful to contemplate!

Bunter was hungry already. He was getting hungrier. He was going to be fearfully hungry before morning. He groaned, till he was tired of groaning. He tried to go to sleep in the deck-chair. But he was too hungry to sleep; and it was cold, too—the warm day had been followed by sharp winds from the sea. Even sleep was denied him.

There was, he knew, no chance of being taken off. That rocky islet was part of the Seahill Estate; no one ever came there, except holiday visitors at the millionaire's mansion, for boating, or fishing, or swimming. Nobody was likely to come after dark.

There was, in fact, nobody to come. Smithy was little likely to think of sea excursions, especially after dark. The Highcliffe fellows certainly had no intention of coming back. If only those beasts, Harry Wharton & Co., had come with him, it would have been different. But they hadn't—not even after he had taken the trouble to dispatch a special telegram, with Mr. Vernon-Smith's name signed to it!

Bunter was booked till morning. He was safe enough, so long as he did not attempt to leave the rock. But he was hungry—fearfully hungry—famished, in fact! Boiling in oil was too good for those Highcliffe cads. In his dismal

depths of dolour, Billy Bunter even wished himself at home—even with his brother Sammy and his sister Bessie!

And then, through the wash of the sea, after long hours—centuries, as they seemed to Bunter—the sound of oars came to his fat ears.

Bunter sat up and took notice at once.

His eyes gleamed through his spectacles.

Utterly unexpectedly, a boat was coming out to the lonely rock, at a late hour in the evening. Those Highcliffe beasts, perhaps, had relented, and were coming back for him. Anyhow, somebody was coming.

The fat Owl jumped out of the deck-chair, and jumped to the little window of the hut, which looked shoreward, the door being on the seaward side. He stared from the window.

The starlight was bright on the sea. A single oarsman sat in the boat, and he was pulling direct for the rock.

Billy Bunter drew a deep breath of happy relief. He could see only one man in the boat, and his back, of course, was turned to Bunter as he pulled towards the rock. But his destination was plain—he was heading straight for the rock—straight for the hapless, stranded Owl.

It was not one of the Highcliffe fellows. If Pon had relented, no doubt he had passed the word to some boatman along the coast. It seemed impossible to account in any other way for the boat coming there at all.

But as Bunter watched he could see that the oarsman did not look like a boatman. And, though the fat Owl could only see his back, it struck him that he had seen that man before, somewhere.

The tide was at the full now, almost on the turn. The boat came swiftly enough. But as it drew nearer, the

happy satisfaction faded out of Billy Bunter's fat face.

He glimpsed black hair under the hat, blowing in the wind. More and more familiar the outlines of the figure appeared to his staring eyes. He had been going to step out of the hut, and go round it, to shout to the man as he came nearer; but now he remained glued to the little window. He watched, with his fat heart almost in his mouth.

If he doubted who the man was, his doubts were suddenly ended when the oarsman turned his head, to glance at the rock, resting on his oars a moment as he did so.

The starlight shone on a swarthy face and caught the glint of beady black eyes.

Bunter gasped.

It was the Italian!

The swarthy face was turned away again. The man had taken his bearings, and was pulling swiftly for the rock.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

The fat junior quaked from head to foot.

Twice had the fat Owl intervened when the Italian's weapon was raised against Mr. Vernon-Smith. What the villain might do if he found him in that solitary spot, at night, was an awful, terrifying thought to Bunter. It might have been to a fellow with a stronger nerve than Bunter's.

Why the man was rowing out to that rock, at night, was an utter mystery. Bunter could see no one else in the boat—the Bounder, as he lay, was hidden from his sight. Bunter wondered dizzily whether the brute was going to hide there; he could imagine no other reason for his coming. If he found Bunter—

Terror seemed to chain the fat junior's

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(Continued from page 13.)

limbs as he watched the Italian drawing nearer and nearer. His fat face was as white as chalk; but he forced himself to move.

With quaking limbs the hapless Owl tottered across the hut to the doorway on the other side. For whatever reason the man was coming, it could hardly be doubted that he would enter the hut. Billy Bunter dared not be found in it when he came, and there was no hiding-place in the little building.

He tottered out, the hut between him and the approaching boat. He dared not step to right or left—which would have revealed him to the Italian's eyes if the man had looked round again.

Bunter blinked round him wildly and desperately, through his big spectacles. The splash of oars sounded terribly near. Where was he to get out of sight before that awful gunman landed? On the low rock, open to the starlight, there was no concealment for a gull.

With his fat knees knocking together, Billy Bunter tottered to the edge of the rock, on the seaward side. Terrified as he was, he was careful to keep the hut between him and the boat.

There was only one chance for Bunter. The rocky edge was broken in gullies and crevices, flooded by the sea. At low tide they were empty, and dry in the sun; now the water washed in them, but the rocks jutted over the sea, at varying heights, from a foot to two or three feet.

The fat Owl slid down into a deep crevice. He held on to the rock, with the water up to his armpits.

It was cold, and it was horrid; but his head was below the level of the rocky isle, and he was out of sight.

Not unless the Italian came to the rocky rim and looked down would he discover Bunter. It was not likely, for he was nowhere near the landing-place.

Anyhow, Bunter had to take his chance of that. Soaked to the skin, shivering with cold and terror, the fat Owl clung to a point of rock and listened, with his fat ears on the strain.

He heard, at length, the bump of the boat at the landing-place, and the sound of footsteps. He suppressed a squeak of terror. Every sound came quite clearly to him. He knew that the man had landed, tied up the boat, and was lifting something from it. He wondered what it was; and he started, and gasped, and wondered whether he was dreaming as a familiar voice floated to his ears.

"So you're sticking me here, you scoundrel!"

It was Herbert Vernon-Smith's voice.

Another voice replied—softer, with a mocking note in it.

"Si, signorino! Here you will wait—a safe spot, non e vero? You will see no one—no one until I return. But I shall return, before dawn, signorino, and bring you life or death!"

"You rotter—you cur!" came the Bounder's savage tones. "You thief!"

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You will never lay hands on N'gombo! Never!"

"Forse che so, forse che no! Noi vedremo! But that is enough, little signor—here I leave you!"

Dumbfounded, Bunter heard. In his amazement, he forgot that he was hungry, forgot that he was shivering in the cold wash of the sea among the rocks.

The Italian was not alone—Smithy was with him, apparently a prisoner; and the man from Milan intended to leave him on the rock. It was beyond Billy Bunter's understanding; but he realised, more than ever, the necessity for eluding the gunman's eye! What was that dark, desperate villain likely to do, if he found a witness to his crime?

Silent, crouching in the rocky crevice till his fat chin almost touched the water, Bunter listened, shivered, and palpitated. He heard movements at a little distance—the Italian was entering the hut. Bunter was deeply thankful that he was no longer there.

A few minutes, and there was a sound of the boat pushing off. Then the steady stroke of oars—receding to the shore.

The man was gone!

He had, from his words, left the Bounder there. Anyhow, he was gone—the splash of oars died away in the wash of the sea.

But not till the last sound was lost did Bunter venture to drag himself from the water, and clamber on to the rock again. Shivering, dripping, and gasping, the fat junior tottered across to the hut, pushed open the door, and peered in.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Price of N'gombo!

B UZZZZZZZZ!

Samuel Vernon-Smith turned to the telephone on the roll-top desk.

He was standing at a table in his study, on which was spread a large-scale map of East Africa.

It was one of the latest, and it showed the kingdom of Abyssinia as Italian territory. The new empire of Mussolini bordered the northern frontier of the British colony of Kenya, where Harry Wharton & Co. had once accompanied Smithy and his father on a holiday trip.

On that trip, while the juniors had been seeing strange sights, strange lands, and strange people, Samuel Vernon-Smith had kept his attention chiefly fixed on business.

Seeing—before others saw—that Kenya was a coming country, Mr. Vernon-Smith had taken up options, and concessions, timber lands, and coffee plantations, far and wide. And among the many irons he had had in the fire, N'gombo was far from being, at the time, the most important.

But that had changed with the boom in metals, the growing scarcity of tin, the huge rise in its price. Stanniferous land anywhere was worth money now—much money; and N'gombo—it's rich tin deposits still a secret—was now a prize packet.

There was a sarcastic smile on the millionaire's face, as he traced the concession on the map—just within the Kenya border.

N'gombo was British, and was going to remain British; though, had "Signor Nessuno," as the man from Milan chose to call himself, got his greedy clutches on it, it was possible

that a slight alteration in the frontier line might have placed it under the Italian flag. That, at all events, was what the plotter from Milan aimed at. And, to further his purpose, he was prepared to blow out the life of Samuel Vernon-Smith like a candle.

The millionaire turned from the map, as the telephone-bell buzzed, and picked up the receiver. It was late in the evening—and he had not expected any more calls that night. Still less had he expected to hear the voice that came through:

"Signor Vernon-Smith?"

The millionaire gave a start. He knew that voice, even if the use of an Italian word had not told him who was speaking.

His face set hard and grim.

"Well?" he rapped.

The man had the impudence to ring him up—the man who had hunted him for his life; who was himself hunted by the police; who would probably, at that very moment, have been seeking a chance to snipe him, if he had been unguarded. Mr. Vernon-Smith would have given a great deal to know from where that call came.

"A word with you, signor!" went on the voice, foreign in its accent, though the English was good. "May I repeat my offer for the N'gombo Concession? This time I offer you a higher price."

"Fool!" answered Mr. Vernon-Smith contemptuously. "If you offered me all the gold in the Bank of Italy, I should refuse!"

"I offer you something more than gold, signor," came the answer. "I offer you a life!"

"Fool and rascal!" said the millionaire, in the same tone. "You have not had much luck so far, and at your next attempt, if you dare to make it, you will be laid by the heels, I hope. Try, if you like."

"I do not speak of your life, signor—but of your son's!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith gave a great start.

"My son's?" he repeated.

"Call your son, signor, and see if you will find him!" The voice had a tone of mockery. "He is in my hands, signor."

"You lie, you scoundrel, you lie!" said the millionaire, his voice husky. "My son is safe under my roof at this moment!"

"Satisfy yourself that he is safe under your roof, signor—I will hold the line!" came the mocking voice.

Mr. Vernon-Smith put down the receiver, with a hand that was shaking. His portly face was white.

He rang the bell, and Larkin appeared at the door.

The butler glanced, in surprise, at the millionaire's face. The colour seemed to have drained from it.

"Where is my son, Larkin?" asked Mr. Vernon-Smith, in an unsteady voice.

"I think he is with his friends, sir, in the billiards-room!" answered Larkin. "They have been there since dinner, sir!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith gasped with relief.

"He lied—I knew that he lied!" he muttered. "Larkin, go and tell Herbert to come to me at once—not to lose an instant!"

"Very good, sir!"

Larkin disappeared, and Mr. Vernon-Smith went back to the telephone. He snapped savagely into the transmitter.

"Are you there, you dog?"

"Grazie tanto!" came the mocking voice. "You are polite, signor, in the way of your countrymen. Speak!"

"My son is in my house, as I have said! You lie, you cur, you lie!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith, with a savage emphasis. "I have sent for him to come to me—in a minute he will be in my presence. What do you say now, scoundrel?"

There was a low laugh over the wires.

"Signor, it will be a long minute. Your son, signor, is where you will never see him again, unless you buy his life with the tin-mines of N'gombo!"

"It is false!" breathed the millionaire, though a hideous conviction was creeping on his mind that it was true.

"You know, or will soon know, that it is true, signor! If it is true, will you buy his life with N'gombo? That is the price!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith stood silent. He listened, in anguish, for the sound of footsteps!

Why did not Larkin return—why did not his son come? Was that dastard, safe at a distance, safe at the end of a telephone-wire, speaking the truth? Why did his son not come?

"Signor," the voice went quietly on, "believe me, I like not to use these methods! I am a man of finance in my own country—in the way of business, this would not be my method."

"Rascal!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith.

There was a gasping sound over the wires. It sounded as if the man from Milan was choking at the other end.

"Enough, enough!" came an angry hiss. "Vedremo—vedremo, furfante! In one half-hour I will speak again—by that time you may satisfy yourself whether your son is to be found—and answer 'Yes' or 'No.'"

Mr. Vernon-Smith put up the receiver. The man from Milan had rung off. He turned to the door.

Larkin appeared there, with a troubled face.

"My son?" said the millionaire harshly. "Where is he?"

"I have asked Master Herbert's friends, sir—"

"Is he in the house or not?" roared Mr. Vernon-Smith, in a voice that made Larkin jump.

"It appears not, sir—"

"Not?"

"Master Ponsonby says that he went out by the door on the terrace to walk in the grounds more than two hours ago, sir. They have not seen him since. I am unable to find him in the house, sir. Master Herbert must be still in the grounds."

Mr. Vernon-Smith sat—or, rather, fell—into his chair.

He knew now that it was true.

Not for a moment had it crossed his mind till now that his son was in danger. Now he knew that the man from Milan, defeated in his first purpose, had changed his methods. To save his own life, a dozen times over, Samuel Vernon-Smith would not have yielded an inch. But to save his son's! The N'gombo Concession, all his vast fortune, would not be too high a price to pay for that!

"My son!" breathed the millionaire. His face was like chalk.

"Shall I send the servants to look for Master Herbert, sir?" asked Larkin, surprised and alarmed.

The millionaire gave a groan.

"Yes; look for him, if you can guess where that villainous Italian has hidden him!" he muttered.

He leaned on the table, burying his face in his hands. In half an hour the man from Milan would ring again, and the millionaire knew what his answer would be—what it must be. His son's

life was the price of N'gombo, and the man from Milan had won!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter on the Spot!

"OH! The hound—the hound!" muttered Vernon-Smith, as he writhed in his bonds on the floor of the fishing-hut on the lonely rock.

It was like Smithy to feel rage and intense exasperation rather than fear.

He had heard the oar-strokes die away towards the shore. The Italian was gone—gone, he knew, to get into communication with his father, to put the choice up to him—N'gombo, or his son's life!

That the man would carry out his threat, the Bounder had not the slightest doubt, yet from the bottom of his heart he hoped that his father would refuse. A thousand deaths seemed to him better than yielding to the ruthless rascal.

While it was yet dark the man would return, bringing, as he had said, life or death. There was no hope of escape; no one would, or could, come to the lonely rock to save him. It was unapproachable until the tide went down, except by boat, even if anyone had thought of coming. He ground his teeth with helpless rage as he lay and listened to the wash of the water. Suddenly, to his utter amazement, the door opened.

"I say, Smithy, old chap!" came a fat, familiar voice.

It seemed to the Bounder that his senses must be leaving him. How else could he hear Billy Bunter's voice on that lonely rock half a mile from the shore, cut off by the tide?

He wrenched himself into a sitting position and stared.

Framed in the doorway, against the spring starlight, was a fat figure. A big pair of spectacles glimmered in.

"Bunter!" gasped Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, you're there!" said the fat Owl, blinking in. "I thought you were, from what that gunman was saying. I can't see you. Where are you, old chap?"

"Here!" breathed the Bounder.

Billy Bunter stumbled in. He blinked at the Bounder, dim in the shadowy interior of the hut.

Vernon-Smith could only stare at him. He had never supposed that he would be glad to see Billy Bunter. He was glad now.

"I say, I'm all wet," said Bunter, shivering. "I had to duck out of sight when that beast came. I say, I'm soaked!"

"How on earth did you get here, Bunter?" asked Smithy. He could hardly believe yet that the fat Owl of the Remove was standing there. It seemed so utterly impossible that he should be there.

"Those Highcliffe cads!" grunted Bunter. "They dragged me here, the beasts, and left me stranded, with the tide in. Didn't you miss me at dinner, Smithy?"

"Oh!" gasped Smithy. "Yes!"

"You might have looked for me," said Bunter. "You might have guessed that those cads had been up to something. This isn't the way we treat guests at Bunter Court, I can jolly well tell you!"

"So this is where you've been! I—I missed you, of course!" The Bounder did not care to mention at that moment that he had hardly given Bunter a thought. "Lucky for me, old fat man!

Get me loose, Bunter. I've got to get out of this as fast as I can!"

"You can't get away till the tide goes down, Smithy."

"Get me loose, fathead!"

"And even then it won't be safe in the dark—"

"Idiot! Get me loose!" hissed the Bounder. "How long are you going to stand there jabbering, you blithering owl!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Will you let me loose?" shrieked Smithy.

"Well, I think you might give a chap time to wring the water out of his clothes when he's soaked to the skin!" said Bunter indignantly.

"Oh, you fat fool! You born idiot! You—you— Never mind your clothes—let me loose!"

"Oh, all right! You always were selfish!" remarked Bunter. "You never think of others first, like me, Smithy."

"Idiot!"

Billy Bunter groped with clumsy fingers at the cords knotted on the Bounder. He groped and fumbled.

"I say, these knots are tied jolly tight!" he grunted. "I say, this is going to take a long time. I'd better get dry first."

"Haven't you a penknife, fathead?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Use it, then, ass!"

"Well, it's got both blades broken, you see."

"You—you—you—"

Had Vernon-Smith's hands been free at that moment, it was probable that Bunter would have felt the weight of one of them, glad as the Bounder was to see him there.

"I was done over that penknife," said Bunter. "You see, I bought it from Fishy last term. I didn't know it was an American one till both blades went. I—"

"There's a penknife in my pocket; get it out!" hissed the Bounder.

"Oh, all right!"

Bunter groped for the Bounder's penknife and found it. He opened it, and sawed at the cords knotted on Smithy's wrists.

"Quick!" panted the Bounder.

"I'm being as quick as I can, Smithy. If you keep on moving like that you might get cut—"

"Ow!"

"I told you so! Better keep still, old chap!" advised Bunter.

Herbert Vernon-Smith kept still. The cord parted at last, and his hands were free. He grabbed the penknife from Bunter, and sawed at the cords round his ankles.

A minute more and he was on his feet.

"I say, Smithy—"

Unheeding, the Bounder ran out of the hut.

Billy Bunter rolled after him.

Vernon-Smith ran at once to the landward side and stopped, staring savagely at the deep water that rolled between him and the shore.

The tide had been on the turn when the boat crossed to the rock. It was going out now, but it was still deep over the sandy path. There was no passage.

The Bounder gritted his teeth with savage impatience. He was free now, but he was cut off by the tide, as Bunter was.

The fat junior came panting up and joined him.

"I say, Smithy, old chap—"

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Smithy savagely. He was thinking desperately of a swim ashore, but it was madness. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,524.

to think of it against the out-going tide.

Billy Bunter snorted.

"Is that how you thank a chap for setting you free?" he asked sarcastically. "If you can't be civil, you beast—"

"An hour to wait, at least!" muttered the Bounder, gritting his teeth.

"The tide won't be down in an hour, Smithy."

"It will be low enough to get along that path, fathead! I don't care if it's over my knees."

"Tain't safe in the dark—"

"Idiot!"

"I suppose you're not going and leaving me here, after all I've done for you!" yapped Bunter.

"Dummy!"

"Beast!"

Smithy was not, perhaps, ungrateful for the service Bunter had rendered him, but he was thinking of his father and the Italian.

The man was not likely to lose time.

If the choice was put up to the millionaire, and he was convinced that his son's life was the price of N'gombo, there was little doubt what his decision would be. And that surrender, which the Bounder would not have wished, even to save his life, was useless now. He was free, if only he could get away. He raged on the edge of the rock.

The tide was going; the water was sinking. He was not going to wait till the spit of sand was clear. But he had to wait till he had a chance of wading along it without being swept out to sea.

Billy Bunter, grunting, wrung water from his wet clothes, and shivered. The Bounder watched the starlit sea with savage impatience. How the Italian would get in touch with his father, he did not know, but he knew that the man would lose little time—he was sure of that. He had to get back before the surrender was made.

"I'm going!"

He spat out the words desperately at last.

There was an alarmed squeak from Bunter.

"Look here, you beast, you're not leaving me here alone!"

"Chance it with me, then."

"You silly ass, I'll watch it!" gasped Bunter.

He blinked in terror at the water swirling over the sandy path.

The Bounder repressed his angry impatience for a moment. He knew how much he owed to Bunter.

"Look here, you fat duffer!" he said. "I shall get through all right, and I'll tell them to send a boat for you—see? You'll be taken off in half an hour, if I go now."

"But it ain't safe in the dark, Smithy! Suppose you—"

"Rely on me. I'll get through all right. You wait and see!"

"Oh!" said Bunter. "That's all right. If you think you can get through, Smithy, old chap—"

"I know I can."

"Well, look here! Mind you don't get yourself drowned!" said Bunter anxiously. "I don't want to stick here all night."

Herbert Vernon-Smith made no reply to that. He tramped off the rock on to the sandy path, sinking up to his waist in water.

Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles were glued on him as he went.

Splashing in the tide the Bounder tramped away, till he disappeared from Bunter's sight towards the shore.

And Bunter could only hope that he got through safely. He did not want to stick there all night.

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THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for the Desperado!

LARKIN jumped.

"Master Herbert—" he stuttered.

Standing in the open doorway, the butler was looking out into the April night. He had despatched five or six of his staff to look for Vernon-Smith in the grounds. The Bounder suddenly dawned on his vision—running up to the door, squelching water as he came—drenched and dripping, panting for breath.

Larkin blinked at him.

Ponsonby & Co., from the doorway of the billiards-room, stared at him.

"Cad!" said Ponsonby. "Been for a swim with your clobber on, Smithy?"

"You look damp, old bean!" grinned Cadshy.

"Absolutely!" chirruped Vavasour.

The Bounder did not heed them, or look at them. He grasped Larkin by a portly arm.

"My father—" he panted.

"In his study, Master Herbert."

"Has he heard from—from the gunman?"

"The master seems alarmed about you, Master Herbert. But I do not know what—"

Smithy ran on. But he turned his head to call back to Larkin as he went.

"Larkin, Bunter's stranded on the rock in the bay! Order a boat to be sent out for him at once!"

"Oh!" gasped Larkin. "Yes, Master Herbert!"

Pon & Co. exchanged startled glances. They were surprised to see the Bounder of Greyfriars come in, panting and breathless, dripping with water. They knew now that he must have been out to the lonely rock in the bay, and had evidently come back through the tide.

"Well, my hat!" said Monson. "What the dooce made him go there, I wonder?"

"Smithy, old man—" called out Pon.

Vernon-Smith did not heed him. He was running, and he vanished from sight down the corridor that led to his father's study.

He tore open the door, without knocking, and ran in.

Mr. Vernon-Smith was seated at the table, as Larkin had left him. His elbows rested on the map of East Africa, his chin in his hands, his whole attitude one of despair. He did not stir as the door opened.

"Father!" panted the Bounder.

Mr. Vernon-Smith stirred then. He bounded.

In utter amazement he leaped to his feet, and spun round towards Smithy. He seemed scarcely able to believe his eyes as he saw his son.

"Herbert!" he gasped.

"Am I in time?" panted Smithy. "You've heard from the gunman, father? He had me tied up on the rock in the bay—I've got back. Am I in time? Don't tell me that you've given in to the brute!"

"Herbert!" repeated the millionaire. The black shadow of care lifted from his face. "Yes, I've heard from him—and you were missing—"

"You've not given in?"

Mr. Vernon-Smith smiled, a grim smile, as he looked at his watch.

"In exactly three minutes, Herbert, if the man keeps his word, I should have given in," he answered. "He rang me up, told me that you were in his hands, and—"

"And my life the price of the N'gombo Concession," said the Bounder, between his teeth.

"He gave me half an hour to assure myself that you were missing. Three minutes more, and the half-hour will be up."

"And you—"

"What could I say to him?" said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "I cannot imagine how you have got out of his hands. But if your life was at his mercy, do you think I should give a second thought to N'gombo, or all the African continent?"

The Bounder grinned.

"I never knew I was so jolly valuable," he said. "I'm in time—that's all right. The hound, the rotter, the thieving scoundrel! We've beaten him this time!"

"But how?" exclaimed Mr. Vernon-Smith. "You are drenched with water, Herbert. Where have you been?"

The Bounder told him in a few words.

"I had forgotten Bunter," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "So that was where he was! By gad, a fortunate circumstance for both of us, Herbert! You are not sorry now that I made you give the boy a holiday here—what?"

"Hardly!" chuckled the Bounder.

"Go and change your clothes now, Herbert! You are drenched!"

"I was up to my neck before I got on shore," said Smithy. "But never mind that. I want to speak to that gunman. If he rings—"

Buzzzzzz!

It was the telephone bell.

Mr. Vernon-Smith stepped to the instrument, and picked up the receiver. He smiled over it at his son. Three minutes had made a tremendous difference. The man from Milan was not going to receive the answer he confidently expected.

"Hallo!"

"Nessuno speaking," came the voice of the Italian. "I have given you the half-hour, signor, to assure yourself that your son is missing. Have you satisfied yourself on that point?"

"Scoundrel!" answered the millionaire. "My son is in this room, standing within six feet of me."

"Cospetto! It is false!" came an angry hiss on the wires, like the hiss of a snake.

Mr. Vernon-Smith handed the receiver to his son.

The Bounder, grinning, spoke into the transmitter.

"Are you there, you dog?"

He heard a gasp. The man at the other end evidently knew his voice.

"Il figlio—e il suo figlio!" panted the Italian.

Smithy could guess what he meant by the Italian words.

"Yes, the son. It is the son," he answered. "You are speaking to the fellow you left tied up on the rock, you dirty dog! Try again, you rascal—try again! You won't catch me napping next time!"

The telephone whirled to a howl of rage from the other end.

Smithy laughed.

He put up the receiver, and turned to his father.

"We've done the villain this time, father!" he remarked.

"You must take the greatest care after this, Herbert," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "Now that you are sharing the danger, the matter is serious. I wish—" He broke off, frowning.

"You wish—what?" asked Smithy.

"I wish you had your Greyfriars friends with you. You are an obstinate young rascal, Herbert! You would have done better to ask them here, as I have said."

"Shall I ask them?"



"Wurrgh!" murmured Bunter, as Ponsonby tapped his fat little nose with the cane. "My hat! That chap can sleep!" said Gadsby. "Give him another!" Tap! "Ooooooh!" gasped the fat Removeite, awakening, as Pon gave him a more severe tap. "Oooogh! Those beastly gnats—ow!" Then he gave a startled jump at sight of Ponsonby & Co.

"I should feel easier in my mind," said his father.

"Done!" said the Bounder.

And he left the study to go up to his room and change his dripping clothes.

By the time Vernon-Smith had changed and come down, there was a fat figure standing in the hall. Larkin had lost no time; and William George Bunter was back again. He was giving Pon & Co. a devastating blink through his big spectacles, when Smithy came down the stairs.

"Cads! Rotters!" Bunter was yapping at the Highcliffe knuts. "I'd jolly well thrash the lot of you, only you ain't worth soiling a fellow's hands on!"

"Bump that fat cad!" said Pon.

"Chuck that, you fellows!" The Bounder hurried down. "Hands off, you fools! All serene, Bunter, old fat man!"

Bunter blinked at him.

"Look here, Smithy, if those cads are going to stay here and play rotten tricks on a fellow—"

"Aren't you hungry, Bunter?"

"Oh, yes, rather! Famished!"

"Come and feed, old fat bean."

Bunter was ready—more than ready. Any fellow who had missed tea and dinner would naturally have been ready for supper. Bunter was ready for six or seven. He dismissed Pon & Co. and all their works from his mind as he sat down to eat—and it was long, long past bed-time when he had finished.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Honoured Guest!

"FEEL better, old bean?"

Smithy's tone was slightly sarcastic.

But it was as agreeable as he could make it. Smithy had sat it

out, so to speak, while Billy Bunter was at supper. Gratitude, or any other kind feeling, was not strongly developed in the Bounder of Greyfriars, but it was very clear in his mind how much he and his father owed to Bunter.

True, it was by sheer accident that Bunter had come in so useful. Certainly it had not been by his own wish that he had been on the rock in the bay when Smithy was left there by the man from Milan, but that did not alter the fact that he had freed the prisoner and saved Mr. Vernon-Smith from surrender to the enemy.

Smithy—for the present, at least—was feeling very amicable towards the fat Owl of the Remove, and disposed to make as much of him as he could; so, declining without ceremony, bridge with the knuts in Pon's room, he sat it out while Bunter made a deep inroad on the provender.

Larkin waited on Bunter; he was kept very busy. He had got rather used to Bunter's performances in the gastronomic line, but he had never seen the fat Owl really hungry before. Wondering more and more where Bunter parked it, Larkin grew at last a little alarmed, almost expecting to see the fat junior burst over the polished floor of the dining-room.

But even Bunter was finished at last, and Larkin went wondering away; and in answer to Smithy's question Bunter gave a satisfied nod.

"Yes, old chap," he said, "much better. I was rather peckish."

"Rather peckish!" repeated Smithy.

"Yes. It's not much I eat as a rule, but I was really hungry this time," confessed Bunter.

"Sure you've had enough?" asked Smithy. "Couldn't you manage another cold chicken?"

"N-n-no. I think not."

"Not another pudding, or pie?"

"No, old chap; I've really had enough," said Bunter. "I might manage a bunch of those grapes if you shove them over."

Smithy shoved them over.

"And some of those peaches, perhaps," said Bunter.

Smithy shoved over the peaches.

"And perhaps a few bananas," said Bunter thoughtfully, "if you'll pass them over, Smithy."

"Pleased!" said Smithy.

Bunter munched on. There was apparently some small section of cubic space yet unfilled in Bunter's extensive interior. Bunter was not the fellow to leave it empty; he munched and munched.

Ponsonby looked in at the door with a sulky face.

"Look here, Smithy, if you're not comin'—" he said.

"Not!" said Smithy.

"Then I'm goin' to bed."

"Good-night!" said the Bounder, unmoved.

Ponsonby scowled and loafed away, an inimical glare from Billy Bunter's spectacles following him.

"Now, look here, Smithy, I've got a bone to pick with you!" said Bunter. "I'm not having any more rags from those cads. See? I can't very well thrash that swab Ponsonby, as we're guests here—"

"Oh, that's all right!" said the Bounder. "No objection to your having the gloves on with him, Bunter, if you're really keen on it."

"I didn't come here to scrap with Highcliffe cads!" said Bunter, with dignity. "But it's got to stop. See? Otherwise, I go."

Vernon-Smith grinned. This was the result of making much of Bunter. But THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,524.

he resisted the temptation to answer that the fat Owl could go as soon as he liked—and be blown to him!

"Mind, I mean it!" said Bunter. "I came here for an Easter holiday; I've been treated rottenly. If you want me to clear, say so."

Bunter paused, like Brutus, for a reply. Had Smithy replied that he could clear as soon as he jolly well liked, it was exceedingly improbable that the fat Owl would have cleared; the grub was altogether too good.

But Smithy made no such reply. "My dear chap forget it," he said. "I wouldn't part with you for your weight in gold—and a ton of gold is worth a lot of money!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"I'll see that there's no more raggin'," said the Bounder. "I'll keep an eye on Pon and his friends."

"That's all very well," said Bunter. "But they've been ragging all the time, and you jolly well haven't stopped them. If you want me to stay—" Bunter paused again—feeling his way, as it were.

"I do," said the Bounder solemnly.

"Well, if you put it like that, old chap, I don't want to let you down," said Bunter affably. "In fact, I'll drop Lord Mauleverer a line and tell him I shan't be able to come to the Towers, after all. I'll let that chap D'Arcy of St. Jim's know that I can't give him any time these hols. There!"

"Good!" said Smithy.

"But," said Bunter firmly, "I've got to make a condition. I'm not going to stay here and be ragged by those Highcliffe cads. Next time you're out of sight they'll be at it again. I know you had a row with Wharton and his gang at the end of last term, but you can wash all that out. After all, you're always rowing with somebody, ain't you, Smithy?"

Smithy looked at him.

"They ain't like you, you know," went on Bunter cheerfully; "they don't nurse grudges like you do, Smithy."

"Oh!"

"I shouldn't wonder if they've forgotten all about it already; not your sort at all," explained Bunter.

Smithy did not speak, he just gazed at Bunter.

"If you asked 'em," said Bunter, "they'd come. In fact, they'd come all the more if they knew that that gunman was after you now as well as after your pater. That's the sort of fatheads they are."

"Yes," said the Bounder thoughtfully, "I think you're right, Bunter. That's the sort of fatheads they are. I'm sure."

"And if that Italian keeps after you, old man, you'd be safer with them around," said Bunter. "Think those Highcliffe cads would stand by you? Yah!"

The Bounder laughed. He did not think that the Highcliffe fellows would stand by him if there was danger in the offing. He knew that Harry Wharton & Co. would. That was, as Bunter happily expressed it, the kind of fatheads they were.

"Well, what I mean to say is this," went on Bunter. "if you ask that gang over here to keep those Highcliffe cads from ragging I'll stay; otherwise, not. You can't expect it, Smithy."

Smithy grinned. As he had already told his father that he was going to ask the Famous Five to Seahill Park he was quite prepared to agree to the condition imposed by the fat and fatuous Owl.

"Done!" he said.

"Well, that's all right, then," said Bunter. "I'll stay: I'll stick to you."

Smithy. I never was a fellow to let a pal down, as you know. If it gives you a bit of a leg-up socially to have a fellow like me staying here, all the better; you can let the servants think we're friends at school if you like." added Bunter generously.

Vernon-Smith felt as if he could smack Bunter's fat head for that, but he dare not.

"But, mind—honest Injun," said Bunter suspiciously—"you're going to ask those fellows! Ring them up on the phone now."

"And fetch them out of bed?" asked the Bounder. "They don't keep these hours at Wharton's place, fathead!"

"Oh, a telegram, then—"

"I'll ring Wharton up in the morning—first thing."

"That's all very well," said Bunter, "but I shan't be down till eleven—and I'd rather see it done. Look here, you can telephone a telegram. See? It will be delivered first thing in the morning."

"Right-ho! If you're sure you've finished supper—"

"I'll take those sugary almonds up with me," said Bunter, heaving his weight out of his chair, "and a few bunches of grapes. These grapes are jolly nearly as good as we get from the vinery at Bunter Court, Smithy. I'd better take those biscuits, too. I might get hungry in the night after missing meals. Let's see you send that wire, old chap."

Billy Bunter—laden with provender in case he should get hungry in the night, which was quite a probable contingency—followed Vernon-Smith to the telephone cabinet.

He did not feel at all sure of the Bounder, and he was going to see it done. The Bounder restrained a desire to jam his bunch of grapes down the back of his fat neck, and led the way to the telephone.

It was much too late to ring up Wharton Lodge—it was past midnight. But, as Bunter said, a telegram despatched by phone would be delivered first thing in the morning. That was all right!

The fat junior stood with watchful eyes and ears, while Smithy put the message through. It was quite a long message, for a telegram; but the millionaire's son did not need to economise words like common mortals.

"That all right, fathead?" asked Smithy, when it was done.

"That's all right, old chap!" agreed Bunter. "I'll go to bed now. I say, you might carry up these biscuits for me—I keep on dropping some of them."

Billy Bunter rolled off, at last, to bed.

Herbert Vernon-Smith was glad to see the last of him. He was going to be as nice as he could to Bunter—but how he was going to get through the rest of Easter without kicking him, he really did not know.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

At It Again!

"MASTER Harry—" Harry Wharton & Co. were at breakfast in the sunny April morning, when Wells came in with a telegram.

Colonel Wharton had already breakfasted, and Aunt Amy breakfasted in her room; so the Famous Five had the table to themselves.

They had been up with the lark that morning, and out in the woods by the river, and had come in with appetites almost worthy of William George Bunter.

The chums of the Remove were all

lousy, but Harry Wharton suspended operations on toast and eggs and rashers, to glance round at Wells.

"A telegram, sir!" said Wells.

He laid it on the table beside the captain of the Remove, and waited.

"Oh, all right!" said Harry, and he slit open the buff envelope.

"Bunter again?" grinned Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I shouldn't wonder! The fat ass never knows when a chicken won't fight any longer!"

"I dare say Pon & Co. have been giving him a high old time, at Smithy's place, the last day or two," said Frank Nugent, laughing. "I've no doubt he would be glad to see us there."

"The gladfulness would probably be terrific!" grinned Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

All the Co. watched Wharton as he read the telegram.

A grin dawned on Wharton's face as he did so; and at the end he burst into a roar:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Jolly old Bunter?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Yes—look at it!" chuckled the captain of the Remove. "Bunter's at it again!"

With great hilarity, the chums of Greyfriars read that telegram.

It was quite a long one, and was marked "Handed in at Seahill." It ran:

"Dear Wharton,—Would you and your pals like to run over here for a week or two? My father would be very glad to welcome you, and I should be no end bucked. Lots of things to keep you amused, including a villain with an automatic. I really hope you'll come—I feel sure you've forgotten that row we had at the end of the term."

"HERBERT VERNON-SMITH."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Famous Five.

That that telegram really had been sent by Herbert Vernon-Smith, not one of the five believed for a moment. They had not the slightest doubt that it was Billy Bunter at work again!

He had sent one telegram, in the name of Smithy's father. Now he had sent another in the name of Smithy himself. That was how it looked to the chums of the Remove.

It was, in fact, difficult for them to think anything else.

Having parted with the Bounder at school on scrapping terms, they certainly did not expect him to invite them for Easter.

But they were not at all surprised at Bunter inviting them in his name. What he had done once, he had done again, that was all! He was "at it" again!

Smithy had, so far as they knew, no motive for asking them. Bunter had—a very strong motive, which they all knew about.

"Handed in at Seahill, this time!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "If that fat ass hadn't sent us a spoof wire from Wimford the other day, we might have been taken in by this."

"We jolly well should have been," said Harry Wharton. "If it hadn't actually happened once, I shouldn't have supposed that even Bunter was idiot enough to sign somebody else's name on a telegram."

"And we might have liked over—"

"Fancy Smithy's face, if we did!"

"And those Highcliffe cads!" grunted Johnny Bull. "They'd like to make out that we were butting in, like Bunter. And it would jolly well look like it, too."

"I'll kick that fat chump up and

down the Remove passage next term," said Harry. "He's got to learn not to play potty tricks like this. It's breaking the law, to sign a false name on a telegram, if the blithering Owl only understood it."

"By gum, what a set of asses we should have looked, walking in, and Smithy staring at us when we got there!" said Nugent. "And he wouldn't be nice about it, either."

"The niceness would not be terrific," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But, my absurd chums—!" The nabob's dusky brow was thoughtful. "Are you terrifically sure that that esteemed telegram is a ridiculous spoof?"

The Co. stared at him. "Of course it is, fathead," said Bob. "The same trick Bunter played at Wimford the other day, over again." "You don't think for a moment that Smithy sent this, Inky?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Nunno! But"—the nabob pointed with a dusky finger at a line in the message—"that sounds more like the esteemed Smithy than the absurd and ridiculous Bunter." It was the line referring to the villain and the automatic. Harry Wharton nodded.

"That's so," he agreed. "Not like Bunter to put that in. Still—"

"Might have put it in as a draw!" grinned Bob. "We're not fearfully keen, that I know of, to change our quarters. But if that rotter who's been potting at Smithy's father got after old Smithy, I'd be jolly glad to be around."

"Same here!" assented Johnny Bull. "The samefulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "And if there is an esteemed possibility—"

Harry Wharton shook his head. "Rot!" he said. "Smithy knows we're on the telephone here, and he would ring us up if he wanted to ask us over. Why should he send a wire?"

"That settles it!" said Bob. And Hurree Jamset Ram Singh nodded his dusky head. It did seem to settle it. There was absolutely no reason, so far as the Famous Five could see, why Vernon-Smith, if the message came from him, should send a telegram instead of calling up on the phone.

"Bunter all right," said Johnny Bull. "Is there a reply, sir?" asked Wells, coughing. "The lad from the post office is waiting, sir."

"May as well send an answer! Anybody got a pencil?" The captain of the Remove proceeded to indite a reply.

"BILLY BUNTER, SEAHILL PARK, SUSSEX

"Ass! Fathead! Chump!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Co., as they looked at that reply; and Wells' serious face melted into a grin.

"There you are, Wells," said Harry; and the Wharton Lodge butler departed with that reply to the telegram, which was handed to the lad from the post office, and a little later duly dispatched from Wimford.

There were many chuckles in the breakfast-room at Wharton Lodge as the Famous Five finished their meal. After which they went cheerily out to enjoy the sunny morning, dismissing Billy Bunter from their minds—and not thinking of the Bounder at all—little guessing that the Bounder was thinking of them with growing anger and irritation as the day wore on.

(Continued on next page.)

The STATELY HOMES of GREYFRIARS

'WAY DOWN UNDER

By

The Greyfriars Rhymester



(1)

England's team have left Australia
And the Ashes to their fate—
Never mind a bit of failure,
Wait till 1938!
Brown cares little who's been winning,
Matches which have gone before;
Now, for him, the tour's beginning,
For New Zealand is the tour!

Tom Brown is a good cricketer,
but if only he could wield the
willow as our long-haired poet
wields the pen, he'd be certain to
play in the next New Zealand
Test Team!

(2)

Far away, a fearful distance,
Lies New Zealand, Browney's home;
There's no country in existence
Half so beautiful to roam.
So he tells us, and his stories
Are remarkable to hear,
All about the strange Maoris
Who are dignified, but queer.

(3)
"You have no idea," he tells us,
"Of the beauty of the place!"
And his earnest voice compels us
To admit it is the case.
"In New Zealand we have weather
Very much like Britain's own!"
"What a shame!" we cry together,
With a sympathetic groan.

(4)

Then he glares. "Oh, don't be funny!
It's a ripping climate there.
As a rule it's warm and sunny,
Healthy in the open air!"
That's the weather he is calling
Similar to ours, you know!
Where the rain is always falling,
Leastways, till it starts to snow!

(5)
Browney's pater is a farmer,
Not what we call farming here!
Rearing sheep is quite a drama
In the Southern hemisphere.
Sheep he reckons by the thousand
In their sheep-runs on the range;
Then, of course, he has his cows and
Horses, too, by way of change.

(6)

Houses there are large and spacious,
Browney's home is very good.
"But," you'd say at once, "good
gracious,
It is mainly built of wood!"
Sure it is, with a veranda,
Outhouses and all complete;
Handsome, big, expensive, and a
Home you'd find it hard to beat

(7)
Browney's fond of riding horses
Out across his father's lands,
Trusting to his own resources
With a rifle in his hands.
Says the fathead: "A sheep-puncher!
That is really what I am!
And I bet that many a luncheon
Likes my Canterbury lamb!"

(8)

There is many a bursting geyser,
In the mountains round about.
Browney doesn't care, for he's a
Chap who likes to see 'em spout.
He can see volcanoes smoking
In the far blue distance, too,
(Here we thought the ass was joking,
But it seems the tale is true).

(9)
Waterfalls are often mighty
In that rich and wondrous land.
Gay and gorgeous birds in flight he
Sees each day I understand.
Yes, New Zealand is exquisite,
I should like to travel there,
So I'll pay Tom Brown a visit,
If Tom Brown will pay my fare!

Next Week: HILTON, of Hilton Hall.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Not From Mauly!

"BEASTS!"

Billy Bunter made that cheery remark as he came rolling down at half-past ten in the morning.

Ponsonby & Co. were lounging in the hall, looking very elegant and natty in riding-clothes. They were going out riding that morning—excellent "gees" being available at Seahill Park.

Herbert Vernon-Smith had not changed for riding, however, and he was loafing about with his hands in his pockets and a discontented frown on his face.

The Highcliffe fellows disdained to notice Bunter or his remark. But the Bounder gave him a look.

"Shut up, fathead!" he snapped.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Oh, chuck it!"

Billy Bunter gave him an expressive glare through his big spectacles. Last night the Bounder had been amicable, civil—wonderfully polite, in fact, for him. It seemed to have worn off now, however. He was quite the old Bounder again.

"Look here, Smithy, stagger along with us!" said Ponsonby. "What the jolly old dooce—that gunman merchant can't be hanging about the place in broad daylight."

"Hundred miles away by this time," said Monson.

"Absolutely!" declared Vavasour.

"Rippin' ridin' on the sands," said Gadsby. "Come on, Smithy! We'll look after you if the ice-cream man turns up."

"I tell you I can't come!" said the Bounder irritably. "My father's anxious, since that brute got me last night, and he doesn't want me to go off the estate—or out of sight of the house, if it comes to that."

Pon smiled at his friends. Pon knew, as his friends knew, that the Bounder of Greyfriars was absolutely devoid of anything like fear. But Pon was not losing a chance of administering a thrust.

"But putrid to stick indoors in this gorgeous weather," he said. "Look here, we'll keep to the park, if you're nervous of meeting that gunman outside the place."

Smithy did not answer, but he gave Ponsonby a very unpleasant look.

He was respecting his father's wishes, sorely against his own inclination. Smithy's way was rather to rush on trouble than to take measures to avoid it. Still, Pon was at liberty to take any view he liked. He liked, apparently, to take the view that Smithy was suffering from "cold feet."

"And we'll all be with you, old bean," said Monson, taking his cue from Pon. "If that organ-grinder turns up, we'll eat him!"

"Absolutely!" grinned Vavasour.

"Buck up, old man!" said Pon encouragingly. "You'll be safe enough with a crowd of fellows."

"Greyfriars fellows, no doubt," said the Bounder, in his bitterest tone. "But I'd rather not rely on Highcliffe men, if there's danger about, thanks!"

"He, he, he!"—from Billy Bunter.

Ponsonby breathed hard.

Really, he had asked for it—and, as a matter of fact, the Bounder's gibe was well-founded. Certainly, none of the knutty four would have stood by Smithy if a desperado with an automatic had unexpectedly turned up.

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Still, this could not be called fearfully polite from a host to his guests!

Not for the first time, Pon was tempted to tell the Bounder of Greyfriars, what he thought of him, and shake the dust of Seahill Park from his feet.

"I say, Smithy, when are they coming?" asked Billy Bunter, pausing on his way to breakfast to ask that question.

"Find out!" grunted Smithy.

The lack of a reply to his telegram to Wharton Lodge was irritating the Bounder, as well as his father's prohibition of excursions to a distance from the house.

Wharton must have had his wire very early that morning; there had been ample time for a reply. But no reply had come to Vernon-Smith. A telegram lay on the hall table addressed to Bunter; but it did not occur to Smithy that it had any connection with his own telegram to Wharton.

He had taken it for granted that the cheery Co. would "wash out" the memory of that row at the end of the term. He had felt assured that the hint of danger to himself, in his message, would cause them to come, even if they were not keen on changing their quarters. And there had not even been an answer.

It seemed to him that he had been taking too much for granted, and he was sore and savage. He did not want Pon & Co. to hear that he had invited the Greyfriars party, and that they had ignored his invitation. It was like Bunter to blurt it all out.

"But, I say, Smithy, what does Wharton say?" persisted Bunter.

"Oh, give us a rest!" growled Vernon-Smith. "Aren't you men starting? I can't come, so it's no use wastin' time."

"But, look here, Smithy, Wharton must have got your wire hours ago!" exclaimed Bunter warmly. "I suppose he's answered to say whether they're coming or not, hasn't he?"

Smithy gritted his teeth, as Pon & Co. exchanged a quick look.

"More guests comin', Smithy?" drawled Pon.

"No!" grunted the Bounder.

"Look here, Smithy, they jolly well are coming!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. "I'm not going to stay here with these Highcliffe cads, if they don't come, I can jolly well tell you!"

"Larkin!" yapped Vernon-Smith.

"Yes, Master Herbert?"

"Look out a train for Bunter, will you?"

"Certainly, Master Herbert."

Billy Bunter blinked at Vernon-Smith. This was a change from last night—a change with a vengeance! Smithy was not only the "old Bounder" again, but he seemed worse than ever.

"You needn't trouble, Larkin!" snapped Bunter. "I shall go by car, if—I go. I don't mean that I'm turning you down, Smithy, old chap!"

"I was afraid you didn't!" snarled the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Go in and feed, and shut up!" said Smithy. "I'm fed-up with you!"

Billy Bunter breathed hard and deep. Even the fat Owl of the Remove felt that a fellow couldn't be expected to stand this. It was really altogether too thick. Only the fact that Seahill Park was his only refuge for the Easter holidays, restrained Bunter's just wrath and indignation.

"Look here, do you mean to say that

Wharton's refused to come or what?" he demanded.

"I don't mean to say anythin'! Shut up!"

Pon & Co. grinned. The mere idea that Smithy had invited Harry Wharton & Co. there was annoying to them. But if Wharton had refused the invitation, it became more amusing than annoying. They understood now why the Bounder was like a bear with a sore head that morning.

"Has he wired, back?" demanded Bunter.

Smithy did not answer. He turned his back on Bunter, and walked across to the hall window.

Bunter breathed harder and deeper. His very spectacles glittered with wrath. Contempt is said to pierce the shell of a tortoise, and even William George Bunter was not so thick-skinned as a tortoise!

"Larkin!" yapped Bunter.

"Yes, sir!"

Larkin's manner was respectful; but even the short-sighted Owl did not fail to spot the lurking grin on his portly face.

"Any letters for me?" snapped Bunter. "I've been expecting an answer from my friend Lord Mauleverer. It's odd that it hasn't come."

"No letter, sir! There is a telegram."

"Oh, look here, why didn't you bring it up to me?" demanded Bunter warmly. "Leaving a fellow's telegrams hanging about—"

"I knocked at your door three times, sir, but you were asleep," said Larkin. "It is here, sir."

Bunter grabbed the telegram.

His little round eyes glistened behind his big round spectacles.

The fat junior had written to Mauly from Seahill Park. Gladly, very gladly, would he have exchanged Mr. Vernon-Smith's mansion for Mauleverer Towers—where there were no Highcliffe cads, and where Mauly's manners were undoubtedly much more polished than Smithy's.

The arrival of a telegram looked—to Bunter—as if Mauly was playing up.

He had told Mauly that he could give him a few days—if he liked.

He had hoped, if not expected, that Mauly would like. He had asked Mauly to phone or wire, if he was sending the car for him. And here was a wire. What was Bunter to think?

Certainly, he was expecting a telegram from nobody else. This was from old Mauly.

Bunter grinned.

It was quite a windfall. It enabled him to treat Smithy as he deserved—and show him that he jolly well wasn't the only pebble on the beach.

It was like Bunter to count his chickens before they were hatched. Nothing doubting that that wire was from Lord Mauleverer of the Greyfriars Remove, the fat junior blinked round at Smithy.

"I shan't want a car, Smithy!" he called.

"What do you mean, fathead?" snapped the Bounder over his shoulder.

"And Larkin needn't look out a train, either!" sneered Bunter. "My pal Mauly's sending a car for me!"

The Bounder stared.

He had resolved to put up with Bunter, and be as civil as he could—though his civility rather failed at times. Still, if the fat Owl had succeeded in planting himself on Lord Mauleverer, Smithy most certainly did not want to deprive Mauly of the pleasure of his company.



Silent, crouching in the rocky crevice till his fat chin almost touched the water, Bunter watched the Italian carry his prisoner from the boat to the hut. The fat Removite trembled at the thought of what the desperate villain would do if he found a witness to his crime!

"Is that wire from Mauly?" he asked.

"That's it!" grinned Bunter. "I told you last night that I'd turn Mauly down for you, Smithy; but after your rotten manners this morning—"

"Oh, don't worry!" said the Bounder sarcastically. "I'll try to survive the loss if you leave me! I think I can bear it!"

"There's a limit," said Bunter loftily. "I don't expect much in the way of manners from you City people. But there's a limit. Sorry to turn you down, and all that! I know I said I'd throw Mauly over, but—"

"But you didn't know then that he was going to let you hook on to him—what?"

"Beast!"

"How the dooce do you know that telegram is from Mauleverer when you haven't opened it?" asked the Bounder, staring at him.

"Oh, I know all right! You see, I asked him to wire if he was sending the car. This is from Mauly all right. I can't say I shall be sorry to go, Smithy. You new-rich bounders are hardly my style, if you don't mind my mentioning it. And you can't expect me to stand your no-class friends!" Billy Bunter blinked scorn at Pon & Co. "Jolly glad to see the last of you cads!"

"Do you mind if we burst that fat frog over your floor, Smithy?" asked Monson.

"Yah!"

Bunter, at last, jabbed a fat thumb into the envelope and took out the telegram.

His fat face was beaming. It bucked Bunter no end to be in a position to turn the Bounder down, and turn his podgy back on the Highcliffe gang. He had absolutely no doubt of what was in that telegram—till he opened it, and blinked at it.

Then, as the poet expresses it, a change came o'er the spirit of his dream. He blinked.

He stared.

He goggled.

Pon & Co. looked at him, rather entertained by the varying and extraordinary expressions on his fat face. The Bounder grinned sourly. He had doubted whether Mauly was keen to relieve him of his fat guest. Now he was sure.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"When is the car comin'?" asked the Bounder satirically.

"Oh crumbs!"

"Mauly comin' in the car to fetch you, you fat fraud?"

"This—this—this ain't from Mauly!" stammered Bunter. "It—it—it's from Wharton! I—I can't make it out!"

"Wharton!" repeated the Bounder, coming towards him. "What's that? He can't have answered to you by mistake, I suppose? Let's see it."

Billy Bunter blinked blandly at the telegram. The Bounder glanced at it in his fat hand, stared, and burst into a roar:

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What's the jolly old joke?" asked Gadsby.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Bounder. "Look!"

He jerked the telegram from Bunter's fat hand and held it up.

The Highcliffians stared at it. Really, it was a remarkable telegraphic message.

"Billy Bunter, Seahill Park, Sussex. Ass! Fathead! Chump! — HARRY WHARTON."

"I—I—I say, you fellows, wha-a-t can Wharton mean by that?" gasped Bunter. "What—what the dickens can he mean?"

"What he says, probably!" answered the Bounder, laughing. "Ass! Fathead! Chump! Plain English, isn't it?"

"Beast!"

"Have you been trying to stick Wharton as well as Mauly?" chortled the Bounder. "This looks like an answer in the negative."

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

"The cheeky beast!" gasped Bunter. "I—I thought it was from Mauly, of course—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I say, Smithy, I—I shan't be leaving you, after all—"

"I thought it was too good to be true!" agreed Smithy.

"If you put it like that, Smithy, I shall go—"

"I do put it like that!"

"I mean, I—I shall go and have my brekker. It's all right, Smithy, old chap. I ain't turning you down."

Bunter rolled off to the breakfast-room.

Pon & Co., chortling, went out to their horses. The Bounder was left, grinning.

But the grin faded off his face, to be replaced by a scowl.

That absurd telegram had arrived for Bunter, but there had been no reply for the Bounder.

They were not coming, and they were not even going to take the trouble to answer him. His brow blackened, and his lips set in a hard, bitter line. He could have kicked himself for having asked them—as it had turned out. He was not going to ask them again, that was certain. And yet—was it possible, barely possible, that Harry Wharton had not received his telegram? He might by chance be away, or he might have gone out very early.

Smithy was aware of his own little failing of taking offence too easily. He

hesitated a long time, unwilling to make the first advance if, indeed, the captain of the Remove was treating him with contemptuous indifference. But he made up his mind at last, went into the telephone cabinet, and rang up Wharton Lodge. A word would be enough.

It was the fruity voice of Wells that answered.

"Vernon-Smith speaking! Is Wharton in?"

"No, sir. Master Harry has gone out with his friends. They are not expected in till lunch."

"You can tell me whether Wharton had a telegram this morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh!" said the Bounder, between his teeth. "He had it?"

"Yes, sir, at breakfast."

"That's all." The Bounder was about to jam the receiver back, but he paused. He was going to make absolutely sure. "Can you tell me whether the telegram was from here—Seahill?"

"Yes, sir."

There was no doubt now.

Vernon-Smith slammed back the receiver with a slam that made the instrument rock. Wharton had had the telegram hours ago; he had gone out with his friends for the morning, without taking the trouble to reply, either by wire or phone. The Bounder's face, as he stamped back into the hall, was a startling contrast to the brightness of the sunny spring morning.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Short and Sharp!

HURREE JAMSET RAM SINGH'S dusky face wore a thoughtful expression as the Famous Five came in at Wharton Lodge for lunch.

The chums of the Remove had had a cheery and strenuous morning, and were in great spirits. That afternoon they were going to push out Wharton's old boat on the Wyme, and have an afternoon on the river. Four members of the Co. were thinking chiefly of lunch, and then of boating; but the dusky Nabob of Bhanipur seemed to have something else on his mind.

Bob Cherry gave him a bang on the shoulder that made him jump.

"Penny for 'em, old black bean!" said Bob.

"Wow!" gasped the nabob.

He rubbed his shoulder.

"What is it, Inky?" asked Harry Wharton, with a smile. "You've been looking jolly thoughtful two or three times. Anything up?"

"I have been thoughtfully reflecting on that absurd telegram," confessed the nabob.

"Bunter's rot?" asked Nugent. "Why?"

"I am not terrifically certain, after absurd reflection, that it was the idiotic Bunter's rot," said Hurree Singh. "It would be preposterously deplorable if a ludicrous misapprehension materialised."

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob, with a chuckle. "Smithy would have his back up, and no mistake. But it's all rot, Inky. It was Bunter at it again."

"No doubt about that!" said Harry. "But—What is it, Wells?"

He turned to the butler.

"Master Vernon-Smith rang up this morning, sir," answered Wells. "He gave no message, but I thought I had better mention that he asked whether you had received a telegram from Seahill. I told him that you had."

"Oh!" said Harry.

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The Famous Five looked at one another.

Hurree Singh had had a lingering doubt with regard to that telegram. The other fellows had none.

"By gum!" said Harry. "If it was from Vernon-Smith, after all—"

"Rot!" said Johnny Bull. "Why should he have wired when he could have phoned?"

"Well, he's phoned now," said Harry slowly. "He must know about the telegram, as he asked Wells."

"He's found out Bunter's fatheaded trick, and wanted to make sure," said Johnny. "I dare say he rang up before he kicked Bunter."

"Well, look here, I may as well give him a call," said Harry. "Inky thinks that wire may have been genuine, and Smithy must have rung up for some reason—"

"To tell you it was spoof, if you'd been in."

"Yes, perhaps. If that's so, he can tell me when I get him on the phone," said Harry, laughing. "I don't think there's anything in it; but if there's a sporting chance that old Smithy wants to bury the hatchet, we don't want to discourage him."

"May as well," said Bob. "Smithy can't bite you from the other end of a telephone-wire, anyhow!"

Harry Wharton went to the telephone to ring up Seahill, in Sussex, while his friends went in to lunch.

He had to wait a little while, but the voice of Larkin came through at last.

"Is that Seahill Park?" asked Harry.

"Yes. Mr. Vernon-Smith's butler speaking."

"Oh, is that you, Larkin? Tell Smithy it's Wharton on the phone, will you, and I'd like to speak to him."

"Master Herbert is at lunch now, sir, but I will go and tell him at once. Please hold on."

Harry Wharton held on.

He held on for several minutes. Then he heard a cough at the other end.

"Hem!"

"That you, Larkin?"

"Hem! Yes, sir! Master Herbert cannot come to the telephone, sir!"

Harry Wharton coloured with vexation. Master Herbert, if he were at lunch, could obviously have come to the telephone, had Master Herbert chosen so to do! Evidently Master Herbert did not choose!

Larkin's tone was apologetic. Wharton guessed that the Bounder's answer had been less polite than that rendered by Larkin; the Seahill Park butler had toned it down in transit.

"Oh!" said Harry. "Is that all, Larkin?"

Another cough!

"Yes, sir! That is all! Oh, here is Master Herbert! He has come, sir!"

Another voice came through, speaking so close to the transmitter that Wharton heard it, though it was not addressed to him.

"Have you given that fellow my message, Larkin?"

"Really, Master Herbert—"

"I fancied you mightn't! Give me that receiver, you ass, and clear!"

"But, sir—"

"Oh, chuck it!"

Wharton's face set. He heard every word, and was on the point of shutting off. But as the Bounder was evidently going to speak, he held on.

Smithy's voice came sharply through.

"That you, Wharton?"

"Yes!" said Harry curtly.

"Larkin didn't give you my message, I think?"

"He told me you could not come to the phone. It seems that you could,

after all!" said Wharton sarcastically.

"Yes—here's the message, by word of mouth! You can go and eat coke! Got that?"

"You cheeky ass—"

There was a whirr. The Bounder had slammed off.

Harry Wharton, with heightened colour, left the telephone, and joined his friends at the lunch table.

They glanced at him and noted his expression. But as Colonel Wharton and Aunt Amy were present, nothing was said.

After lunch, however, when the chums of the Remove started for the boathouse, they wanted to know.

Wharton explained briefly.

"Cheeky cad!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"The cheekfulness is terrific."

"Same old Smithy," grinned Bob Cherry. "He can't forget that row the last day of term. Pity a fellow can't punch a fellow's head on the telephone—they're bringing in television now, but I suppose we shall never get tele-punching!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, that's that!" said Harry. "It was Bunter, after all, as we thought—and Smithy's made it clear just how friendly he feels—bother the fellow! Let's get the boat out."

The Famous Five ran the boat out on the stream, and pulled away down the Wyme. They had a lunch-basket packed for tea on the river, and were going to make a jolly afternoon of it—and in a very short time they forgot all about the Bounder.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Light at Last!

I SAY, Smithy—"

"Oh, don't bother!"

"Look here—"

"Shut up!" snapped the Bounder.

Billy Bunter glared at his host through his big spectacles. That afternoon Herbert Vernon-Smith seemed in a worse temper than ever. Certainly he had no politeness at all to waste on his fat guest.

There was still a bruise on Smithy's head, which irritated him. The restraint placed on his movements owing to his father's anxiety for his safety irritated him more. But worst of all was the annoyance and humiliation caused by the reception of his invitation at Wharton Lodge. He was glad that Wharton had rung up and given him a chance of handing out a Roland for an Oliver, but that was only a small solace.

Pon & Co. had gone out into the grounds after lunch.

Billy Bunter would have been glad to bestow his fat limbs in the hammock on the lawn or in the summer-house; but Bunter was not running risks. He had had more than enough of the attentions of Pon & Co. It was quite a blow to Billy Bunter that the Famous Five had failed to turn up.

"If that's what you call manners, Smithy—" he yapped.

"Will you shut up?" snarled the Bounder.

"No, I won't!" retorted Bunter. "Why haven't they come? I can jolly well tell you I'm not sticking here with those Highcliffe cads without them! Look what they did yesterday—"

"Give us a rest!"

"Stranding a fellow on a rock, to be cut off by the tide!" said Bunter warmly. "They'll be up to some game again next chance they get. Think they'd dare rag a chap if my friends were here? They'd be jolly civil if Bob

Cherry was near enough to punch their noses! Look here, what did Wharton say in answer to the telegram?"

"He never answered it at all!" growled the Bounder. "Now shut up!" "Rot!" said Bunter. "Of course he'd answer!"

"I tell you he didn't! Now chuck it, before I kick you!"

"And I tell you it's rot!" yapped Bunter. "If Wharton didn't want to come, he'd be civil enough to say so. You needn't fancy that every fellow's manners are like yours, Smithy."

The Bounder gave him a glare. His foot was almost itching to be planted on Bunter's tight trousers. He restrained it with difficulty.

"Look here, why not phone?" asked Bunter.

"Fool!" "What I mean is, Wharton mayn't have had the telegram—"

"I know he had!" snarled the Bounder. "If you want to know, I rang up and asked the butler there if he'd had it."

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter. Vernon-Smith swung away angrily.

Billy Bunter stood blinking at him. If Wharton had had the telegram, it was quite a mystery. There was no reason why he should not have answered, whether he was accepting the invitation or not.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter suddenly. He jumped as it dawned on his fat mind.

"I—I—I say, Smithy—" "Leave me alone, you dummy!"

"But I—I say, perhaps Wharton never knew that the telegram came from you, old chap!" gasped Bunter. "You—you see—"

"You fat fool, my name was signed to it!"

"Yes, but—" "But what, you gabbling cuckoo?" howled the angry Bounder.

"I—I—I mean, he might have fancied it came from—from me!" gasped Bunter. "What I mean is, very likely he did—in fact, he must have, after that telegram from Wimford the other day—oh crikey! That's why he sent me that cheeky wire this morning, calling me names—"

Vernon-Smith, who was pacing the hall with angry strides, stopped, and stared at the fat junior.

"You babbling bloater!" he hissed. "What do you mean, if you mean anything? How could he fancy it came from you, with my name on it?"

"Well, I mean, after that telegram the other day, with your pater's name on it, you know—"

"What!" roared Vernon-Smith. The look on his face was so alarming that Billy Bunter gave a backward jump.

"I—I say, Smithy, I—I mean—I—I never sent him a telegram with your pater's name on it!" he stuttered. "Nothing of the kind! And they never spotted it, because it was marked handed in at Wimford! It never happened the day I was over there—in fact, I haven't been over there at all! I—I was somewhere else when I was there—Ow! Leggo, you beast! Wow!"

Vernon-Smith, his face quite startling in its expression, grasped the fat Owl by the collar and shook him rather like a terrier shaking a rat.

"You fat rascal!" he roared. "Yaroooh!"

"You sent a telegram to Wharton in my father's name!" yelled Smithy.

"Ow—no! Nothing of the sort! Besides, I told them I could fix it with your pater, if they came!" gasped

Bunter. "But they made out that the telegram was a spoof, and wouldn't come— Leggo, you beast! Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as the angry Bounder pitched him away and he sprawled full length on the polished oak.

The Bounder stood glaring at him speechlessly.

He understood now. "You—you—you fat scoundrel!" he gasped, at last. "You sent Wharton a telegram asking him here in my father's name, and he spotted it—"

"Ow! No! Besides, it would have been all right if they'd come—"

"And so he fancied my telegram was another of your rotten tricks," roared the Bounder. "That's why—"

"Ow! Beast!" gasped Bunter. "If this is how you treat a guest, Smithy, I can jolly well say— Ow! Wow! Groogh!"

"You—you—you—" Vernon-Smith made a stride at Bunter, and drew back his boot. That itch to kick Bunter was going to be gratified at last!

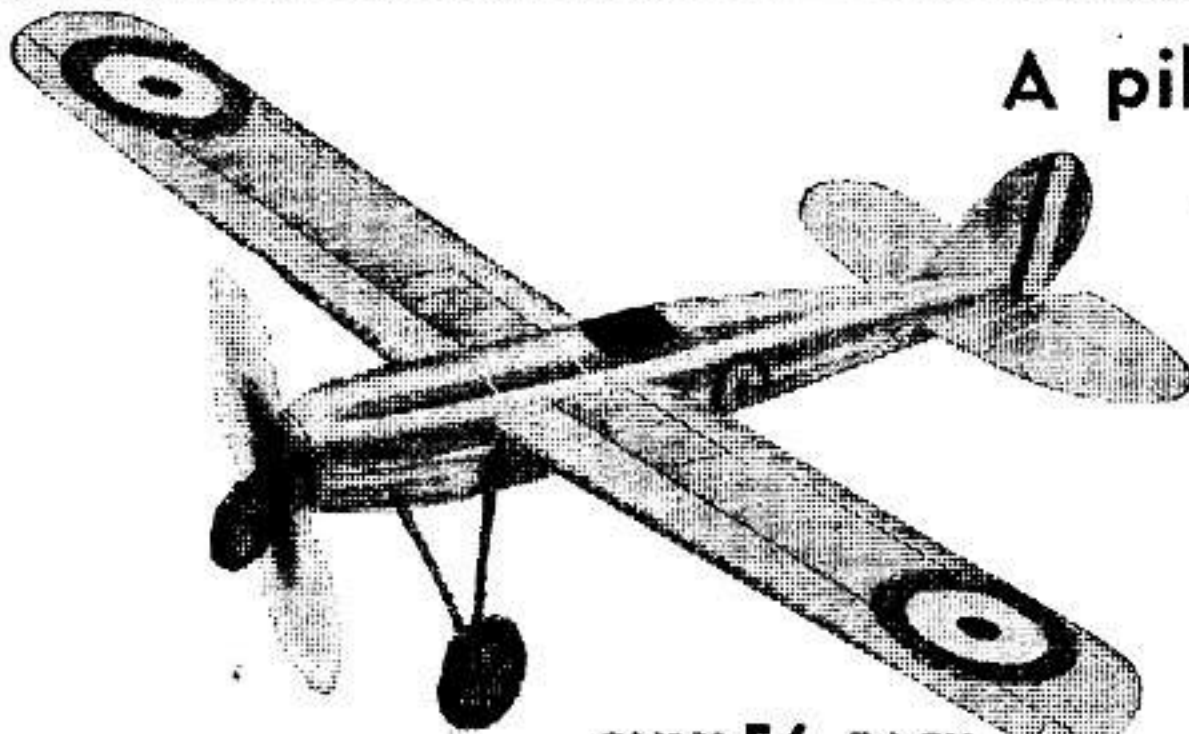
Bunter bounded—too late! He roared as the boot landed. He roared again as it landed a second time. Then he reached the stairs, and fled up them for his fat life.

The Bounder clenched his hands. It was all clear to him now. He made a step towards the telephone cabinet—but stopped. He caught up his hat and ran out, hurrying to the garage.

Five minutes later he was covering the road to Surrey as fast as Mr. Vernon-Smith's magnificent Rolls could carry him.

Vernon-Smith was bound for Wharton Lodge to see the captain of the Greyfriars Remote, and to put things right.

(Continued on next page.)



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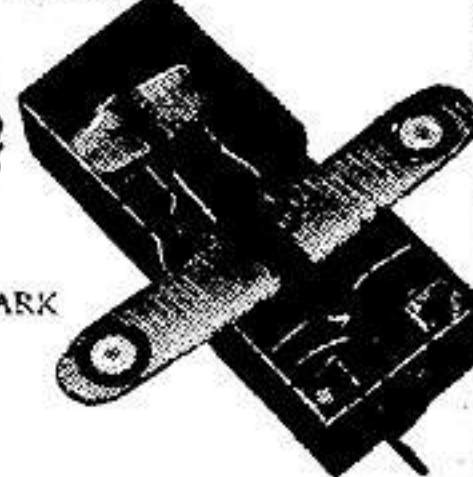
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THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Caught Napping!

"MASTER Harry is out—"
 "Oh!"
 "With his friends—"
 "Oh!" repeated the Bounder.

He stood in the doorway of Wharton Lodge staring at Wells.

"If you wish to see Colonel Wharton, sir—or Miss Wharton—both are at home!" said Wells. "Master Harry will not be back before the evening."

Vernon-Smith shook his head. He had made rapid time, in that run up from Sussex into Surrey. Williams, the chauffeur, had gone all out.

Now that he knew the mistake that had arisen, Smithy was very keen to set it right. Obviously he could not blame Wharton for the error—it was all the fault of the fat Owl and his fatuous trickery. It occurred to him, too, that the reason why Harry had rung up later in the day was that some doubt had risen in his mind—and the Bounder's cheeks burned when he thought of the way he had answered him.

For once, Smithy was putting his arrogant pride in his pocket. He was going to see the captain of the Remove, explain to him, and take him and his friends back in the car, if they would come!

In his haste, he had rather forgotten that the juniors might be out for the day; likely enough as it was in holiday-time. It was rather a fiasco for him.

"Look here, where are they gone?" he asked. "Anywhere where I could get after them in the car? It's rather particular, Wells!"

"I am afraid not, sir!" answered Wells regretfully. "The young gentlemen are gone on the river in Master Harry's boat. They have taken their tea with them."

"Oh!" repeated the Bounder. "Up or down the river?"

"Down towards Wimford, sir," said Wells. "If you cared to follow the tow-path, sir, possibly you might see something of them—"

"I'll try, anyhow!" said Vernon-Smith. "I'll leave the car here."

He went back to the waiting car.

"Hang on here till I come back, Williams," he said.

"Yes, sir!" said the chauffeur. "But—I think I ought to mention it, sir, that I think we were followed here—"

"Followed?" repeated the Bounder, with a start. He had forgotten all about the danger from the Italian.

"Yes, sir! Several times I spotted a blue Mercedes, and I saw it last this side of Wimford," said the chauffeur. "I shouldn't have taken any notice of it, but after what happened yesterday—"

The Bounder gave a whistle.

His father had warned him not to wander in the woods at Sealhill Park, or to go on the beach, or ramble about the country—until there was news that the desperado had been taken. There had been no such news. But he was at liberty to go out in a car, driven by a chauffeur; there could hardly be risk in that.

"If you're going out from here, sir, it would be safer to go in the car," hinted Williams.

"That's all right," said the Bounder. "I'm not going out on the roads. Williams. If that blighter has followed me up from Sussex, he won't see me again till we leave in the car."

With a nod to the chauffeur, Vernon-

Smith walked away across the lawn and by a path that led down to the stream, which flowed through the grounds of Wharton Lodge at a distance from the house.

He had been there before, more than once, and knew his way about. He reached the stream, and turned along the bank.

The Wyme was a very small stream at that point, but it widened on its winding course through extensive woodlands—winding a good many miles before it flowed under Wimford Bridge.

The Bounder walked quickly. Wimford was only three miles away, but the stream's serpentine course covered six or seven. Somewhere in that distance, he was fairly certain to spot the boat and its crew of Removites.

It was a pleasant enough walk, by the sunny stream, under the boughs of the trees; and Smithy was glad to stretch his legs, after the run in the car. He watched the river as he went. He had not forgotten what Williams had told him, but he was not thinking of the man from Milan.

If the desperado had indeed been watching Sealhill Park, and had followed him in a car, he could only have followed him to Wharton Lodge, and seen the Rolls drive in at the gates there. If he waited for it to emerge again, he was welcome to wait as long as he liked.

Smithy gave him no thought. He swung along the path by the stream, anxious to catch sight of the Famous Five. He covered three or four miles from Wharton Lodge, and then he was in sight of a little islet in the Wyme—the Monk's Eyot, as it was called.

Smithy remembered it; he had had a holiday in that vicinity once, with his chum Redwing. He came to a halt, and stood staring across towards the tiny island.

Small as it was, it was covered with trees, which cast a deep shade on the water. It was just the spot where a boating party might have stopped for tea, and he wondered whether they were there.

The bank where he stood was bordered by woodland; and as he stood looking towards the eyot, he had his back to the wood.

For several minutes he stood, his eyes on the eyot, and then a look of satisfaction came over his face. In the shadow of a bunch of willows on the eyot, he made out a boat tied up. Somebody was there, and he had little doubt that it was the party from Wharton Lodge.

He was about to move down to the water's edge to shout across to the eyot, when there was a rustle in the wood behind him.

Even as he heard it, a grip was laid on the back of his collar, and he was jerked backwards. There was a powerful wrench from a powerful arm, and he was dragged off the path, out of sight among the trees.

He crashed down on the ground, panting; and the next moment he was struggling. Even before he saw his assailant, it flashed into his mind in whose grasp he was.

But it was futile to struggle. A grasp like iron pinned him down; and he glared up in helpless rage at a swarthy face that grinned down at him.

"You!" hissed the Bounder.

"Son io, signorino!" grinned the man from Milan; and as he spoke, he whipped a cloth over the Bounder's mouth, and, disregarding his furious

resistance, knotted the ends of it behind his head.

Unable to speak, the Bounder glared up at him, choking with fury.

Still pinning him down in an iron grasp, the Italian cast a swift glance round. He had dragged the Bounder among the trees, and they were screened from anyone on the river, or passing along the path.

Satisfied, the swarthy rascal grinned down at him again.

"Sicuro, signorino! You escaped me once—this time, no! This time I take care, signorino! The price of N'gombo will not slip through my fingers one more time! No! Mai!"

With all his strength the Bounder resisted. But it was in vain; he was little more than an infant in the Italian's grip. He was dragged to the trunk of a sapling, his back jammed against it, and a cord run round him and knotted.

Then the Italian released him.

He stood leaning on a tree close at hand, and lighted a black cigar, grinning through the smoke at the Bounder's infuriated face.

"Patience, little signor!" he said. "We must wait! Cospetto! While the light lasts, I cannot take you to my car! But when the night falls, signorino, we take together a little walk—and a long ride! Non e vero? It is soon sunset—wait with patience, little signor!"

The Bounder could not speak. He could not stir. His eyes spoke volumes, but his helpless fury only seemed to amuse the man from Milan.

"Grazie," went on the mocking voice. "Grazie tanto, signorino! Why you come here I know not; but how fortunate for me! I follow your car, thinking I have wasted the time! But I watch—si, si, signorino, I watch—and you take this pleasant walk, little dreaming—non e vero?—that I walk in your footsteps!"

He chuckled.

"And you stop to admire the so beautiful scenery on a river, and give me one chance to step behind you and drag you into a wood, before any eyes may see. I give you my thanks, little signor, for making my task so easy."

He chuckled again, and resumed smoking his cigar.

The Bounder's eyes burned at him. He had played into his enemy's hands; and this time there was no escape. Only a dozen yards away flowed the sunlit river. Boats might be passing, among them the Wharton Lodge boat. Anyone might pass up or down the path by the stream, but hidden in the thick wood he was out of sight. Hidden, bound, silent—to wait for dark; helpless in the hands of his enemy!

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

The Famous Five to the Rescue!

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

"What—?"

"Smithy!"

"Smithy!" repeated Harry Wharton.

"Look!"

Five fellows, seated in the shade of the trees on Monk's Eyot, jumped up. Harry Wharton & Co., as the Bounder surmised, had camped on the little island for tea. Tea was over now, and they were taking a rest, and disposing of a tin of toffees, before pushing off to pull back to Wharton Lodge.

From the bank of the stream the juniors on the eyot were invisible, with trees and bushes around them. But from where Bob sat an opening in the thickets gave him a view of part of the bank, and through that opening he was astonished to spot a familiar figure—familiar, but very unexpected.

"Smithy!" said Frank Nugent, in wonder, as he pulled aside a bunch of hawthorns and cleared the view a little. "The esteemed and ridiculous Smithy!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

The Famous Five stared through the hawthorns. It was the Bounder; and he had halted on the bank of the river, and had his eyes fixed on the island.

"What the dickens is Smithy doing here?" said Harry Wharton, in utter wonder. "He was at the other end of Sussex when I phoned—"

"Can't be calling on us, I suppose?" said Johnny Bull.

"Hardly—after the way he answered me on the phone!" said Harry dryly. "He seems interested in something—he's spotted our boat. But what—and why—"

"He hasn't spotted us!" grinned Bob. "He can't see us through the hawthorns. Shall I give him a yell?"

"Better give him a miss, I think," said Harry. "He can't want to see us, and we don't want a row with him!"

"But—" murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"But what, Inky?"

"If there was a preposterous and idiotic misapprehension, my absurd chum, and the ridiculous Smithy has come to see us—"

"Oh, great Scott!" gasped Bob. "Look—look—oh!"

Behind the Bounder, from the trees along the path, a figure appeared. What happened next passed like a flash. The amazed juniors on the eyot had a glimpse of a swarthy face and glinting black eyes. The next instant the Bounder vanished from their sight, dragged backwards among the trees.

For a long moment the chums of the Remove stood spellbound.

So suddenly and swiftly had the Bounder vanished that they almost doubted the evidence of their eyes.

A moment ago he had been standing there, full in view in the April sunlight. Now the path by the stream was bare, and no movement or sound came from the wood that bordered it.

"Oh!" gasped Nugent.

"The Italian!" breathed Harry Wharton. "The man who was after Smithy's father—he's got Smithy!"

"Come on!" said Johnny Bull.

He plunged through the thickets, making for the edge of the eyot, where the boat was tied up.

The other juniors rushed after him. They scrambled into the boat, and Bob Cherry pushed off.

Their faces were tense.

For whatever reason Herbert Vernon-Smith was there, there was no doubt on one point; he had fallen into the hands of his father's enemy. There was only one thought in the minds of the Famous Five—to rush to the rescue.

That the Italian was desperate and dangerous, that he was undoubtedly armed, they did not stop to think, any more than they remembered that they were on scrapping terms with Smithy. He was in danger, and that was enough for them. The boat shot out from the eyot, and pulled swiftly across to the bank.

In a few minutes the Famous Five jumped ashore, almost at the spot where Vernon-Smith had been standing.

Bob Cherry grabbed a boathook as

Wharton hooked the painter to a bush. Then they hurried across the path to the wood.

"They can't have got far!" breathed Wharton. "We're not five minutes after the scoundrel! Come on!"

They hurried into the wood.

Unaware that the Italian had tied his prisoner to a tree, to wait till nightfall made it safe to remove him, they went at a rush—and almost ran into a swarthy man, who started away from a tree-trunk on which he was leaning.

A cigar dropped to the earth, and a swarthy face, distorted with rage, glared at the startled juniors.

"The gunman!" panted Wharton.

"Collar him!"

"Cospetto!" panted the man from Milan.

He glared like a tiger at the five schoolboys who had appeared so suddenly that it seemed to him as if they had started up out of the earth.

"There's Smithy!" gasped Bob, as he spotted the bound figure against the tree.

The Italian sprang back. His hand whipped to his pocket, and at the same moment Bob Cherry lunged with the boathook.

There was a yell of pain and rage from the Italian as the sharp point drove into his arm.

No doubt, in his rage and fury, the desperate rascal had intended to draw a firearm, and use it; but the jab of the boathook crippled his arm, and the juniors were springing at him, and only a desperate bound saved him from their grasp.

The next moment he was running.

After him the Famous Five tore, among the trees, right at his heels, and the boathook struck him over the head as he flew out on the path by the river.

He staggered there, panting, in the sunlight for a second, and then, as the juniors rushed him down, sprang into the water.

They came to a halt, trampling in the rushes on the water's edge.

Far out in the stream they glimpsed him, swimming desperately, and going down the stream with the current. A moment more and he was gone from their sight past a curve of the winding stream.

Harry Wharton ran to the boat, but he realised at once that it was useless. The rascal had only to scramble ashore and disappear into the thick woods along the Wymé. He stopped.

"Smithy," he exclaimed, "come on!"

And they ran back into the wood.

Herbert Vernon-Smith had watched the exciting scene, unable to speak, unable to stir a limb. He wrenched madly at his bonds as the Famous Five disappeared in pursuit of the desperado. He was still wrenching when they came breathlessly back.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Here we are again, Smithy, old bean!"

A few moments more and the Bounder was released.

"Did you get him?" he panted.

"No."

"You silly fatheads!"

"Oh, thanks!" gasped Harry.

"Same old Smithy!" chortled Bob.

"I say, old bean, what did the gunman want you for? Not for your nice manners, was it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Bounder scowled savagely; but his brow cleared, and a grin replaced the scowl.

"Sorry!" he said. "I wish you'd got

(Continued on next page.)

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the brute. My father's not safe so long as he's loose. How the thump did you fellows get here?"

"We saw the man grab you from the eyot yonder."

"I never saw you, but I fancied you were there," said Smithy. "If that brute had given me a chance I'd have shouted to you. By gum! Lucky for me you spotted him." He paused. "Thanks!" he added.

"Don't bother!" said Harry Wharton politely. "We'll take the speech as read, Smithy. Like a lift in our boat? You'd be safer in company—"

The Bounder looked at him.

"You don't know why I came here?" he asked.

"Haven't the foggiest!" answered Harry. "Not for a row, I hope. We're not going to row with you, Smithy. Keep it for the desperado, old bean!"

"You silly chump!"

"What I like about Smithy," remarked Bob Cherry, "is his genial, polished style in conversation. Chesterfield was a fool to him."

"The polish is truly terrific!"

Vernon-Smith scowled again; but again his scowl vanished, and gave place to a grin.

"I'll tell you," he said. "I came to say that I've found out that that bloated blitherer, Bunter, sent you a spoof telegram some days ago, and that I've guessed that you supposed that my telegram was another spoof. Is that so?"

"Oh, my hat!" said Bob.

"It—it—it was your telegram?" stammered Wharton.

"Yes."

"Oh crumbs! Inky thought—"

Wharton stammered. "That's why I rang up to make sure, and you—"

"And I wasn't polite, as I supposed that you hadn't taken the trouble to answer me," said the Bounder sarcastically. "If you've got your back up about it, let it go at that!"

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

"We thought it was Bunter at it again, and sent him the answer. But if it was you—"

"It was."

"Then the apologise for the absurd mistake is terrific, my esteemed Smithy!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Sorry," said Harry, "but, really, what were we to think? You see—"

"I see!" assented the Bounder. "I've left my car at your place, and you can give me a lift back in your boat. I'd rather not walk, with gunmen about. On the way you can think out a polite refusal."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I'm glad you came over to explain, Smithy," he said. "If we come, do you mind if we kick your other guest?"

"I've done that already before I started. But you can kick him again, if you like."

The Bounder paused.

"Look here," he said abruptly. "I'd like you to come. My father would like you to come. But I'd better tell you

plainly that you'd be safer where you are. That Italian is gunning after my father, and he's started gunning after me, too, now he can't get at the pater. You may find it exciting at Seahill Park—more exciting than enjoyable, perhaps."

"You mean," said Harry quietly, "that you're in danger—as we've seen for ourselves—and that if we stick to you we may be in danger, too?"

"Just that."

"Then"—Harry glanced round at his chums, and four heads were nodded as one—"then, old bean, we're jolly well coming! Put in the night at my place, and we'll come back with you in the morning."

"Done!" said the Bounder. "I'll ring up the pater and tell him I'm with you. And—and I'm jolly glad you're coming!"

"The gladfulness of our absurd selves," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh solemnly, "is terrific!"

"Not to say preposterous!" added Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was a cheery party that pulled back to Wharton Lodge in the boat, and it was a cheery party that packed into the Rolls the following morning, and rolled away through the April sunlight for the millionaire's mansion on the Sussex shore.

THE END.

(The final and most exciting yarn in this series will be found in next Saturday's issue of the MAGNET. Note the title: "THE TRAIL IN THE SAND!" Owing to the great rush for the MAGNET nowadays, readers are asked to order their copy well in advance!)

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him. Editor of the MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

AS there is very little space at my disposal this week, chums, I feel that I ought to kick off with a mention of next week's programme.

"THE TRAIL IN THE SAND!" By Frank Richards,

is the title of the long school yarn. And it's a thriller! Having failed in his purpose so far, Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith's treacherous enemy has turned his attention to the millionaire's son, and things are more exciting than enjoyable at Seahill Park. Though not exactly pining for trouble with an armed desperado, the Famous Five of Greyfriars are ready to stand by the Bounder through thick and thin. And it's a good job for Smithy that they do! Thrills and excitement you'll find in plenty in this powerful yarn. Take it from me, chums, you'll enjoy every line of it, just as you will the "Greyfriars Herald" and the Rhymester's popular feature.

Now for an interesting paragraph concerning

A CHANCE FOR BILLY BUNTER!

In Czechoslovakia, the latest craze is holding "plum-eating marathons"! They have a national dish in that country which they call "knedlicks." It is composed of plums with a thin coating of dough which is lightly cooked. Towns and villages organise public competitions, and prizes are awarded to those who eat the most plums. Up to the time of writing, the champion plum-eater has managed to

get through 123 at one sitting, and he is hoping to be able to get his record up to 150. I should think Billy Bunter could beat that, what say you? When our fat porpoise hears about this plum-eating business, he'll want to spend his next holiday in Czechoslovakia!

Though we cannot all have a chance to fly, we can learn lots about it from the "Frog" MK IV Interceptor model aircraft which is a real model of an R.A.F. plane with adjustable controls to which it responds just like a real plane. This model only costs 5s., and if you would like free flight instruction you can ring up Liberty 1041 and fix an appointment for this on the Frog Aerodrome at Merton. You will find a coupon on page 25 which you can send for particulars of the Frog Flying Club, and how to get handsome enamelled Air Force pilot badges.

Next we come to a letter from a Berkshire reader, who asks me if I can tell him where the last

BULL BAITING IN ENGLAND

took place? I can. It was at Wokingham, in Berkshire, and it is only a hundred years ago since the last bull-baiting took place in the market square. As long ago as 1661 a Wokingham man was gored by a bull. He was so annoyed that he left £6 per year in his will to provide a bull to be baited in the market once a year. When the bull was killed, the meat was given to the poor, also its hide for making shoes. Although bull-baiting has long since ceased, the poor people of Wokingham still receive joints of beef every Christmas as a result of this charity.

Do you know that the early adventures of the chums of Greyfriars appear regularly every week in our companion paper, the "Gem"? Many readers do know; but I'm sure all those who do not would be interested to read what Harry Wharton & Co. were like in their early schooldays. Take my tip and sample the "Gem" now.

YOUR EDITOR.

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All applications for Advertisement Space in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, The MAGNET The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

"THE LAW CREATES CRIMINALS!"

Prisoner's Passionate Plea!

A prisoner's plea from the dock at the Woodshed Sessions last Tuesday held the Court simply spell-bound.

Harold Skinner was the prisoner. He was charged with riding a bike at night-time without a light. Electing to conduct his own defence, he made a slashing attack on the law.

"The law should aim at keeping a man off the wrong road," he said. "What does it actually do? Your honour, I submit that the law which has put me into the dock to-day is a law that simply creates criminals!"

"Your honour, you see in me a man of blameless character and unimpeachable integrity, who adheres strictly to a rigid code of morality."

"I have at all times been a good citizen—a shining example for others to follow. I never tell a lie—unless there is a reason for telling one. I never borrow money when I happen to be in funds. I never smoke cigarettes when there's a beak prowling about. I never gamble with chaps who can't pay me when they lose. I never sneak unless I think I can get away with it. In fact, your honour, there's no more upright man in the school than me!"

"Yet here I stand in the place reserved for those who have no standard of conduct—no morals! Can you wonder that I feel sick at heart?"

"Technically, I suppose I am guilty. I was cycling at night-time without a light—I admit it."

"I was in actual fact taking an innocent trip to Friar-dale, after lights out, for the purpose of playing a harmless game of billiards with some honest and simple folk I happen to know—raccourse pests, I believe they are, by trade."

"That was all!"

"I extinguished my lamp because I didn't wish to disturb any masters or prefects who might have been about. Your honour, what a crime!"

"If the law convicts me for what I have done, then I say that law should be destroyed root and branch."

"With these few remarks, spoken straight from the heart, I leave the matter in your hands."

Prisoner then stood back, his shoulders braced, head erect and eyes shining brightly with the light of innocence.

Judge Brown, who was weeping copiously, made no attempt to silence the burst of sympathetic applause

that followed Skinner's eloquent plea.

"Case dismissed," he said, between his sobs. "You are discharged without a stain on your character. Help yourself out of the poor-box, as you go out."

Skinner was then carried out of the court shoulder-high, surrounded by cheering crowds.

P.-c. Bob Cherry, who made the arrest, is now to be tried for unlawfully detaining an innocent citizen. The expectation is that he will receive a very severe sentence and the general opinion that it will serve him jolly well right.

There's not the slightest doubt that P.-c. Bob Cherry will think twice before he makes another arrest!

"BASEBALL BATS FOR BOUNDARIES!"

American Cricketer's Helpful Lecture!

Nothing in England excites Fish's contempt more than the ancient game of cricket. And nothing in cricket excites Fish's contempt more than the cricket bat.

"What an implement!" he jeered, when he saw the chaps examining Brown's new bat. "Looks like it might be useful for stopping a brick, but as for slugging a pill—say, jovver see an Amurrican clout king wham the onion in a ball game?"

We had to admit that we'd never had that pleasure.

Fish grinned reminiscently.

"Waal, I'll say his hickory makes that budgeon look like chicken-feed. You yawp about your boundaries! Say, if I batted in a cricket game with a baseball bat, you'd imagine I'd fired back the ball with dynamite! Yes, sir!"

"Why not try, then?" Brown asked.

Fishy tried.

He turned up on Little Side that afternoon in knickerbockers and woollen stockings and a sort of jockey cap and a baseball bat. He stood at the wicket and Inky bowled to him.



The GREYFRIARS HERALD

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STOP PRESS NEWS



SHOULD PREP BE ABOLISHED?

HARRY WHARTON Says "NO!"

Most chaps, without even thinking, will answer that question with an emphatic "What-ho!" Having thought a little, I answer, No! After all, we're not overworked.

School hours are short. We have plenty of recreation. Sundays are practically free. And holidays are long.

And it's just as well for us to acquire the habit of doing a spot of work on our own while we're young. Most of us will have to do it when we get older, won't we? Well, then, where's the harm in laying the foundation now?

Smithy, like the fathead he is, wants prep abolished. He wants everything abolished that is favoured by the beaks. He kicks against it for the same reason as he kicks against other things—because he enjoys kicking!

Yet he knows jolly well that prep is no hardship to him. He can do it standing on his head. The reason he "cuts" it so often is that he really enjoys looking for trouble—and one certain way of finding it in the Remove is to miss doing prep!

Speaking for myself, I think I'd still do prep even if Quelch dropped his regular morning examination on the previous evening's subjects. My feeling about it is that it's nice to think the powers that be are willing to trust us to do it in our own studies; and it's up to us to show we're worthy of that trust by doing it!

Finally, I am of the opinion that prep in studies gives us a valuable exercise in self-discipline. When you're in the Form-room under the gimlet eye of a Form-master, all the discipline you want is supplied to you ready-made. When you sit down at the table in your study to do your swot, you have to supply the discipline yourself.

Perhaps that's the best reason of all why prep should not be abolished!

H. VERNON-SMITH SAYS "YES!"

Of course prep should be abolished!

Nobody, but a Good Little Eric and a Form-master's Favourite, would ever think otherwise!

We get enough Latin and history and maths in the Form-room—more than enough in my opinion! So why should we have more of it inflicted on us during the evening?

Men of the world are all agreed that the tosh they teach us at school is useless to us in after-life. This being so, the obvious thing to do, as they have to go on doing it, is to compress it into Form-room hours, leaving us the evenings in which to learn the things that really matter ourselves.

Dash it all, a man has to learn card-playing and billiards some time or other, hasn't he? How the thump can he do it, if he's expected to spend all his time grinding away at dead languages?

He has to acquire also the gentle art of witty conversation. This simply can't be done without the helpful aid of cigarettes and convivial pals!

If we all thought on the same lines as Wharton, we would rapidly degenerate from human beings into moulting owls.

Luckily we don't. So up the rebels—and down with prep!

Them's my sentiments!

ITEMS OF INTEREST

The fossil remains of a prehistoric animal 200 feet long have been discovered near Friar-dale. This is nothing in comparison to some of the grizzlies Mr. Prout has shot in the Rockies!

A letter posted twenty-five years ago has just reached Greyfriars. There's no foundation in the rumour that it contains a postal-order for Bunter!

PROTECT THE LAMBS IN FAG STREET!

Urges PETER TODD

Something ought to be done to protect the lambs in Fag Street.

Fag Street, for the benefit of those who don't already know it, is the name given to the region surrounding the Third and Second Forms where the fags' Stock

Exchange business is done.

In that area, 'most any time of the day, you can find groups of fags swapping cigarette-pictures, bus-tickets, match-box labels, autographs and signed photos of celebrated sportsmen and famous film stars.

Dominating the groups are the wolves of the Street—keen-eyed brokers like Gatty and Myers and Bolsover minor, who know every move in the game. These youngsters rig the market to suit themselves. They'll corner supplies of one article and send up values to dizzy heights. At other times they'll sell wildly and send values right down into the depths so as to be able to step in again at the right moment and buy at bargain prices!

It's from these ingenious kids that the lambs need to be protected.

By the lambs, I mean the young innocents who start dealing in Fag Street without knowing what they're up against.

The tales I've heard of fortunes lost in Fag Street by novices are simply harrowing!

One kid started out with a jolly fine collection of cricketers' autographs intending to dabble cautiously in the market and sacrifice some of his cricketers to get several sets of cigarette-cards he wanted.

He finished up after a week with one cigarette-card and no cricketers!

What happens to the ill-gotten gains of the principal brokers is a mystery. There are rumours of vast stores of cards and tickets and pictures and signatures hidden away in secret places underneath the school buildings. On the other hand, some maintain that their profits find an outlet for hard cash in markets outside Greyfriars, the hard cash being spent in orgies of doughnuts and cream-puffs at the tuckshop.

Whatever the truth, it's time that the powers that be took steps to protect the lambs in Fag Street!

THE MAY QUEEN OF ST. SAM'S!

By DICKY NUGENT

"You must wake and call me early, call me early, Lickham dear!"

Get me up at any cost, 'cause I'm the Queen of the May this year!"

Mr. Lickham, of the St. Sam's Fourth, who was taking a moonlight walk round the school buildings before retiring for the night, stopped in surprise, as these words fell on his ears.

Looking up, he saw a bearded figger in a nitecap leaning out of an open window, warbling out the words with grating gusto. It was Doctor Alfred Birch-mall, the revered and majestic headmaster of St. Sam's.

Mr. Lickham fairly blinked at the Head.

"What's up, sir?" he inquired, anxiously. Have you gone up the pole?"

The Head grinned.

"Not likely, Lickham! But I shall be going round the pole to-morrow. The Muggleton Spring Festival Committee have chosen me to be Queen of the May!"

"WHA-A-AT!"

"Fakt!" smirked the Head. "They're sending a decorated car to fetch me early in the morning, and they're going to crown me May Queen on the village green!"

"Impossible, sir!" gasped the master of the Fourth. "Who ever heard of a May Queen with a beard? You have to be a good-looking young lady to take the part of a May Queen—not a be-wiskered old buffer of ninety-nine!"

Doctor Birch-mall frowned and scratched his nose.

"There's something in that, Lickham. I must admit that I was a little surprised when I received the invitation this evening. I can only conclude that the committee failed to find a young lady sufficiently good-looking and that they decided instead, to select the best-looking spessiman of manly bewty!"

"If that's so, sir, what made them select you?" grinned Mr. Lickham. "With a face like yours, you'll frighten all the chaps, and—yareooo!"

Mr. Lickham broke off with a scendish yell, as a slipper, flung with unerring aim by the Head, hit him on the nose.

"Take that!" snorted Doctor Birch-mall, as the master of the Fourth turned



and bolted. "And don't forget to call me early!"

The Head then slammed down the window, and Mr. Lickham went indoors.

And four juniors who had been lissening from one of the windows of the Fourth Form dormitory on the other side of the quad, returned to their beds, larking fit to bust.

"The Head as Queen of the May, you chaps!" roared Jack Jolly. "I'll bet we shan't half see some fun in the morning! Ha, ha, ha!"

The kaplin of the Fourth was right.

Soon after breakfast on the following day, a weird and wonderful site appeared on the steps of the Head's house.

It was Doctor Birch-mall dressed in a long, flowing table-cloth, and there was a collar of crinkly-paper round his neck, while his beard was tied at the end with a bow of brightly coloured ribbon.

The fellows rushed up from all quarters, as that eggstraordinary site met their eyes.

"My hat! What is it?"

"Don't go too near it, you chaps—it mite bite!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Doctor Birch-mall frowned.

"Silence! This is no larking matter, boys! For the first time on record, a headmaster of this school

has been chosen as Queen of the May!"

"Grato pip!"

"In a few minnits, a decorated car will arrive to take me to Muggleton to be crowned on the village green!" said the Head. "It is a grate honnor for me, and—ah! Here comes the car!"

A car covered with flowers and decorations had appeared down the drive. It drew up outside the Head's house, and two heralds jumped out and blew a



fanfare on their trumpets.

Doctor Birch-mall grinned and walked down the steps to get into the car.

But he never got there.

Before he could do so, the shover, who had jumped out of the driver's seat to open the door, stepped in front and gave him a ruff push.

"Stand back, you!" he said. "We've called for the May Queen!"

"I know you have, and that's why I'm here!" yelled the Head. "I AM THE MAY QUEEN!"

"Eh?"

"I'm the Queen of the May to-day, I tell you—and if you don't believe me, here's the proof!"

With these words, Doctor Birch-mall dived into his table-cloth costume and brought to light a big and important-looking envelope bearing the name "Doctor A. Birch-mall" on the front. Grinning triumphantly, he took out of the envelope a sheet of parchment, containing the following words:

"To Dr. Alfred Birch-mall.

"You are hereby invited to be Queen of the May. The ceremony of crowning will take place on the Village Green at Muggleton. A decorated car will call for you at 8.30 a.m.

(Signed)

WILLIAM SMITH,

Secy."

"Haw, haw, haw! This is funny and no mistake!" roared the shover. "Somebody's been having you on toast, mister!"

"Nonsense! Cannibalism is strictly forbidden at St. Sam's. Besides, I'm still here!"

The shover larked again.

"That's just where you're wrong! You're not quite all there! The fact is that somebody has been playing a joak on you. That invitation was addressed to—MISS MOLLY BIRCHE-MALL—and someone has rubbed out the 'Miss Molly,' and put 'Doctor Alfred,' instead!"

The Head gave a violent, spasmodic start.

"Is it possible?" he asked hoarsely.

"If you eggssamine it closely, you can see where the original words have been rubbed out!" larked the shover. "If you want any proof, look behind you!"

Doctor Birch-mall wheeled round. To his utter amazement, he saw his dawter, Molly, standing at the top of the steps, daintily dressed in white, with garlands of flowers round her neck.

"Molly!" he cried.

"What is the meaning of this unusual attire?"

"The same to you, pop!" trilled Miss Molly, with a rippling lark.

"I'm the Queen of the May at Muggleton. They chose me weeks ago, though I never received the official invitation. But what are you supposed to be?"

The Head groaned.

"I don't quite know, my dear. I fancy I'm supposed to be the onion!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I won't hold up the proceedings, my dear," went on the Head, as he gallantly opened the door of the car for the smiling Miss Molly.

"Step this way!"

"And you," he added, in a fierce aside to Jack Jolly & Co., whose grinning faces had shown him they were the fellows who had planned the joak, "will step into my study after the May Day revels are over—to be birched black and blue!"

But May Day with Miss Molly in the leading role, turned out to be such a jolly affair that the Head forgot all about that appointment later.

And the heroes of the Fourth didn't trouble to remind him!