

MEET BILLY BUNTER—FATTER AND FUNNIER THAN EVER!

The Magnet^{2D}

Billy Bunter's
Own Paper



BEAUTY TREATMENT
for BUNTER!

Baffled by the careful watch kept at Mr. Vernon-Smith's house, yet still determined to gain his rascally ends, the desperado from Milan tries a new trick. But the millionaire's son and his school-boy chums are trained Boy Scouts, who know just how to follow a trail!

The TRAIL in the SAND!



By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**

Exciting Yarn of Schoolboy Adventure, featuring **HARRY WHARTON & CO.**, the Popular Chums of **GREYFRIARS.**

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Unpleasant for Bunter!

"LARKIN!"
Billy Bunter leaned on the balustrade, in the gallery over the great hall at Seahill Park, and blinked down through his big spectacles.

Larkin was standing at the open doorway, looking out into the bright sunshine of the spring morning.

But as his name was suddenly called, Mr. Vernon-Smith's butler glanced round. Then he glanced up, and a faint grin dawned on his portly face at the sight of the fat countenance looking down.

"Yes, sir!" said Larkin.

"Has Smithy come back yet?"

"Not yet, sir."

Snort from Billy Bunter!

It was nearly twelve o'clock on a fine morning; but Billy Bunter was not down yet.

Bunter never was an early riser in holiday-time. But even Bunter would have been down before noon, in ordinary circumstances.

But the circumstances were not ordinary.

They were extraordinary—very.

"When is the beast coming?" demanded Bunter.

"The what, sir?" asked Larkin.

Apparently the butler at Seahill Park did not recognise his master's son under that description.

"I mean Smithy!" hooted Bunter.

"Oh, Master Herbert will be in to lunch, sir, I understand," said Larkin.

"Blow him!" said Bunter.

Larkin made no reply to that. When

a guest "blowed" his host, there was really nothing for a butler to say.

"The silly ass!" went on Bunter.

"Hem!"

"The cheeky fathead!"

"Hem!"

"Leaving a fellow here on his own!" said Bunter. "Deserting him, after asking him for Easter! I say, where are those Highcliffe cads? Have they gone out? I can't stick up here for ever!"

Larkin, well-trained butler as he was, allowed his features to relax for a moment. In fact, he grinned.

Bunter glared down at him.

The Owl of Greyfriars could see nothing at which to grin. The position was intensely exasperating to Billy Bunter.

It was rather a catch to be spending the Easter holidays in a millionaire's magnificent mansion. But there were drawbacks in this case. Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, had other guests, as well as Billy Bunter. And when Smithy was not in the offing, those other guests—Pon & Co. of Highcliffe School—made life hardly worth living for Bunter, even in a millionaire's mansion on the sunny Sussex shore!

Bunter had breakfasted in bed, and taken a nap after brekker! That passed a good deal of the morning quite happily. But even Bunter wanted to come down at twelve. And he dared not—until Smithy came in! Only too well, by past painful experiences, he knew that Pon was on the watch to catch him. While the cat was away, the mice would play—with Bunter!

The Highcliffe fellows did not seem

to want Bunter there, which was surprising, considering how nice he was! But they didn't. They had set him down in puddles! They had bumped him out of hammocks! They had stranded him on a rock in the bay to be cut off by the tide! They had tilted him out of armchairs! They had turned soda siphons on him! Every time Smithy was out of sight, in fact, they made themselves fearfully unpleasant!

Bunter, at the present moment, was prepared to scuttle back to his room and lock himself in at sight of the enemy.

This was not the sort of thing a fellow expected when he was staying with a pal for Easter—really, it was not!

And that dashed butler was grinning, as if it amused him. In point of fact, there had been a lot of grinning in the servants' hall, over the extraordinary proceedings of Master Herbert's guests that vacation.

Larkin, still grinning, glanced round him.

"The Highcliffe young gentlemen are in the billiards-room, sir," he said.

"Why haven't the cads gone out?" snorted Bunter.

"Shall I inquire, sir?" asked Larkin blandly.

"Oh, don't be an idiot!" yapped Bunter.

He knew well enough why Ponsonby & Co. had not gone out. They were lying in wait for him!

"Didn't that rotter say when he would be coming back?" demanded Bunter.

"Who, sir?" asked Larkin, again failing to recognise the description.

"Smithy, you ass!"

"Master Herbert telephoned to his father yesterday evening, sir, that he was staying the night at Wharton Lodge, and that he would return this morning with his Greyfriars friends," answered Larkin. "He did not, I think, state the precise time. If so, the master did not mention it to me."

"Bother the silly fathead!" said Bunter. "There was no need for him to go and fetch Wharton and his crowd over. I'd have gone with him, too, if he'd asked me. Blow him!"

"Is that all, sir?" asked Larkin.

Bunter's conversation seemed to have palled on Mr. Vernon-Smith's butler.

"No!" yapped Bunter. "Where's the old bean?"

"Who, sir?" inquired Larkin.

He seemed determined to recognise nobody by Bunter's descriptions.

"Old Smith, I mean!" snapped Bunter.

"I am afraid, sir, that I am unacquainted with anyone of the name of Smith, either old or young, sir!" said Larkin.

"You jolly well know that I mean Mr. Vernon-Smith!" yelled Bunter. "Where's Smithy's pater, you dummy?"

"Oh, if you mean Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir, the master is in his study," said Larkin smoothly.

"Go and tell him I want to speak to him."

"I am afraid, sir, that I cannot disturb the master. He is very busy with City affairs, sir."

"Never mind that! Blow his City affairs!" hooted Bunter. "Think I'm going to stick up here for ever? Go and tell old Smith I want him—see?"

"Who, sir?" asked Larkin.

"Mr. Vernon-Smith, you silly fathead!" roared Bunter. "Don't keep on pretending to misunderstand me, you cheeky idiot!"

"I regret, sir, that I could not venture to interrupt the master."

"Will you do as I tell you, or not, Larkin?" bawled Bunter.

"Not, sir!" said Larkin, with cheerful calmness.

Billy Bunter, glared down at him, his very spectacles glittering with wrath. This was the sort of cheek he had from servants at Smithy's place. It was possible, of course, that Larkin did not like being called a fathead and an idiot.

An elegant youth came strolling across the hall from the doorway of the billiards-room.

Bunter's enraged blink was transferred from Larkin to Cecil Ponsonby of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe.

Pon glanced up at him, smiling. He had one hand behind him.

"Comin' down, old fat bean?" he asked.

"Beast!" was Bunter's reply.

He watched Pon warily, ready to dart back to his room, if the dandy of Highcliffe made a move towards the stairs. But Pon stood where he was, smiling, his eyes on the fat face over the balustrade above.

Larkin, who was behind Pon, could see that there was a big red orange in Pon's right hand. Bunter couldn't!

Larkin looked on with interest. He had his own opinion of the behaviour of Master Herbert's guests, but he found them rather entertaining.

"Won't you come out for a stroll with us, Bunter?" asked Ponsonby.

"No, I jolly well won't!" retorted Bunter. "Wouldn't be seen with such a crew!"

"Why, you cheeky fat cad!" exclaimed Pon, ceasing to smile at that reply.

"Yah!" retorted Bunter. "Highcliffe cad! You can rag a chap when you're four to one, but wait till Bob Cherry gets here! You'll be civil enough then! Yah!"

Bunter leaned over the balustrade, favouring Pon with a glare of contempt and scorn. There was lots of time for retreat, if Pon came up the stairs after him. So the fat Owl of Greyfriars could afford to be as contemptuous and scornful as he liked.

"Rotten!" continued Bunter. "Welshing Smithy at billiards—that's what you're here for, the lot of you! I'd jolly well come down and lick you, only I wouldn't soil my hands on a Highcliffe cad! Rotten swab! Yah! They'd sack you from Highcliffe, if it was a decent school! You're a rotten cad, and a funky worm, and a rank outsider, and a—— Yoo-hoo-hooop!"

Billy Bunter broke off, with a wild howl, as Pon's arm jerked, and the orange flew with deadly aim.

Plump!

It landed fairly on Bunter's fat little nose. It was not a happy landing—for Bunter!

"Yooooo—hooo—whoop!" roared Bunter, as he disappeared backwards from the balustrade.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Ponsonby.

Bump!

Bunter had sat down suddenly—and hard!

"Yoo-hooop!"

With a gunman at large, things are more exciting than enjoyable at Seahill Park. But gunplay or no gunplay, the Famous Five, of the Greyfriars Remove, are ready to stand by a school-fellow in his hour of need!

Ponsonby, chuckling, walked back to rejoin his friends in the billiards-room.

Larkin, grinning, resumed gazing from the doorway at the fine spring morning. From above came Billy Bunter's dulcet tones on their top note:

"Ooooo! Yow-ow-ow! My nose! Ow, my boko! Wow!"

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Shadowed!

HARRY WHARTON half-rose and looked back from the car, which was eating up the miles on the long white road.

Other cars were whizzing along that bright morning, and among them, far in the rear, the captain of the Greyfriars Remove picked out a blue Mercedes.

Harry sat down again, with a rather grave face.

His comrades looked serious, too. Every few minutes Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, Hurree Janset Ram Singh, or Frank Nugent glanced back.

Only Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, seemed unconcerned.

There was a lurking grin on his rather hard face, that was all. If Smithy had noticed the blue Mercedes, it did not seem to worry him—which was surprising. For if the Greyfriars car was being followed, it was on Smithy's account, not on that of the Famous Five of the Remove.

They were only in danger from being with the Bounder. The man in the Mercedes, if he was shadowing the

party, did not care a hoot for them. Herbert Vernon-Smith was his game.

Harry Wharton & Co. had kept a look-out since the car had left Wharton Lodge. Before they passed Wimford, only a few miles from Wharton's home, the chauffeur had spoken to Smithy, and the Bounder had looked back very intently, and the Famous Five, following his stare, saw the blue Mercedes for the first time.

Since then they had seen it a dozen times.

Vernon-Smith, after that one intent stare at it, had seemed to lose all interest in it. It dropped from sight as the Greyfriars party, in Mr. Vernon-Smith's magnificent Rolls, hummed through Wimford High Street. If there was a pursuer on the road, he did not seem to care to keep close in a town.

In Wimford the Rolls had stopped, while Herbert Vernon-Smith alighted and went into a shop. He came back with a bundle, which he dropped in the car.

That bundle had lain at his feet ever since, unregarded.

As the shop had been a confectioner's, the chums of the Remove supposed that Smithy had bought tuck; but, if so, he seemed to have forgotten all about it, as he did not open the bundle or allude to it.

Now the Rolls was a good many miles past Wimford, on the way down from Surrey into Sussex. Again and again, when the Famous Five looked back, they glimpsed the blue Mercedes.

Sometimes it was unseen for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. Then they wondered whether it really was shadowing them. But always it popped up again—at a distance, sometimes a little nearer, sometimes a little farther, but never very long out of sight.

"Look here, Smithy," said Harry Wharton at last, "we're being followed, old man!"

"Think so?" asked Smithy.

"I'm absolutely certain of it!" said the captain of the Remove. "And if it is so, the man in that Mercedes is after you!"

"I can't make him out," remarked Bob Cherry. "I've spotted him once or twice, but he's all cap and goggles. But——"

"He's the man who was after you before, Smithy!" said Frank Nugent. "Look here, what about stopping in a town and putting the police on him?"

"Any good, do you think?" asked Smithy.

"Well, if he's that Italian blighter who's been sniping at your father, Smithy, the police want him badly," said Johnny Bull.

"The wantfulness of that esteemed gunman is terrific!" agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

The Bounder laughed.

"Haven't you noticed that we drop him in a town?" he asked. "He crops up again when we're clear. I don't think he would be easily nabbed. If it's the Italian in that car, he's got his eye-teeth cut!"

The Rolls hummed on. The country road changed to a street, and pace was slackened in a village. The Famous Five, looking back, failed to see the blue Mercedes. It had disappeared again.

"We could dodge the brute by taking another road," said Nugent.

"If it's the gunman, he knows we're heading for my father's place," answered Vernon-Smith. "He could pick us up again all right."

"But what's his game?" said Bob. "He followed you yesterday from Sussex to Surrey; now he's following you back from Surrey to Sussex. He

must jolly well know where you're going—home. No need for him to shadow us."

"Unless——" said Harry Wharton slowly.

"Unless what?" asked Bob.

"Unless he means to hold us up somewhere on the road!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"On a road like this, with cars buzzing by every minute!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "Some nerve if he did!"

"Not likely!" grinned Bob.

"Well, no," confessed Wharton. "But he's up to something, that's certain. He isn't following us because he likes our company at a distance."

Smithy grinned.

"If it's the gunman, he won't hold us up on a road like this," he said. "He will wait till we turn off on the road to Seahill. That's more of a lane than a road, with not much traffic about."

"Then that's his game!" said Harry.

"I shouldn't wonder."

"Well, you don't seem to mind," said the captain of the Remove, puzzled. "But from what you've told us, I should think——"

"Oh, I don't mind!" said the Bounder carelessly.

Harry Wharton frowned a little.

The Bounder of Greyfriars had a nerve of iron, and he rather liked to display that nerve. But the matter was serious enough, whether Vernon-Smith took it seriously or not.

If the man in the Mercedes was the Italian, his father's enemy, Smithy was in danger. It was, in fact, because Smithy was in danger that the Famous Five had joined up with him for the remainder of the Easter holidays.

Before Greyfriars broke up for Easter they had heard, over the radio, of the first attempt on the life of Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, the millionaire and financier. Since then they had seen newspaper reports of several more attempts, with descriptions of the Italian. One of those attempts—a dastardly scheme to wreck the millionaire's car—had been defeated by Harry Wharton.

Now they knew that the Italian had turned his attention to the millionaire's son. That was quite enough to make the Famous Five willing to join up with Smithy. They were ready to stand by him through thick and thin. Still, they were not exactly pining for trouble with a desperado armed with an automatic and recklessly ready to use it at some lonely spot out of reach of help.

The grin on the Bounder's face grew sarcastic as the Rolls hummed on, and he glanced at the serious faces of the Co.

"Sorry you came!" he asked lightly.

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Johnny Bull gruffly. "Nobody here's got cold feet, as you jolly well know, Smithy!"

"But if that blighter gets us in a quiet corner, with an automatic in his fist——" said Bob.

"There he is again!" said Nugent.

They were on the open road once more. A dozen cars were in sight, making for the coast or coming away from the seaside towns. Far in the rear of the Rolls, they picked out the blue Mercedes once more.

"Sticking to us like glue!" said Bob.

"The stickfulness is terrific!"

"Yes, that Italian is a sticker!" assented Vernon-Smith, with a nod. "He means business, and no mistake! All serene! We don't turn off this road for ten miles yet."

"And after that?" asked Nugent.

"After that it's on the knees of the gods!" said the Bounder, laughing. "We get a long stretch over the downs,"

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with hardly a building in sight, and only a passing car here and there."

"If you're thinking of giving him a race at the finish," said Bob, "you can wash it out! That Mercedes can keep up with us, and a little more."

"Oh, we'll give him a run for his money!" said the Bounder. "He will have to pass us to hold us up, and he won't do that, I think."

"I can tell you that he could jolly well pass us if he liked!" said Bob.

Bob Cherry knew something about cars, and he had a very keen eye on the Mercedes. He spoke rather warmly.

"Bet you two to one, in fivers, that he doesn't!" grinned the Bounder.

Bob gave a grunt.

The Bounder chuckled.

"My mistake!" he said. "I've got into naughty ways with the Hlighelife chaps! I'll make it two to one in doughnuts, old bean, if you're so particular."

"Oh, don't be a goat!" growled Bob. "If you know more about cars than I do, all right! But I tell you that if that man chose to go all out, he could walk past this packet!"

"We shall see!"

The Famous Five sat with rather grim faces. Now that they knew what the route ahead was like, they had no doubt whatever of the shadower's game. He was going to pick a lonely stretch, pass them at top speed, and stop the car.

Once ahead, he could draw across the road, and force them to a halt.

It was clear to them, and the Co. had more faith in Bob's judgment than in Smithy's. If the Bounder was banking on speed at the finish, he was making a mistake. But they did not see what they could do. It was Smithy's car, and it was for Smithy to decide—and if the wilful and arrogant Bounder chose to run himself into a trap, they could not stop him.

Heedless of the expressions on the faces of the Famous Five, Vernon-Smith picked up the bundle he had put on board at Wimford, and which he had apparently forgotten till then. Taking it on his knees, he began to unfasten the string—and the cool grin on his face indicated that he, at all events, had no doubt about the outcome.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Bounder Hits Back!

"GINGER-POP?" asked the Bounder.

"What?"

"Or lemon-squash?"

"You ass!"

"Or just soda?"

"Fathead!"

Harry Wharton & Co. stared blankly at the opened bundle. From it Smithy was taking bottles and tumblers and a siphon.

It was quite a warm morning, and none of the juniors had any objection to ginger-pop or lemon-squash with a dash of soda. But it did not seem to them a time for thinking of light refreshments. Even Billy Bunter, probably, would have forgotten the inner Bunter, had he been there, with an armed desperado speeding behind in a powerful car.

"No takers!" grinned the Bounder.

"Oh, rats!" grunted Johnny Bull.

The Bounder, laughing, uncorked a long-necked glass bottle, poured lemon-squash into a tumbler, and added a squirt of soda. The big car was running smoothly. Having offered the glass round in vain, Smithy drank the contents himself. Then he laughed again.

"Look out for the circus soon!" he remarked. "I'd bet any man tenners—I mean monkey-nuts!—that that Italian fancies he is on to a soft thing. When we turn off this jolly old crowded highway he will be sure of it."

"The surefulness will be terrific, my esteemed Smithy!"

"Many a slip 'twixt cup and lip!" said the Bounder. "You're fond of proverbial wisdom, Inky—there's a proverb for you."

"It is true that the slipfulness between the absurd cup and the idiotic lip is sometimes terrific," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the stitch in time saves ninepence, my esteemed Smithy. And forearmed is four-legged!"

The Bounder grinned, and, standing up, looked back once more. The blue Mercedes was a little nearer now, and in full view. Little more than the peaked cap could be seen of the driver; but nobody in the Rolls doubted who he was. Only one man had any object in tracking the Bounder of Greyfriars—and that man was his father's enemy, the Italian from Milan.

"You're asking for it, Smithy, if we turn off this road, and give him a chance!" said Frank Nugent.

"I've always been the fellow to ask for it, haven't I?" yawned the Bounder. "I shan't grouse if I get what I ask for. But——" The grin faded from his face, and it set hard—very like his father's in Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith's grimmest mood. "But," he went on quietly, "that dog of a dago hasn't got me yet. And he may be sorry soon for trying it on."

The Famous Five looked at him. That the Italian was planning to trap the Bounder, once off the populated main road, they were certain. But it occurred to them now that the Bounder had some card up his sleeve—he spoke as if he were going to be the trapper. His eyes glinted back at the Mercedes. For a moment or two his face was hard, set, grim. Then it relaxed, and he grinned again.

"Bet you that bean is counting his chickens!" he remarked. "He fancies he's got me—he's going to give me a lift in his car to parts unknown, and then dictate terms to my father! He had me once—tied up like a turkey on the rock in the bay—only that fat ass Bunter happened to be spotted about, and I got back in time. But for that, good-bye to N'gombo!"

"N'gombo!" repeated Bob. "What on earth's N'gombo?"

"A dead secret in the financial world, so far!" grinned Smithy. "But I can tell you fellows, as you're not likely to enter into financial rivalry, what? You're entitled to know what you're putting your heads in danger for."

"No need——" began Harry.

"Rot! I'm going to tell you! Ever heard of Kenya?" grinned Smithy. "Colony in East Africa, next door to Abyssinia. You remember the row between Italy and Abyssinia. That's the cause of this spot of trouble."

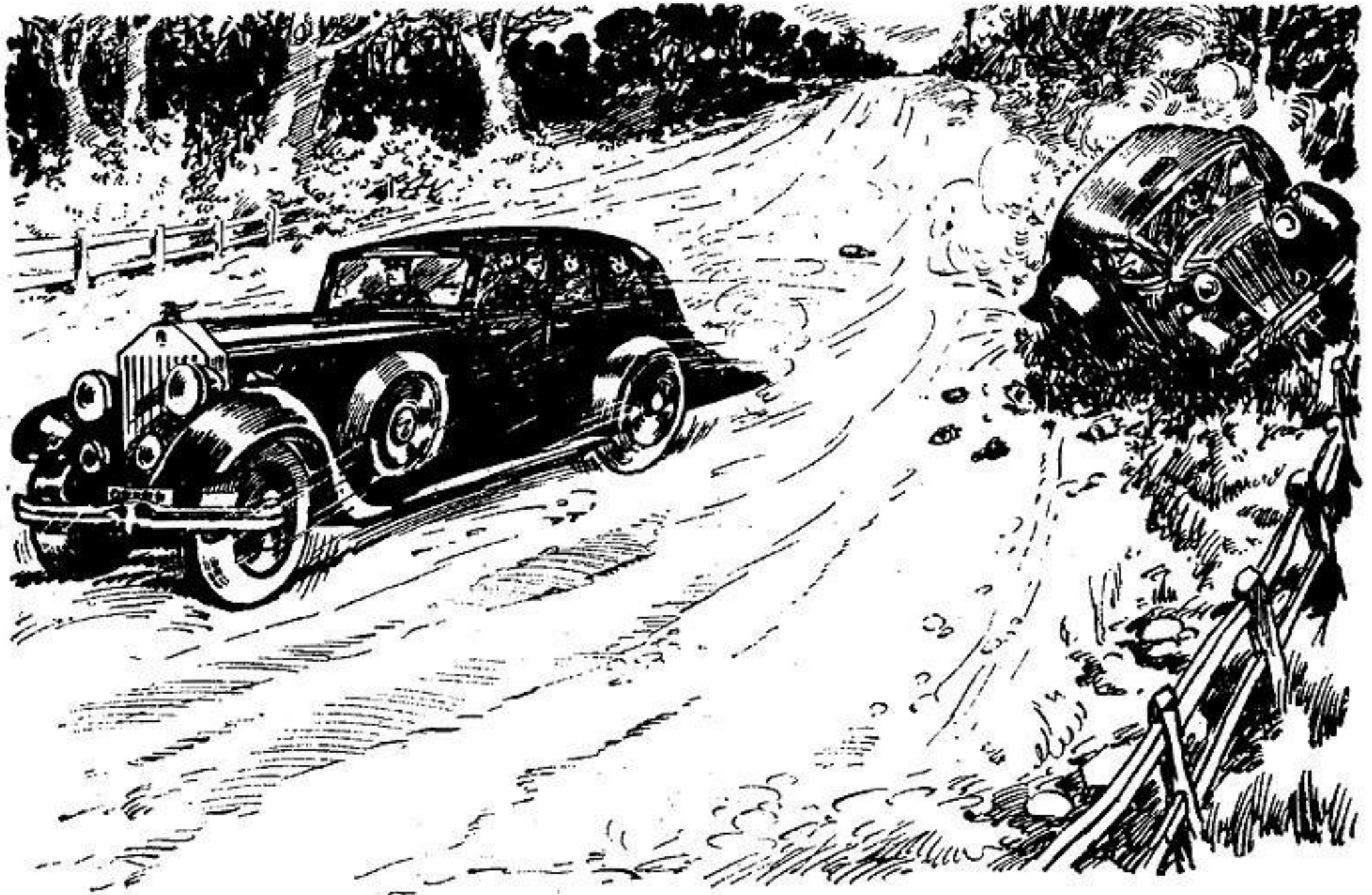
"How the dickens——" exclaimed Bob.

"N'gombo is in Kenya, on the Abyssinian border. 'Member the holiday we had there in a vac? That was the time the pater bagged the N'gombo Concession. Some Portuguese had it, and sold him an option. The Portuguese discovered tin there—stanniferous ground, as they call it. Great discovery which is being kept dark at present, till the pater fixes it all up, and his syndicate is formed—legal business put through—and N'gombo safely parked. That's where the man from Milan comes in."

"He's after it?" asked Bob.
 "Like a terrier after a rabbit. He's willing to buy, but the pater isn't willing to sell. That's why he's taken to sniping." The Bounder's lip curled. "You see, the dago is a patriot, of sorts—his stunt is to get hold of N'gombo and somehow wangle the frontier line to get it into Italian territory. I dare say you know that tin is indispensable for munitions of war—and a big tin mine is exactly what they want. The whole thing hangs on my pater—and if he went West, it would be fairly easy going for the dago. Only my pater really believes that the tin is there, so far—and without him the whole thing would fall through."
 "The awful rascal!" said Bob. "So that's why—"
 "That's why," assented Smithy. "If

"You think I'm giving him a chance?"
 "It looks like it!"
 "You'll see!" The Bounder's jaw squared. "That man has sniped at my father six or seven times. He'll be at it again—and again! Think I'm not going to stop him if I can? My pater's life is no more than a mosquito's to him, to carry on his game. What's his to me, do you think? I'd crush him like a viper! Let him come on—and let him take his chance!"
 The Bounder's eyes blazed.
 "But what—" gasped Bob.
 "You'll see!" said Vernon-Smith, between his teeth. "We're leaving the road."
 The Rolls rocked round a corner and shot on by a long lane that led over

moment, Herbert Vernon-Smith was as grimly ruthless as the man from Milan himself! They were well matched!
 The Rolls roared on. The Mercedes roared behind, closer and closer.
 Looking back, breathless now, the Famous Five watched the man who drove. They had a glimpse of a swarthy face and glinting black eyes. It was the Italian. The chums of the Remove had all seen him before, and they knew him. It was the man from Milan. And he was coming up hand-over-fist.
 Harry Wharton glanced round. Not a building—nor a car—in sight. If he passed them, and stopped them, they were at his mercy—and the tremendous speed of the Mercedes showed that that was his intention.

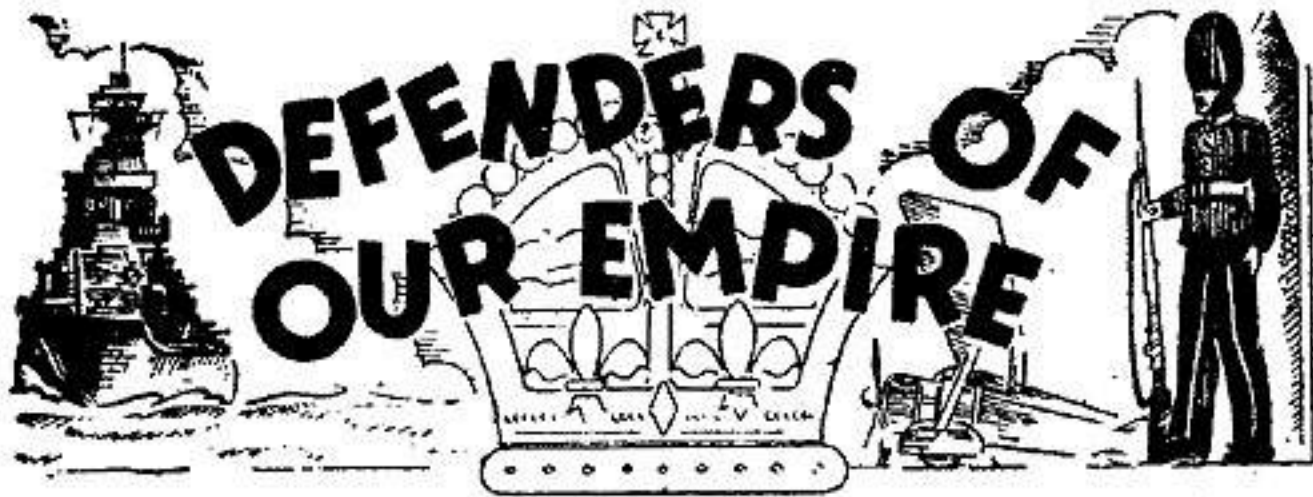


Vernon-Smith grabbed bottle after bottle, glasses and siphon, and rained them on the road, under the wheels of the oncoming car. Jagged broken glass cut the tyres to shreds, and the Mercedes swerved and then crashed! White as chalk, Harry Wharton & Co. stared back!

that blighter had sniped the pater—he's tried half a dozen times—he would have got hold of N'gombo; and I've no doubt he would get away with shifting the border-line a few miles—it's a wild, unpopulated country, forest and desert, at that spot, not known to be of any value. Anyhow, they would get the tin. But he's failed—and he hasn't much time left now; the pater's pushing things on. That's why he concentrated on little me. If he got hold of me—as he did once—his game is to buy N'gombo, with me as the price—and it would be a winner."
 The Bounder chuckled.
 "You see, for some reason it's difficult to understand, my father puts a high value on me!" he explained. "No accounting for these things."
 "Fathead!"
 "Now you know the whole bag of tricks," said Vernon-Smith, "and in a few minutes now we turn off this road and the fur will begin to fly."
 "For goodness' sake, Smithy, don't give the man a chance, if that's his game," said Harry Wharton earnestly.

green pastures on the downs. A moment or two later the blue Mercedes was seen again, coming on fast.
 The man in the Mercedes was putting on speed now. Off the main road, where other cars were many, he was ready to act. Not a car was to be seen on the long lane that led over the downs to Seahill.
 The Famous Five breathed hard.
 It seemed that the Bounder had, after all, some card up his sleeve. They could not guess what it was.
 It was not speed that he was relying on to escape.
 Williams, the chauffeur, glanced round for instructions, and the Bounder shook his head.
 The Rolls was going fast—but could have gone a great deal faster. The Bounder did not choose to put on more speed. Clearly he knew, as Bob knew, that the high-powered car behind could beat him in that line. But what the Bounder of Greyfriars had in mind, Harry Wharton & Co. could not guess. But they could see that in that

Closer and closer came the blue car, till the distance between the two was reduced to yards.
 There came a sudden shout from the Italian.
 "Stop!"
 The Bounder laughed.
 The man did not shout again. He swerved to pass the Rolls.
 Herbert Vernon-Smith stooped and lifted the bundle on the seat. From it he grabbed a bottle in each hand.
 Whiz! Crash!
 "Oh!" gasped Harry Wharton.
 "Smithy!" panted Bob.
 Unheeding, the Bounder of Greyfriars grabbed bottle after bottle, glasses and siphon, and rained them on the road, under the wheels of the oncoming car. Half a dozen of them smashed harmlessly—but the juniors, with white faces, heard a yell of mingled rage and terror from the Italian. Then it came! Jagged, broken glass cut a tyre to shreds, and the



THE KING'S NAVY

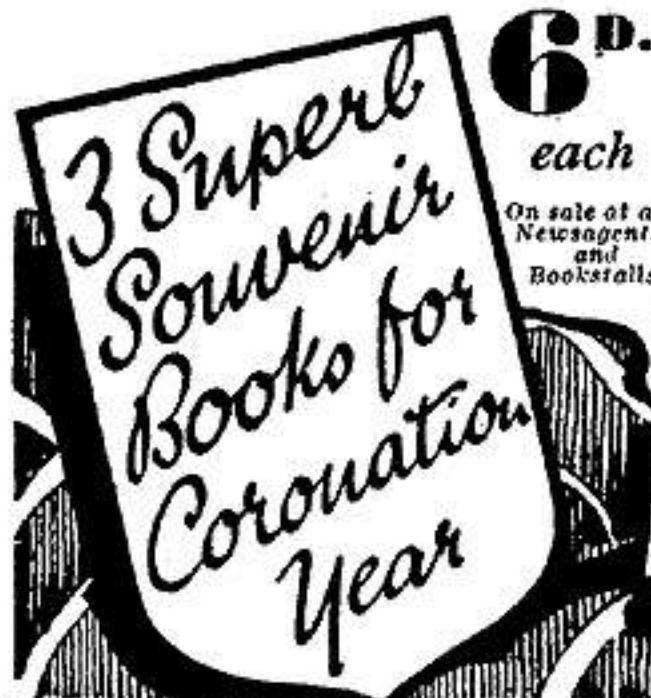
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Mercedes—a split second ago roaring behind them, swerved, and crashed.

White as chalk, the Greyfriars juniors stared back.

Herbert Vernon-Smith stared grimly.

They had a glimpse of a swerving car, that seemed to leap off the road, and the blinding crash followed.

The Rolls shot on.

What happened to the Italian they did not see. The chances were a hundred to one that he was smashed with his car. But the Rolls rushed on, leaving the wreck of the Mercedes piled on the roadside, and it disappeared from their sight!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Pon the Painter!

PONSONBY lounged out of the billiards-room at Seahill Park, followed by his knotty pals, Gadsby and Vavasour.

They grinned as a fat fist was shaken at them, over the balustrade of the gallery above.

Billy Bunter was still there—rubbing his fat little nose, which had a pain in it—till the Highcliffians appeared.

Bunter was waiting anxiously for a sound of a car on the drive. But as yet there was no sound of Smithy's car.

Until the Bouncer came, Bunter was a prisoner. He dared not come downstairs, within reach of the clutches of Pon & Co. He had to keep on the watch, ready to dodge back to his room if they came up. It was really unpleasant for Bunter—a very serious drawback to millionairing with Smithy!

But Pon & Co., except for a grinning glance, gave the fat Owl of the Remove no heed. They lounged across to the door.

"Smithy not back yet, Larkin?" asked Pon.

"No, sir."

"I fancy we'll go and meet him on the road. I suppose we can have a car?" yawned Ponsonby.

"Certainly, sir! Master Herbert has the Rolls, but there are several cars available in the garage!" answered Larkin.

"We'll walk round, then," said Ponsonby. "Get your hats, you men! Rather a rippin' mornin' for a car run."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

The four Highcliffians lounged out, and disappeared.

Billy Bunter, from above, watched them go, with a gasp of relief. They had been indoors most of the morning—with an eye open for Bunter. Apparently they had tired of waiting for the fat Owl to fall into their clutches, and given it up.

"Beasts!" hissed Bunter.

He was glad to see the last of them. But he did not venture down immediately. He gave them plenty of time to get off in the car.

Larkin went away by the service door. Billy Bunter continued to watch the hall below the gallery for a good quarter of an hour.

Then, at long last, he descended the stairs.

Bunter was no whale on fresh air, but he was quite fed-up with sticking indoors on that glorious morning. It was a relief to roll out, at last, into the sunshine.

With quite a cheery face, the Owl of the Remove rolled away down the long avenue towards the gates, which were more than a quarter of a mile from the millionaire's mansion.

That beast, Smithy, might come buzzing in, in the Rolls, any minute now, bringing with him the Famous Five

from Wharton Lodge. Billy Bunter did not, as a matter of fact, think very much of Smithy, or of the Famous Five. But he was very keen and eager to see them now.

Once Harry Wharton & Co. were installed at Seahill Park, Highcliffe rags would be at an end. Pon & Co. were ready and willing to rag a fat and helpless fellow like Bunter—very keen on it, in fact. But they would think twice, or thrice, or four times, before hunting trouble with hefty fighting men like the Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove. There was no doubt that Pon & Co. would walk very warily, with such hard litters as Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull on hand.

In quite a cheery mood, the fat Owl rolled along the shady avenue.

Suddenly the happy satisfaction faded from his fat face, and he came to a dismayed halt.

Behind him, on the drive, was a sound of pattering footsteps. Even before he looked round, he guessed.

Blinking round with startled eyes through his big spectacles, Billy Bunter beheld four fellows coming on at a run.

Grinning, Pon & Co. rushed him down, and surrounded him.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Oh crikey! Beasts—cads—rotters—ow!"

He knew now—too late!—that Pon had spoken to Larkin, in his hearing, simply for the purpose of pulling his fat leg, and tricking him out of cover.

The Highcliffe party had no intention of going out in a car to meet Smithy. They had not walked round to the garage. They had simply posted themselves out of sight, and waited for William George Bunter to walk into the trap.

Bunter had obliged them by walking straight into it!

He blinked at the four grinning faces, one after another, in terrified dismay. They had got him. Worst of all, they had got him out of sight of the mansion's windows. The servants would not have been likely to intervene—now they couldn't, anyhow! The loudest yell from Bunter would not reach Mr. Vernon-Smith in his study at the back of the house. The hapless fat Owl was fairly landed in the hands of the Amalekites!

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

"Got him!" grinned Ponsonby. "This may be our last chance, with Smithy bringing that Greyfriars crew here! We'll make a real example of him this time!"

"Yes, rather!" chuckled Monson.

"Look here, you beasts, you leave a chap alone!" gasped Bunter. "You jolly well wouldn't dare, if Bob Cherry was here!"

"Sit down!" said Ponsonby.

"Yaroooh!"

Bunter sat down, suddenly, with his hat flattened over his ears. He sat and roared.

"Got the cord, Gaddy?" chortled Pon.

"Here you are!"

"Tie up his furs!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Beasts! Leggo! Highcliffe cads!" yelled Bunter. "Help! Rescue! Beasts! Yaroooh! Leave off kicking me, Pon, you rotter! Yoo-hoop!"

Monson grasped the fat Owl's podgy wrists and dragged them together behind him. Gadsby knotted a cord round them.

Then the four of them grasped Bunter and heaved him to his feet.

"Oh, gad, he's not a light-weight!" gasped Vavasour.

"Ow! Leggo!"

"Jam him against that tree!" said Ponsonby.

"Beast!"

Bunter was jammed against a tree by the side of the avenue. Ponsonby hooked his right leg off the ground, bent it up at the knee, and held it, while Gaddy put in some more work with the cord.

Billy Bunter was left standing, like a stork, on one leg!

"Now the paint!" grinned Pon.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh crikey!" spluttered Bunter, as Monson produced a can of paint and a brush. "You—you beasts, don't you pip-pip-paint me—"

Pon prised the lid off the can and dipped in the brush.

Bunter, leaning against the tree with only one leg to stand on, could not make an effort to escape. He blinked in horror at the paint-laden brush that approached his fat face. It was a bright red paint—a glaring crimson. Bunter's face was red with wrath and indignation and excitement—but it was soon much redder, as the playful Pon laid on the paint.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour, as Ponsonby daubed.

"Oh, you beast!" gasped Bunter. "Oh, you rotter—ooooogh!" he gurgled, as a dab of paint went into his mouth.

"Better keep your mouth shut!" suggested Pon.

"Ooooooch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Gurrrrgh!"

There was a good deal of paint in the can. Pon let Bunter have the lot, and scraped out the tin with a last wipe of the brush, and pushed the brush down the back of the fat Owl's neck. Bunter shuddered and wriggled as it went down.

Standing back, the four Highcliffians looked at Bunter, gasping with laughter. His face was crimson with paint, and paint daubed his ears and his hair, his collar, and his tie, and streaked over his clothes.

His aspect was really remarkable. He leaped to the eye, as it were. He shone afar like a beacon.

"Oh, gad!" gasped Ponsonby. "What a picture!"

"Ooogh! You awful beast!" mumbled Bunter. "Woooooch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, you're not leaving me here like this!" gurgled Bunter. "I say, you rotten beasts—"

"Come on!" said Pon. "Leave it at that! You can stick there, you fat porpoise, till Smithy comes along. Sort of surprise for him!"

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

And Pon & Co., laughing, walked away up the avenue.

Billy Bunter blinked after them, hardly believing that even the young rascals of Highcliffe would really leave him in this awful state.

But they did!

Chortling, they disappeared up the avenue, and the Owl of the Remove was left on his lonely own.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He hopped away from the tree. He nearly tumbled over, and hopped desperately to keep his balance. He was about half-way down the avenue—he did not venture to hop the way Pon & Co. had gone; and he decided to hop down to the gate, and get the lodgekeeper to untie him.

But that was easier to decide than to do. He hopped—and hopped—and stumbled, and tumbled!

Bump!

"Whooooop!"

Billy Bunter sat down in the middle of

the shady avenue. He sat and spluttered, and glowed with paint. With only one available leg, he could not get up again. He could only sit and wait and gurggle and splutter, and hope that somebody would come.

The sound of a car at last was like music to his fat ears!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Sticky!

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

He jumped in the car.

So did the other fellows.

Williams, the chauffeur, braked, and then stared. The Famous Five stared: the Bouncer stared. It was really an amazing sight that greeted them on the shady avenue at Seahill Park.

Up to that moment, Harry Wharton & Co. had been looking grave—the Bouncer grim and a little sardonic. The Famous Five could not help thinking of the wrecked Mercedes, and the man who had driven it.

They had stopped at the police station at Seahill, to report the matter to Inspector Stuce there. Police were already on their way to the spot where the Mercedes had crashed.

That the Bouncer was fully justified, more than justified, in his action, the Co. admitted. The Italian had pursued him, to kidnap him by force, to use a deadly weapon if his friends stood by him, as certainly they would have done—to blackmail Mr. Vernon-Smith by threatening his son's life—and to take that life mercilessly if the millionaire did not yield. That was the crook's game; and any means of defence were justified against such a murderous rascal. A man who threw aside every moral and legal restraint had to be treated like a wild beast—as, indeed, he was.

But the episode was too desperate and tragic for the chums of the Remove to dismiss it easily.

The Seahill inspector had listened with a startled face to what the Bouncer told him. Certainly Smithy was not to be blamed for defending his own liberty and the lives of his friends. Any defensive measures were lawful against an unlawful attack. But there was no doubt that the millionaire's son had displayed very uncommon nerve and hardihood.

Harry Wharton & Co. hoped that the Italian, villain as he was, had escaped alive from the wreck.

They could see in Smithy's sardonic face that he did not share their hope.

Still, it was hard to blame Smithy for that, when he was thinking of his father's safety, threatened by a determined and remorseless enemy.

If the man who called himself "Nessuno" had been smashed in his car, Smithy's father was safe from further murderous attacks; and it was natural that that should be first in the Bouncer's thoughts.

Five faces were clouded and thoughtful, all the same, as the Rolls turned in at the gates of Seahill Park.

But the sight of the remarkable object in the middle of the shady avenue banished seriousness from all faces.

They stared blankly at that remarkable object, as Williams braked, and the Rolls stopped within a few yards of it.

"What the merry dickens—" exclaimed Smithy.

"Is that Bunter?" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Red as a rose is he!" gurgled Bob Cherry.

"Great pip!"

"What the thump——"

The Greyfriars juniors jumped out of the car. They surrounded the hapless fat Owl sitting in the avenue.

Billy Bunter blinked up at them through spectacles smeared with paint.

"Urrgh! I say, you fellows——" he gasped.

"Bunter! Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Vernon-Smith. "What's the name of that game, Bunter?"

"Beast!" gurgled Bunter.

"He blushes!" grinned Bob.

"He's got plenty to blush for!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"The blushfulness is terrific!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts!" roared Bunter. "Look at me!"

They looked—and roared.

Bunter was in an awful state. But there was a comic aspect to the matter, though it was quite lost on Bunter himself.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" howled Bunter. "Look at me! Help me gerrup, will you? I'm tied up——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beasts! Sniggering beasts! Oh crikey!"

"Who did this?" gasped Frank Nugent.

"Urrgh! Those Highcliffe cads!" groaned Bunter. "Oh lor'! I'm all painty! Ow!"

"The Highcliffe fellows!" exclaimed Wharton. He had forgotten, for the moment, that Ponsonby & Co. were staying for Easter with Vernon-Smith.

"Grooogh! Yes! Look at me!" groaned Bunter.

"Why did you let them do it?" asked Johnny Bull.

"You silly ass! Think I wanted them to?" howled Bunter. "I fought like a tiger! I knocked two of them out—but the four were too many for me. I couldn't handle more than three at once——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle!" yelled Bunter. "Will you get me loose or not?"

"Well, you're not nice to touch, old fat man," said Bob Cherry. "But we'll see what we can do."

Bob opened his pocket-knife and cut the cords. It was not easy to touch Bunter without getting some of the paint. However, he was set loose.

"Now help me up!" squeaked Bunter.

"You're a bit too sticky, old fat man."

"Beast!"

Bunter heaved up his weight and stood on his feet. He blinked angrily at the grinning juniors.

"Nice way to see a guest treated, Vernon-Smith!" he hooted. "Not the sort of thing that could happen at Bunter Court, I can tell you! I can jolly well tell you that I'm going to thrash Ponsonby for this."

The Bounder chuckled.

"More power to your fat elbow!" he said. "I shan't stop you! It's really too thick. Thrash him all you like!"

"I mean, if I feel up to it, after this!" added Bunter. "If not, I shall expect one of my pals to thrash him for me. You, Bob——"

"We're rather late for lunch, owing to that jolly old Italian," remarked Vernon-Smith. "Let's get on!"

"Help me into the car, you fellows!"

"Fathead! You're too sticky to get into the car!" said the Bounder. "Do you want to smother everything and everybody with wet paint?"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Billy Bunter certainly was in no state

to take a seat in an expensive and luxurious Rolls. That, however, was a matter of small moment to Bunter. He was not going to walk, when there was a car available—and as it was not his car, naturally it did not matter.

He rolled to the Rolls, to get in. Smithy frowned, and raised a hand to pull him back—but dropped it again.

With a defiant snort, the fat Owl rolled into the car, spreading red paint right and left over leather cushions.

"Look here, you fat ass——" exclaimed Smithy.

"Beast!"

"That car will want some cleaning," remarked Bob Cherry. "So will Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, you can get in——"

"Thanks," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "I'd rather walk the rest, old fat bean! Your company's as delightful as ever—but you're rather too juicy at close quarters!"

"The juiciness is terrific."

"Yah!"

Vernon-Smith signed to Williams to drive on, and the Rolls rolled on with Bunter.

The juniors walked after it. They grinned as they walked. By the time they reached the house, Bunter had gone in, and—unusual as it was for the fat Owl to indulge in an extra wash—he was parked in a bath-room, strenuously busy with hot water and soap.

Bunter was breaking two records at once that day. Not only was he late for a meal, but he was late on account of putting in extra washing!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Oil and Water!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were rather relieved not to meet the Highcliffe fellows at lunch.

They had got in late for that function; and Pon & Co., they learned, had lunched with Mr. Vernon-Smith, and gone out.

Mr. Vernon-Smith was back in his study, with documents and maps, and telephone calls every few minutes; up to the neck in business connected with the N'gombo Concession.

Smithy went to see his father, to tell him of the happening on the road. He came back and joined the Famous Five at lunch.

Billy Bunter did not appear. Bunter was still busy rubbing and scrubbing, and scrubbing and rubbing. The other fellows bore the loss of his company with considerable fortitude.

Larkin waited on the party; and it was possible to read in his portly countenance that he regarded Master Herbert's new guests as an improvement on the old ones.

The Bounder was rather thoughtful; but it soon transpired that he was not thinking of the incident on the road.

"Look here, you men," said Smithy, after a long pause, "it's a bit awkward, I suppose, as you're on scrappin' terms with the Highcliffe chaps, at school. But there's no need for rowin'."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We haven't come here to row with your other guests, Smithy," he answered.

"Well, no; but——"

"There is no butfulness, my esteemed Smithy!" assured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "We will treat the disgusting

Highcliffians with terrific and contemptuous friendliness."

"I suppose we can keep civil, even to those—I mean, even to Pon & Co.," said Bob Cherry.

"Butter shan't melt in our mouths, Smithy!" said Frank Nugent.

"Only, one thing," said Johnny Bull, in his slow and stolid way, "Bunter's a fat ass, and a howling idiot, but he's a Greyfriars man, and I'm not going to stand for Highcliffe cads ragging a Greyfriars man. You'd better give them a tip to leave Bunter alone, Smithy."

"They won't need one, now you fellows are here," said Smithy, shrugging his shoulders. "They don't want any trouble with fellows who can protect themselves. You'll find Pon & Co. civil enough."

"Well, if they're civil, we'll be civil!" said Harry. "No need to revive school rags in the hols, that I know of."

"That's all right, then!" said Smithy, evidently relieved. "Stick to that, and there needn't be any trouble. I've asked those chaps for the hols, and I can't very well turn them out."

"Hardly!" assented Wharton. "In a whacking place like this, old man, there's room for the lot, without treading on one another's corns."

Ponsonby glanced in at the door.

"Hallo, Smithy! Sorry we were out when you got back—glad to see you again, old bean!"

Pon's manner to the millionaire's son was very cheery and cordial. He did not seem to observe that there was anyone else in the room. His glance passed over the Famous Five, as if they were not there.

Harry Wharton compressed his lips a little.

Certainly he did not want to speak to the cad of Highcliffe, or to be spoken to by him. The less he saw of Pon & Co., the better he was going to like it. But if Pon was going to begin by making himself offensive, it was not easy to keep the peace, as Smithy desired.

"Finished your lunch?" went on Pon, in his airy way. "Come and have a hundred up, old bean."

Vernon-Smith looked at him.

"You know these chaps, Pon!" he remarked. "They'll be staying with me, for the rest of the vac."

Thus compelled to take note of the Famous Five, Ponsonby gave them a glance and a slight nod.

"Happy to see you!" he drawled, and immediately became oblivious of their existence again. "Come on, Smithy—we've been missin' you fearfully."

Vernon-Smith hesitated a moment. Between the two parties, on terms of hostility, subdued if not open, Smithy was in rather an awkward position. Oil and water were as likely to mix as the Famous Five of Greyfriars and the knutty gang from Highcliffe.

"I dare say you fellows would like a stroll round the place," he remarked.

"Oh, quite!" said Harry politely.

"I'll see you when you come in, then."

And the Bounder went away with Pon.

Johnny Bull gave a grunt.

The Famous Five, having finished their lunch, went out into the hall. There, the click of billiard balls reached their ears; and through an open doorway, they saw Smithy and Pon already busy.

Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour were standing in the hall. They were looking out into the sunshine, and perhaps did not notice the Greyfriars fellows behind



Billy Bunter slept and snored as Ponsonby proceeded to saw through the cord at the end of the hammock with his penknife. As soon as the rope parted the fat Removite would have an extremely disagreeable bump in the grass!

them. Perhaps, on the other hand, they did.

"That fat cad is still washin', I believe!" remarked Monson, with a chuckle.

"Do him good!" said Gadsby.

"Absolutely!" chirped Vavasour. "Greyfriars fellows seldom or never wash, I believe!"

"Never, I think," said Monson. "I don't think it will cost Smithy much in the way of soap to have a Greyfriars party here."

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged glances. Certainly, with their backs to them, the Highcliffe fellows could not see them. But they must have heard footsteps. In fact, it was perfectly clear that this cheery conversation was being carried on for the special benefit of the Famous Five.

Johnny Bull made a movement with his foot. But he restrained his desire to kick Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour through the big doorway, one after another.

"Ripping place Smithy's got here!" Bob Cherry remarked. "And it's only one of his pater's places! Who wouldn't be a millionaire?"

"The whiffulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

These remarks were, obviously as audible to Gadsby & Co. as the Highcliffe remarks had been to the Famous Five. So when the cheery Highcliffians went on, there was no further doubt on the subject.

"I hear that Smithy's asked a whole crew of them here," observed Monson, still carefully not seeing the juniors in the hall. "A gang of outsiders like Bunter, from what I hear."

"Bit thick!" remarked Monson. "Of course, Smithy can please himself—but I think it's a bit thick, landing a crew like that on decent fellows."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Well, I'm goin' to keep them at armslength," went on Monson. "Smithy can't expect us to associate with them. That's askin' too much."

"A lot too much!" concurred Gadsby. "May as well be civil, of course—but keep the pushin' cads at a distance."

The Famous Five looked at one another. Johnny Bull's brow was growing grim; Harry Wharton's face red. Bob Cherry winked at his friends.

"I hear that Smithy's got some Highcliffe chaps staying here, you fellows," he remarked. "Pon's gang of shady rotters, I hear."

His friends stared at him. Then they grinned. Bob's idea was that if the Highcliffians could carry on a conversation, ignoring fellows who stood hardly ten feet away, so could the Greyfriars juniors! Catching on immediately, the Co. played up to Bob's cue!

"Yes, so it seems!" said Nugent. "I wonder why the dickens Smithy asked such a crew of card-sharping outsiders."

"Keep them at a distance," said Johnny Bull, grinning. "They'll be tryin' to welsh us at billiards, if they get a chance."

"The welshfulness will be terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a dusky grin.

"Yes, for goodness' sake don't let the cads get friendly!" Harry Wharton took up the tale. "All very well at Highcliffe, but fellows who picked up their ways would be sacked from any decent school."

"I've often thought," remarked Bob, "that it's lucky for Ponsonby, Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour that Highcliffe is such a rotten, mouldy show! It's about the only school that such a set of putrid rotters could shove into. But I suppose they wouldn't be allowed to hang on even at Highcliffe if their

headmaster knew what rotten rascals they were."

"Hardly!" agreed Wharton.

Gadsby & Co. did not look round as they heard these pleasant remarks. But the Greyfriars fellows could see that their ears were burning.

The three Highcliffians, still without looking round, walked out of the doorway, and went on the terrace.

The Famous Five chuckled.

Gadsby & Co. evidently had had enough of that peculiar game, having discovered that two parties could play at it.

"I think," chortled Bob, "that we had rather the best of that. But it looks to me, my beloved 'earers, as if there's some slight, faint possibility of trouble before we get to the end of these hols."

And there was no doubt that it looked rather like that!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Sniped!

MR. SAMUEL VERNON-SMITH put up the receiver after his umpteenth telephone-call that day, whirled round on his swivel-chair, and looked at his son, who had just entered.

The millionaire's plump face expressed a rather grim satisfaction.

Harry Wharton & Co. followed the Bounder in.

They entered rather diffidently. Aware that Mr. Vernon-Smith was a tremendously busy gentleman, whose time was of tremendous value, they did not want to butt in and take up any of his invaluable minutes, or even precious seconds.

However, Smithy told them, after tea, that he was going to take them to speak to his father, so they followed on.

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Mr. Vernon-Smith gave them a nod and a smile, and then, getting up from his chair, shook hands with them all round.

He seemed pleased to see them, which was grateful and comforting, for they hardly expected so very busy a gentleman to remember their existence.

"I am glad to see you boys here!" declared Mr. Vernon-Smith very cordially. "I've no doubt Herbert has told you about the circumstances—"

"Yes, we've heard all about the gunman, sir!" answered Harry, with a smile.

"It may be that the danger is over," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "From what Herbert has told me of your adventure coming here it is possible. All the better in that case—I hope you will enjoy a holiday here."

"That's an easy one, sir!" said Bob. "A chap who couldn't in a place like this would be hard to please."

The millionaire smiled. "But," he added, "if the Italian has escaped there may be danger yet. In that case it is a great relief to my mind that Herbert should have some of his friends with him—I mean, the kind of friends who would stand by him if he needed it."

Mr. Vernon-Smith evidently did not regard Pon & Co. as friends of that kind!

Smithy winked at the Famous Five, who smiled.

Smithy's own opinion of his Highcliffe pals was, as a matter of fact, exactly the same as his father's. He cared nothing for Pon & Co., except as associates in "rowdy" pursuits. And after a week or two of them he was getting much less keen on their company.

"These chaps would like to hear the news, if any, father," said the Bounder. "Inspector Stuce was going to let you know about the Italian."

"I have had one call from the police station," answered Mr. Vernon-Smith. "The inspector has taken charge of the wrecked car, but nothing was seen of the Italian on the spot. Search is being made and the inspector is going to ring again."

The Famous Five brightened involuntarily. The Bounder, on the other hand, gave a discontented grunt.

"Then the brute got clear?" he asked.

"Inspector Stuce thinks it unlikely that he can have escaped injury in so complete a smash," answered his father. "It is possible, or, rather, probable, that he will be picked up before he has got far—he can hardly be in a state, Mr. Stuce thinks, to make his escape."

"That's good if true," said Smithy.

"I cannot say I should be sorry at any extent of damage to the scoundrel," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "I am tired of his sniping, and it has caused me very considerable inconvenience. I shall now be able to return to the City for a few days—"

"Not till there's definite news!" said the Bounder quickly.

"The news is definite enough," said Mr. Vernon-Smith. "I have remained here, Herbert, this week at very great inconvenience to my affairs, on account of your uneasiness for me. But now I—"

"Wait till they get the man, father. If he got away, as likely as not he's hanging about, looking for a chance of taking another pot-shot."

"Very unlikely!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith decidedly. "I have to see several men in the City, Herbert—"

"I shall travel up with you, then."

"You cannot abandon your guests!"

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"Oh, yes, I can!" said Smithy coolly. "These chaps won't mind, and Pon & Co. can lump it if they don't like it."

Harry Wharton & Co. moved across to the open french windows, which looked out on the millionaire's private garden.

An argument was beginning between the Bounder and his father, and they were feeling a little uncomfortable.

Outside, the spring sunshine was bright on the extensive shrubberies, backed by towering old oaks and beeches. On a path in the shrubbery they spotted a helmet. A Seahill constable was on duty there. Since the assassin's last attempt on the millionaire, Inspector Stuce's men had been on patrol to keep watch and ward.

"Now, look here, Herbert," came Mr. Vernon-Smith's voice, with a sharp note in it, "I've told you I will not allow you to travel with me so long as this danger lasts, and I mean it. Last time, I admit, you saved my life—next time you might lose your own."

"Which means that you don't really think it is safe, and are going to chance it!" said Smithy. "Well, if you do, I do!"

"I tell you, Herbert—"

"And I tell you—"

Buzzzzzzzz! went the telephone-bell.

It interrupted what was developing into an altercation—rather to the relief of the Famous Five.

Mr. Vernon-Smith grabbed the receiver from the hooks, frowning at his son over the telephone.

"Inspector Stuce? Yes! Mr. Vernon-Smith speaking!" The millionaire fairly barked into the transmitter. His frown intensified as he listened to what the Seahill inspector had to say, and all the juniors could see that the news was unpalatable.

Mr. Vernon-Smith gave a grunt as he jammed the receiver back at last.

"Well?" asked Smithy.

"They find no trace of the Italian!" growled his father. "The man cannot have been hurt in the crash, as he seems to have escaped and left no trace behind. However, they are still hunting him."

"Then he's still loose!" said the Bounder quietly. "And you're in as much danger as ever, father?"

"I must go up to the City, Herbert."

"Not alone."

Mr. Vernon-Smith waved a plump hand at his son.

"Say no more, Herbert. Very likely the man was injured, though he has succeeded in getting clear. At all events, he has fled. I shall run little risk—"

"I shouldn't wonder if the brute's hanging about the place this very minute," said the Bounder.

"Nonsense!"

"Look here, father—"

"That will do, Herbert—leave me now. Tell Mason to come here—there are some letters to be typed. Now run away, my boy."

Mr. Vernon-Smith sat down at his desk again. Outside the sunlight was bright, but it was getting dusky in the study, and he switched on the light of a shaded electric lamp on the desk.

With a mass of documents before him, the millionaire evidently forgot the presence of the Greyfriars juniors.

Smithy turned away, with a knitted brow, and Harry Wharton & Co. followed him to the door.

Crash!

Mr. Vernon-Smith fairly bounded from his chair. Harry Wharton & Co. spun round, in amazement.

Something had struck the millionaire's desk, smashing in a drawer. The next second the juniors knew what it

was, as the report of a firearm followed the crash from the garden outside.

"Good gad!" gasped Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Father!" gasped Smithy.

For a moment or two Mr. Vernon-Smith stared at the smashed drawer in the desk. Outside, the Seahill constable was pacing the garden paths, yet it was from the garden that the sudden shot had come. It had missed the millionaire by hardly more than an inch as it crashed.

The Bounder sprang towards his father, grasped him by the arm, and dragged him forcibly back from the desk.

He was only in time, for even as he dragged the portly gentleman away, another bullet crashed into the desk, this time knocking over an inkpot.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob.

"Gad!" stuttered Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Good gad! The scoundrel—he is there—that gunman! Good gad!"

Harry Wharton stepped quickly to the lamp, and switched it off. He guessed at once that it had guided the aim of the sniper—from a distance. The other juniors ran to the french window, and stared out. The Seahill constable, alarmed by the shots, had drawn his truncheon, and was staring about him, but there was no sign of the sniper to be seen.

But a movement in the branches of a high old oak, in a line with the study window, caught Bob Cherry's eye. He pointed.

"In that tree!" he exclaimed. "By gum, he's been there watching, and as soon as Smithy's pater turned on the light—"

"Come on!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"Stop!" shouted Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"You must not—"

But the Bounder was already rushing out, and the Famous Five rushed with him. They shouted to the constable as they ran down a path in the thick shrubberies towards the oak. Mr. Vernon-Smith, with a revolver in his hand, followed them, panting for breath.

It was a couple of minutes, however, before they reached the oak—more than time enough for the sniper. Two or three trampled shrubs showed the way he had gone—but he was gone.

It was indubitable evidence that the man from Milan had not been hurt in the motor smash. And the Famous Five, who had been glad to hear that he had escaped from that smash alive, could not feel quite so sure now that they were glad of it.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Pon Knows How!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Give us a rest!" implored Bob Cherry.

"Beast!"

"You're beginning to be a bore, old fat man!" Bob pointed out.

Sniff, from Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. had been several days at Seahill Park now. On the whole, they found themselves in quite agreeable quarters there.

It was rather a peculiar position—guests under the same roof as Pon & Co., their old enemies, who had forgotten none of their enmity.

But the two parties kept out of each other's way as much as they could; and when they had to meet they were civil, if not cordial.

The Famous Five were more than willing to keep the peace, if it could be kept, on Smithy's account. It would have been extremely awkward for the

Bounder, had his ill-assorted guests come to blows.

Pon & Co. were unwilling to keep the peace, but they were driven thereto by the fact that they had no use for hard hitting if it came to a row.

The tastes of the two parties being so very different, they had nothing in common, and, in fact, hardly saw one another except at meals. Seahill Park was more than big enough for both—and their tastes led them in quite different directions.

Pon & Co. never found the Greyfriars fellows in the smoke-room or the billiards-room, their favourite haunts. And the Famous Five never found Pon & Co. on the tennis-court, or in the boats, or rambling on the beach, or clambering on the cliffs.

Smithy divided his time between the two parties, with a rather sardonic amusement.

When the blackguardly fit was on him he played billiards, or bridge, or banker with his Highcliffe friends. At other times, he joined in healthy outdoor pursuits with the Famous Five.

In their company, his father regarded him as safe, and he was able to go boating, and bathing, and cliff-climbing. And when he was with the Highcliffians the Famous Five found plenty to do, and did not miss him fearfully.

So three or four days passed, during which nothing more was heard of the gunman. Since the shot in the study window, from the oak, a much more careful guard was kept. Several plain-clothes men were on duty, and it was unlikely that the sniper would succeed in penetrating into the grounds again.

Since that incident, Mr. Vernon-Smith had given up his intended trip to the City, much as it irked and chafed him.

He hoped, from hour to hour, to hear that the elusive Italian had been arrested; but no such news had come, so far.

Every now and then a car would come roaring up the avenue, with some City gentleman to see Mr. Vernon-Smith—Mahomet coming to the mountain, as it were, as the mountain could not go to Mahomet!

Probably, of all the people assembled at Seahill Park, Billy Bunter was the least satisfied.

Really, he had cause for satisfaction, as, since the arrival of the Famous Five, ragging was a thing of the past.

Without anything being said on the subject, Pon & Co. understood quite clearly that if they handled Bunter, they had to deal with the Greyfriars fellows, for which excellent reason they left the fat Owl severely alone.

Which was satisfactory, so far as it went.

Nevertheless, Bunter was not satisfied. He had not recovered from the paint!

Even after the lapse of days, there were still pinkish traces about Bunter. Pon had laid on that paint not wisely, but too well.

Bunter's view was that Pon ought to be thrashed.

In that view the Famous Five fully concurred; but, in the circumstances, they could not very well undertake to give Pon the thrashing he deserved.

Bunter, on the other hand, was free to administer it, if the spirit moved him so to do! Every member of the famous Co. were prepared to hold his hat or his jacket, or to stand round and cheer.

For reasons that were no doubt good, however, Billy Bunter preferred not to thrash Pon personally. It was up to his pals, he considered.

He pointed out, not once, but many times, that Bob Cherry could have

knocked Pon out with one hand without getting much damaged in the process. Which was no doubt quite correct; but Bob had not come to Seahill Park to knock Smithy's guests out, either with one hand or two. He was prepared to knock Pon into the middle of next week, or the whole length of the calendar if he touched Bunter again—otherwise, he was not going to give him even the gentlest tap.

Sitting in the hammock on the lawn after lunch, the fat Owl raised the subject again—for the hundredth time or so. And the Famous Five implored him to give them a rest.

As Bunter declined to give them a rest they strolled away, followed by a sniff from the fat Owl of the Remove.

However, he found comfort in taking a nap in the hammock. Bunter liked a nap in a hammock under a shady tree on a warm afternoon—especially when he had parked two or three lunches, one after another. But until the Greyfriars fellows came he had not ventured to risk it, with the Highcliffe fellows about.

Now all was safe; and Billy Bunter put a fat cushion under his fat head, shut his eyes, and opened his mouth, and slept and snored.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, Smithy!" roared Bob Cherry, as the Bounder appeared at the door of the billiards-room on the terrace. "Coming down to the sea?"

Smithy hesitated a moment or two. He had played a hundred up with Pon since lunch, and Gadsby claimed a game. But he nodded to Bob, called into the billiards-room, "See you fellows presently," and joined the Famous Five.

Leaving Pon & Co. to play billiards and Bunter to snore, the Greyfriars fellows went off cheerily by the path through the park, to the gate in the sea-wall on the beach.

Bunter snored unheeding.

But Pon & Co., after a little while, came loafing out on the lawn. They tired of billiards without the millionaire's son to put fivers on the game.

Pon was looking angry and discontented, his friends bored and peevish. They loafed on the lawn, smoking cigarettes, glancing once or twice at the fat and ample figure that weighted down the hammock.

"That cad Smithy's givin' us the go-by again!" grunted Ponsonby.

"Well, we had his nibs all day, so far; he's givin' his own cads a turn," said Gadsby tolerantly. "Can't say I miss him a fearful lot."

Monson shrugged his shoulders.

"I fancy Smithy's gettin' a bit fed-up!" he remarked. "He's not half so keen on bein' sporty since those cads came. He goes to bed when they do, instead of sittin' up with us. We hardly get a game with him now."

"Do you know," murmured the vacant Vavasour. "I shouldn't wonder if Smithy wouldn't be sorry if we cut our stay short."

"Ass!" said Ponsonby.

That, which had only recently dawned on Vavasour, had occurred to the other three some time ago.

"Well, we can't get shut of that crew!" said Monson. "Can't try raggin' them out, as we did with Bunter! Not that we had much luck with Bunter, either."

Ponsonby cast an evil look towards the hammock.

"Chance to give the fat rotter jip now," he remarked.

Vavasour looked alarmed.

"Look here, chuck it, Pon! We don't want to row with those brutes!"

"No—wash it out, old man!" said Gadsby. "I've heard some of their talk, and I can tell you that fat freak's

been tryin' to egg them on to a row ever since you painted him last week. Leave him alone."

"They'd take it up for him," said Monson. "We can handle that flabby freak just as we like, but I don't want a scrap with that hefty brute Cherry!"

"Afraid of him?" sneered Ponsonby.

"Oh, don't swank!" snapped Monson. "You jolly well don't want a row with him any more than I do! Less, if you come to that!"

"Mightn't come to a row," said Ponsonby coolly. "Suppose that fat fool came down a whop in that hammock, with nobody on the spot. Hammock ropes break sometimes—especially with a weight like that on them!"

"Well, if that hammock breaks under the strain, I'd like to see him drop!" grinned Gadsby. "But it won't."

"It might—if the rope got a bit frayed."

"How's it goin' to get frayed, fat-head?"

"With a little help it might."

Ponsonby took out a penknife and opened it.

His friends exchanged very uneasy glances.

"Give it a miss!" muttered Gadsby.

"He will tumble——"

"He will, when the rope goes!" assented Pon.

"Oh, don't be a funny ass! I mean, he will tumble to who did it."

"He won't know that anybody did it. If he does, he won't know who. He won't wake till he hits the earth. Those cads are down on the beach—safe as houses!"

Ponsonby strolled across the grass towards the hammock.

His friends remained where they were, watching him very uneasily.

So far, they had completely given up ragging Bunter. Certainly, they were quite prepared to carry on, if no painful consequences were to be feared. But they did not feel so sure of that, as Pon appeared to feel.

There was no danger of Billy awakening. He slept, and he snored, as Pon went quietly up to the hammock.

Ponsonby looked at the fat face, with a contemptuous sneer. He would have been only too glad to grab the hammock and roll the fat Owl headlong out of it, to bump on the ground. But that—in present circumstances—he dared not do.

He proceeded to saw through the cord at the head of the hammock with his penknife. A fall at the foot end would have been unpleasant enough; but it was like Pon to make it more unpleasant if he could.

There was no doubt that if that rope parted while Bunter was in the hammock, the fat junior would have an extremely disagreeable bump in the grass. That was what Pon wanted—so long as his own hand in the affair remained undetected.

And how was he to be found out? It was true that hammock ropes broke at times—and Bunter's weight put a terrific strain on the strongest rope. It would pass as an accident—and Bunter would get the bump.

Coolly he sawed through the rope, parting strand after strand, till only a single strand held. Further than that he dared not go. Now that the rope might part any minute—and was certain to part as soon as Bunter moved—Pon was anxious to get off the scene. He slipped his penknife back into his

pocket, and rejoined his friends, grinning.

"What about having a car out?" he suggested. "Better be off the scene when that fat freak hits the jolly old globe, what?"

"Much better!" grinned Monson.

And in a few minutes the Highcliffe party were coming out in a Rolls—while Billy Bunter continued to snore, and—if he was dreaming—little dreaming how precariously he was suspended over the green lawn of Seahill Park.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Bump for Bunter!

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

Snore!

The Famous Five

chuckled.

They had come back from the beach for tea, and Vernon-Smith went into the house, to tell Larkin to serve tea on the lawn.

Harry Wharton & Co. gathered round Bunter's hammock.

Bunter was snoring placidly. Next to eating, sleeping was Billy Bunter's delight; and in that line Rip van Winkle had nothing on Bunter. Evidently he had been sleeping and snoring all the while the Greyfriars fellows had been gone; and even Bob Cherry's stentorian roar did not awaken him when they returned.

"Wake up, Bunter!" roared Bob. "Tea, old man! Grub! Food! Cakes and buns, old fat man! Jam and jelly!"

Snore!

Even those magic words did not call Bunter from the land of dreams!

Larkin and his myrmidons came out, with tables and chairs and tea. The Bounder rejoined the Famous Five.

"The Highcliffe chaps seem to be gone out," he remarked. He grinned. "I don't think they'd have left Bunter sleeping so peacefully last week. Wake up, Bunter! Tea, old fat porker!"

Snore!

The Bounder reached into the hammock and gave Bunter a shake. Bunter's little round eyes opened behind his big round spectacles at last.

"Beast!" he murmured. "Lemme alone! 'Tain't rising-bell!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!" Bunter sat up. "I say, you fellows—Yarooooooh!"

That did it! So far, the frayed rope had held, as Bunter had not moved. It had held—but the slightest sudden strain on it was bound to do the trick—and it did!

As Bunter sat up, the rope parted and the hammock went down by the head—and Billy Bunter, in great surprise bumped on the earth—hard!

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter. "Beasts! Yoo-hooop!"

He rolled in the grass, roaring.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Poor old Bunter!" gasped Nugent. "I suppose no hammock that ever was made would stand the strain for long."

"Yoo-hooop! I'm hurt! Beasts! Rotters! Cads!" yelled Bunter. He sat up in the grass, roaring. "Rotten trick, you beasts! I'll jolly well lick you! Cads! Ow!"

Evidently the fat Owl had the impression that the Famous Five had let him down with that bump. Really, it was a natural mistake, in the circumstances.

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"You silly ass!" exclaimed Bob. "We never touched the hammock! The rope broke when you sat up—"

"Beast!"

"Too many lunches, old fat man!" grinned Johnny Bull. "You can't expect any rope to stand it!"

"Rotter!"

Billy Bunter scrambled to his feet. His fat face was crimson with wrath.

He clenched his fat fists and advanced on the Famous Five. That bump on the earth had hurt Bunter and shaken him up very considerably. Not generally a fighting-man, Billy Bunter was wild with wrath and was going to punch somebody.

The Famous Five, laughing, retreated.

"Which of you cads was it?" roared Bunter. "I'm jolly well going to whop him! Was it you, Smithy?"

"Not guilty, my lord!" chuckled the Bounder.

"If it was you, Wharton—"

"Fathead! Can't you understand that the rope broke?" roared the captain of the Remove, dodging as the infuriated fat Owl rushed at him. "Keep off, you potty hippopotamus!"

"I'll smash you!" yelled Bunter.

"Help!" gasped Wharton, dodging again.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Luckily, it was easy to dodge Bunter. Yelling with laughter, the Famous Five dodged the fat and furious Owl. In a couple of minutes Billy Bunter's available supply of breath was exhausted, and he came to a stop, panting.

"Beasts! Cads! Rotters!" he squeaked.

"You blithering image!" roared Johnny Bull. "Look at the rope for yourself, you potty porpoise, and you'll see that it's broken!"

"'Tain't!" roared Bunter. "You untied it, you beast!"

"Look at it, you blithering bloater!" hooted Bob Cherry.

"Well, it's cut, then!" said Bunter. "You cut it! Dirty trick to play on a chap when he was asleep! Rotten trick!"

"Nobody here would play such a rotten trick, Bunter," said Nugent. "Have a little sense, old fat man! We never touched it!"

"The terrific weightfulness was the esteemed cause, my esteemed fat Bunter!" explained Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Rot!" roared Bunter. "The rope might go if you had your feet in the hammock, Bob Cherry! Any rope might—"

"Why, you cheeky fat ass—"

"But it's no good making out that my weight did it—I don't weigh much, as you jolly well know—"

"Oh crikey!"

"Which of you rotten cads did it?" yelled Bunter. "Yah! Afraid to own up! Rotters! Cads! Swabs! Worms! Sneaks! Beasts!"

"Look here, you footling, frabjous frump!" hooted Bob. He picked up the two parted ends of the rope. "Look at this, you blithering, blithering bloater, and you'll see for yourself that— Oh, great Scott!"

Bob Cherry broke off quite suddenly, staring at the rope-ends.

He had expected, as a matter of course, to find ragged ends when the rope had snapped, which should have had a convincing effect, even on Bunter.

But only one strand in the thick rope showed a ragged end. The others were clean cut, evidently by a knife.

Bob stared at the cut rope quite blankly.

Billy Bunter gave it a suspicious blink through his big spectacles. Bunter could see that the rope had been cut. He had been sure of it before—now he knew for a certainty.

"Well, my only hat!" ejaculated Bob. "Look at this, you fellows! That rope was cut—look at it! Cut almost through."

The Famous Five all stared at it.

The Bounder grinned. He guessed what had happened, before the other fellows.

"The cutfulness was terrific!" remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "But what esteemed ass performed the cutfulness?"

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

"Oh, shut up, fathead!" snapped Bob. "Nobody here touched the dashed rope! And can't you see, fathead, that it wasn't cut right through—a bit was left to hold the hammock up. That bit gave. It was bound to break as soon as a strain was put on it—shifting your weight did it."

"But who—" said Harry.

"If it wasn't you fellows," hooted Bunter, convinced at last—"if it wasn't you, it was those Highcliffe cads!"

"They're not here!"

"Well, who else was it?" roared Bunter. "Think the butler came out and did it? Or the cook?"

"Tea's ready!" remarked the Bounder.

"Blow tea!" roared Bunter. "I've had a fearful bump. Might have cracked my nut! Look here, Bob Cherry! It's up to you! You said you'd stop that cad Pon if he started ragging again! Now he's started."

"Oh, dry up, Bunter!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Shan't!" bawled Bunter. "Are you going to stop that cad or not, Bob Cherry?"

"Well, if Pon did it," said Bob.

"If he didn't, who did?"

"Better find out before you kick up a stindy!" suggested the Bounder sarcastically. "I don't want to be a wet blanket, of course—but I might mention that this is not the Remove passage at Greyfriars."

The Famous Five made no rejoinder to that. They went across to the tea-tables with Smithy, leaving Billy Bunter snorting with wrath. However, Bunter very soon followed them. The call of foodstuffs was not to be disregarded.

But as he munched cake, Bunter glowered—and all the Famous Five looked worried. They had said that they would not stand for any more ragging of Bunter—it was up to them to protect a Greyfriars man who could not help himself. They admitted it, and they meant it.

Nevertheless, a row with the Highcliffe fellows, at Smithy's place, was extremely disagreeable and unwelcome. The situation was a very awkward one—and the Famous Five felt very uncomfortable—and still more so, when a car came buzzing up the avenue, and Pon & Co. descended from it, and came strolling across the lawn.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

And a Punch for Pon!

PERSONBY nodded airily to the tea-party on the lawn.

He did not seem to observe the ferocious glare he received through Billy Bunter's big spectacles.

But his eyes glimmered at the sight



"Here you are, old fellow!" said Monson, holding out his case. "Have just one more cigarette." "I—I—I—I think not!" stammered Bunter. "Thanks, but—but—urrgh—I'm all right, you know! I smoke like a—gurrgh—furnace in the hols! But—ooooch!" The Highcliffians laughed.

of the hammock hanging down by one end. He could guess that Bunter had had his bump.

"Here we are again, old beans!" said Pon affably. "Just in time for tea, what? We've been coverin' the ground in one of your jolly old cars, Smithy. Had a nice walk by the sad sea waves, what?"

"Oh, quite!" grunted the Bounder. Smithy was looking grim. There was trouble in the air. It had been avoided, so far, but it looked as if it was coming now. It was not agreeable for Smithy, as host to both parties.

"Cad!" came a hoot from Bunter. Ponsonby did not seem to hear. He sat down, and helped himself to cake. Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour followed his example.

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "Shut up, Bunter!" muttered the Bounder. "Rotten Highcliffe swab!" howled Bunter. "Playing sneaking tricks on a chap when he's asleep. Rotten cad!" Whiz!

Bunter had a slice of cake in a fat hand. He whizzed it at Ponsonby.

The range was short—but Bunter's aim was faulty. The cake missed the dandy of Highcliffe by a couple of feet, and plumped on the vacant features of Vavasour.

Vavasour gave a howl and a jump. "Oh! What the dooce! Oh!"

"Stop that, Bunter, you ass!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Shan't!" hooted Bunter. "If those Highcliffe cads can rag, so can I, see? Think they're going to have it all their own way?"

Ponsonby rose to his feet with a contemptuous smile on his face. But he kept a wary eye on Bunter.

Vavasour brushed crumbs from his face.

"We'd better get out of this, you men," said Ponsonby, his lip curling. "We'll leave you to your polished company for a bit, Smithy. There's a limit, you know."

"Sneaking rotter!" roared Bunter.

"Why the thump don't you leave that fat fool alone?" snapped Vernon-Smith. "Can't you chuck raggin', you silly ass?"

"Are you going to punch him, Bob Cherry?" yelled Bunter. "You jolly well said you'd stop the cad ragging! Are you afraid of a Highcliffe rat?"

Bob Cherry reddened.

"Look here, Ponsonby—" he began.

"Come on, you fellows!" said Pon, unheeding, and he turned away towards the house.

"I'm speaking to you, Ponsonby!" said Bob, his voice rising.

Apparently deaf, Pon started.

That was rather too much for Bob's patience. He jumped up, ran into Pon's path, and stopped him.

"You can cut that out, Ponsonby," he said. "I've got to ask you something, and you're going to answer."

Ponsonby had to stop, or push Bob out of his way. He stopped. His lips set in a tight line. He glanced round at the Bounder.

"Is a fellow expected to stand this sort of thing here, Smithy?" he asked.

"Never mind Smithy now," said Bob. "Somebody cut the rope of Bunter's hammock while we were on the beach. He's had a hard bump. Did you do it?"

"He jolly well did!" howled Bunter.

"Shut up, fathead, and let Ponsonby answer!" said Harry Wharton.

All the juniors were on their feet now.

Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour had drawn round Pon

The Co. promptly drew round Bob Cherry.

The rival parties faced one another.

The Bounder stood scowling at the whole crowd of them. Billy Bunter joined the Famous Five, barring off the retreat of the Highcliffians. Bunter was ready for war—more than ready for it, with the Famous Five to put in the punching.

Pon breathed rather hard.

He had hoped, and expected, that the snapped rope would be taken as an accident. He had been miles away, with his friends, when it snapped. He had not expected to be called to account.

"I don't quite see what you're drivin' at," he drawled. "If Bunter's broken down a hammock, it's hardly surprisin', is it? He might break down a lorry."

"You cheeky beast—"

"Dry up, Bunter! The hammock did not break down," said Bob. "We thought so at first; but the rope's been cut. You can look at it yourself. It was cut nearly through, and left to snap."

"Frightfully interestin'," yawned Pon. "But what's that got to do with me?"

"I want to know if you did it?"

"Might a fellow ask why?" queried Pon. "It seems to me that it concerns Bunter, not you."

"I'll tell you why, if you like," answered Bob quietly. "Bunter can't stand up for himself, and we're not going to see him ragged. If you played that rotten trick on him, I'm going to punch your head for it. Is that clear?"

Pon looked round at Vernon-Smith. The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

He was not going to interfere. In fact, no interference on his part was

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(Continued from page 13.)

possible. Harry Wharton & Co. were ready to leave Seahill Park on the spot, if Smithy so desired; but they were going to deal with Ponsonby if he had played that trick on Bunter, before they went.

"Sure you're not mistaken, my dear man?" asked Pon blandly. "It seems to me that Bunter's weight might account for the accident. What?"

"It was no accident! The rope was out! Did you cut it?"

"My dear man, the fat ass was snoring when we went away, and I assure you that I never wasted a thought on him."

The Famous Five looked at Ponsonby. Every one of them believed that he had cut the hammock rope. Indeed, they thought they could read as much in the faces of Gadsby, Monson, and Vavasour.

Still, if Pon denied it, there was nothing in the way of proof.

"Perhaps one of the servants?" suggested Pon, in the same bland tone. "I've got an impression that Bunter isn't fearfully popular with the servants."

"I suppose that's possible," said Vernon-Smith.

"Rubbish!" roared Bunter.

"Well, if you say you did not do it—" said Bob, at a loss. "Look here! Put it in plain English. 'Yes,' or 'No'?"

"Oh, 'No'!" drawled Pon.

Vernon-Smith's lip curled. He did not believe that denial. Neither did the Famous Five. Least of all did Billy Bunter.

Still there it was. Whatever Pon's word was worth, he had given it, and it had to be taken. Bob Cherry was far from keen on a shindy at another fellow's place, but he felt bound to stand by Bunter. But he could hardly punch Pon's head on what was, after all, only suspicion.

"Well, that's that, then!" said Bob; and he stepped out of Pon's way.

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Bunter.

"So glad to settle the matter to your satisfaction, dear men!" said Ponsonby airily. "Come on, you men! Let's get out of this!"

Billy Bunter stood gurgling with fury.

Pon was going to escape!

There was a bump on the back of Bunter's head; there was an ache in his fat shoulders, and Pon was getting off scot-free!

"Look here, Bob Cherry—" howled Bunter.

"Oh, chuck it!" said Bob. "Ponsonby says he never did it, and nobody saw him doing it, and that's that! Give us a rest!"

Pon & Co. sauntered on, the Famous Five no longer barring their way.

Then Billy Bunter woke to action. He clenched a fat fist, hurled himself at Ponsonby, and punched.

That punch took Pon quite by surprise. He did not expect active hostility.

ties from Bunter. Before he knew what was happening, the fat fist landed in his eye with a terrific crash, all Bunter's weight behind it.

Pon staggered, and went over on his back as if he had been shot.

"Oh gad!" gasped Monson.

"Bunter, you fathead!"

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter blinked at Ponsonby, and, as the dandy of Highcliffe made a move to rise, backed promptly behind Bob Cherry. Ponsonby sat up, with his hand to his eye, his face white with fury.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Black, but Not Comely!

SLOWLY Cecil Ponsonby rose to his feet.

His hand was still to his eye. The Greyfriars fellows stood silent.

Billy Bunter, scared out of his fat wits at what he had done, kept safe in cover behind the Famous Five.

Bunter had intended to knock Pon down, and he had done it. It was what the rotter deserved, in Bunter's opinion, and it was a very satisfactory proceeding.

But the drawback to knocking a fellow down was what the fellow might do when he got up again. That was what was worrying Bunter now.

Pon withdrew his hand from his eye at last. All other eyes fixed on that eye. It was already blackening.

The fury in the face of the dandy of Highcliffe was startling to look upon. He was going to have a black eye—he knew that. For days and days he was going to be disfigured. It was painful, too, very painful, but Pon thought less of the pain than of the disfigurement.

Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour looked at that eye in horror. Herbert Vernon-Smith grinned faintly. The Famous Five looked serious enough. Behind them, Billy Bunter quaked.

Ponsonby, with his sound eye, looked round for Bunter. His expression as he came towards him made Bunter squeak with alarm.

"I say, you fellows, keep that cad off!"

Pon would have pushed through the Co. to get at Bunter, but Harry Wharton pushed him back.

"Hands off!" he said curtly.

"Will you let me get at that fat scoundrel?" asked Pon, his voice choking with passion. "I'm going to smash him!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Let me pass!" yelled Ponsonby furiously.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"You're not going to touch Bunter!" he answered. "He's no match for you, as you jolly well know! You wouldn't play rotten tricks on him if he was!"

"I've said I never—"

"I know you have, but you can't expect Bunter to believe you after the rotten tricks you've played on him. The day we came here he was tied up and smothered with paint. Any fellow would have thrashed you for that if he could. Bunter couldn't—that's why you did it."

"I'm goin' to smash him! I—"

"You're not going to lay a finger on him!" said the captain of the Greyfriars Remove, quietly and deliberately. "You've asked for what you got, and you can make the best of it!"

Ponsonby stood with clenched hands and flaming face. He was so savagely enraged that he seemed on the point of attempting to drive a way through the

Famous Five by sheer force. But he paused at that.

"Look here, Wharton," said Monson, "that won't do! Bunter's handed out the first punch, and he's bound to put his hands up!"

"Is it Greyfriars style to punch a man unawares, and then hide behind other chaps?" sneered Gadsby.

"Rotten funk!" said Vavasour.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not heed the Highcliffians. They were not going to let the infuriated Ponsonby handle Bunter and that was that!

"You shouldn't have started the trouble, Ponsonby," said Harry. "We've tried to steer clear of rows here, and you should have let Bunter alone. Sorry you've bagged a black eye, but it's no worse than being smothered with paint. You're not touching Bunter, anyhow!"

"Will you stand aside?" yelled Ponsonby.

"No!"

"Then I'll make you!"

"Try it on as soon as you like!" said Harry contemptuously. "That fat ass can't put up a scrap, but any other man here is ready to oblige!"

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

"Hold on, Pon!" exclaimed Gadsby hastily, as Ponsonby made a forward movement.

In his rage, the dandy of Highcliffe was about to hurl himself at Harry Wharton, asking for what he certainly did not want.

Gadsby caught him by the arm and pulled him back.

"Chuck it, old man!" he muttered. "We don't want a battle royal with that gang!"

"Let go my arm, Gadsby!"

"Don't be a fool! Take his other arm, Vav!"

Ponsonby resisted as his friends pulled him away. But his resistance was brief. Enraged as he was, he realised that he did not want a stand-up scrap with the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

"Better get somethin' for your eye, old chap," murmured Monson.

And the four Highcliffians walked away to the house.

A cackle from Billy Bunter followed them.

"He, he, he!"

"Shut up, you fat frump!" grunted Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

The Famous Five stood red and uncomfortable. The trouble they had tried to avert had befallen at last. Billy Bunter, his alarm banished by the departure of the Highcliffians, grinned with glee. Now that all was safe, Bunter was greatly bucked at having knocked Ponsonby down and given him a black eye.

Wharton glanced round at his friends, and then looked at Vernon-Smith.

"Sorry for this, Smithy!" he said.

"So long as we're here, we can't, and won't, let those cads rag a helpless fat ass like Bunter—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"But if you've had enough of it—and I dare say you have—we'll look out the first train!" added Harry.

The Boulder gave a shrug.

"Don't be an ass!" he answered tersely. "Those chaps started the trouble—you know as well as I do that Pon was lyin'; he cut the hammock down. If they don't like the result, they can lump it! Larkin!"

"Yes, Master Herbert!" murmured the butler.

Larkin's face had been really extraordinary in expression during the scene on the lawn.

"See if you can get Mr. Ponsonby somethin' for his eye, and send us out

"some fresh tea!" said Vernon-Smith. "Sit down, you men!"

The chums of the Remove exchanged dubious glances, but they sat down. It seemed to be Smithy's idea to carry on as if nothing had happened. They hardly knew what to do.

"I say, you fellows, I fancy that cad's had enough!" grinned Bunter, as he helped himself to cake. "He's got a black eye! He, he, he! He doesn't want another to match! He, he, he! I've a jolly good mind to go after him and give him another one—what?"

"Shut up, fathead!" growled Johnny Bull.

"He's jolly well sneaked off!" said Bunter. "Serve him right if I'd given him a jolly good hiding while I was about it! I wish you hadn't barged in, Wharton!"

"What?"

"Well, it would have done him good to whop him! You needn't have interfered! I don't see why you couldn't have let me give him what he was asking for!"

Billy Bunter's fat courage had had a remarkable revival—since the Highcliffians had gone. He was full of beans.

"You fat, frabjous, fozzling fathead!" said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry, you may be funky of Pon! Looks to me as if you are!" said Bunter. "I'm not, I can tell you! Look how I knocked him down! I'd knock him down again as soon as look at him!"

"You howling ass, you'll have a chance, next time Pon catches you, without us in the offing!" said Nugent.

"Oh!" Billy Bunter's gas seemed to escape all of a sudden. "I—I say, you fellows, you stick to a chap, you know! I—I say, you keep an eye on that beast! I—I don't want any more trouble with him! Look here, Smithy, after what that cad's done, it's up to you to turn that crew out, see?"

"Go and eat cake!"

"Well, look here, if they don't go, I go!" yapped Bunter.

"Good! Now you're talking!" said the Bounder cordially. "Shall I order the car for you, or ask Larkin to look out a train?"

Billy Bunter did not answer that question. He grunted, and devoted himself to cake.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Smokes for Bunter!

CECIL PONSONBY was not seen at dinner that evening.

He remained in his room, with a beefsteak bandaged over his eye, and in the worst temper ever.

Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour turned up, looking far from merry or bright. Billy Bunter favoured them with a fat grin, which they affected not to notice.

Harry Wharton & Co. wondered whether Mr. Vernon-Smith would notice Pon's absence, and inquire—and what he would say if he learned what had occurred.

But the millionaire did not notice it. He gave the Highcliffe fellows very little attention at any time.

He liked the Greyfriars juniors to be with his son, partly because he liked the reckless Bounder to be in decent company, partly because their presence added to Smithy's security. Pon & Co. he tolerated, because Smithy had asked them there, and the less he saw of them, the better he liked it.

Moreover, Mr. Vernon-Smith was deep in N'gombo documents, several of which he brought to the dining-room with him.

It was not a very merry meal, with the Highcliffians sulking, the Greyfriars fellows feeling uncomfortable, and the millionaire giving no thought to anything outside his own business affairs.

Only Billy Bunter enjoyed it. The food was all right, and, as Bunter often remarked, if the grub was all right, everything was all right. And Bunter gloated over Pon's black eye! He had a long score against the dandy of Highcliffe, and it was a great satisfaction to have handed him something on account!

After dinner, Mr. Vernon-Smith picked up his documents, at which he had been glancing at intervals through the meal.

"None of you can help me with that, I suppose?" he grunted, holding up a long document written in the Portuguese language.

The Famous Five smiled and shook their heads. They could see that the document was in Portuguese, but that was their limit.

But Billy Bunter gave it a blink through his big spectacles. It was one of Bunter's happy ways to fancy that he could do anything till he came to do it.

"I fancy I could!" he remarked.

"Oh!" Mr. Vernon-Smith gave him a look. "You think you could? That's good, my boy. I've got a translation here, but I can't put the two together. I've given instructions for an interpreter to be sent down from London, to go through it with me. Look at it, Bunter."

The Bounder chuckled, and the Famous Five grinned. Gadsby & Co. stared.

Billy Bunter fixed his eyes, and his spectacles, on the document.

The original concessionaire at N'gombo had been a Portuguese, and some of the papers relating to the property were in that language. Mr. Vernon-Smith had translations, but he was a man of thorough methods, and he was going through the originals.

"You see," explained Bunter, "I know some Spanish—"

"Spanish!" repeated Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, yes—"

"That document is in Portuguese!" grunted the millionaire.

"Oh, is it?" said Bunter, while Mr. Vernon-Smith glared at him. "Well, as a matter of fact, I know some Portuguese, too—there was a chap at Greyfriars named Valentine once, who could speak it, and I picked up some. Let's see—"

"You fat ass—" breathed Bob Cherry.

"Oh, really, Cherry! Don't interrupt me while I'm translating this Spanish—I mean Portuguese—for Smithy's pater. Let's see—um—ah—oom—um—oh!" Bunter blinked at the document, which might as well have been written in Chinese, so far as the fat Owl was concerned. "Let's—hem—see! I—I—I say, I—I think that—that's not good Portuguese, sir—I—I don't seem to make it out—"

"You young ass!" said Mr. Vernon-Smith, and he walked out of the dining-room with his documents.

Bunter blinked after him.

"Is your pater stuffy about anything, Smithy?" he asked.

"Fathead!" answered Smithy.

"Well, I could have helped him, and saved him the expense of sending for an interpreter," said Bunter. "You fellows remember that holiday we had in Brazil, when I talked to them in Portuguese—"

"We remember the holiday," grinned

Nugent. "We don't seem to remember hearing you talk in Portuguese."

"I did all the interpreting for you," said Bunter. "I'm rather a dab at languages, you know. I can read Don Quixote in the original Portuguese."

"Oh crikey! That's pretty wonderful!" gasped Bob.

"Nothing to me," said Bunter airily.

"Well, nobody else can do it," chuckled Bob. "You see, Don Quixote happens to have been written in Spanish."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rot!" said Bunter. "You don't know much about foreign literature, old chap. Mean to say Victor Hugo was a Spaniard?"

"Who?" yelled Bob.

"The author of Don Quixote—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five, and even the disgruntled Highcliffians chortled.

Billy Bunter on literature was enough to make a stone image chortle.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter crossly. "What are you cackling at, I'd like to know."

"You puffing porpoise, Don Quixote was written in Spanish by Cervantes, Victor Hugo was a Frenchman!" roared Bob.

"Rubbish!" said Bunter. "He was a Portuguese all right! You fellows are rather ignorant, you know. I could tell you lots of things you don't know about foreign authors and things, and put you wise."

"Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise!" chuckled Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Smithy, think I'd better go to your pater's study and help him?" asked Bunter.

"Idiot!" said Smithy.

His father having gone, the Bounder lighted a cigarette, that example being followed by Gadsby and Monson and Vavasour.

Harry Wharton & Co. strolled out into the hall. Billy Bunter remained.

"I say, Smithy, I'll have some of your smokes," he remarked.

"Better not, fathead!" said the Bounder, frowning.

"Oh, really, Smithy! Think you're the only man who can put on a smoke?" said Bunter warmly. "Shove 'em over!"

Instead of shoving them over, the Bounder threw away his cigarette, and followed the Famous Five into the hall. Smithy smoked chiefly for swank, but a fatuous duffer like Bunter following his example, made him feel rather a young ass—as indeed he was.

"Cheeky beast!" grunted Bunter, blinking after him. "Here, Larkin, find me some cigarettes, will you?"

"I do not think the master would permit me to do so, sir!" said Larkin.

Bunter glared at him.

Monson exchanged a wink with his friends. They grinned, and Monson pushed his cigarette-case over to Bunter.

"Help yourself, old chap!" he said.

"Oh! Thanks!" said the fat Owl, in surprise. He had not expected any civility from Pon's friends. Still, if they were going to be friendly, Bunter did not object. Bunter fancied that he liked a smoke—and he would smoke a cigarette when he could get one for nothing. Even Bunter was not ass enough to part with cash for such things.

Monson & Co. had been going up to see Pon after dinner. But they lingered in the dining-room with Bunter, grinning with anticipation. After the gargantuan dinner Bunter had parked, smoking was a rather risky enterprise.

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for him. He was loaded well over the Plimsoll line, and very little was required to cause cargo to shift.

"Have one of mine, old fellow," said Gadsby, when Bunter was through. He extended his case.

"I don't mind if I do," assented the fat Owl, quite bucked by these polite attentions from the Highcliffe knuts. And he had one of Gadsby's "smokes."

Harry Wharton glanced in at the door.

"Come on, Bunter," he called out, "we're going to put on the radio."

"Bother the radio," answered Bunter. "I'm having a smoke with these chaps."

"You blithering idiot—" "Yah! Come in and have one!" said Bunter. "We're on holiday now, you know—no prefects just round the corner! Quelch can't spot you here. Come in and have a smoke! Be a man for once!"

Harry Wharton turned away, declining the invitation to be a man for once. Being a man like Bunter did not seem to appeal to him, somehow.

"Have one of mine, dear boy!" said Vavasour, when Bunter had finished his second smoke.

Billy Bunter hesitated a moment. Generally, if he smoked a cigarette, he did not finish it. Now he had finished two!

But he was not going to let the Highcliffe fellows see that he was unused to tobacco. He accepted Vavasour's cigarette, and Gadsby gave him a light.

Bunter smoked with an air of enjoyment.

But as he progressed through his third cigarette, his air of enjoyment became more and more difficult to keep up.

Still, he was not giving in. He smoked on, though with a growing inward trepidation. It did not occur to his fat mind why the Highcliffians were being so friendly all at once. He would have done well to remember that wise old Trojan who feared the Greeks when they brought gifts!

"Here you are, old fellow!" said Monson, when Bunter had finished his third. And he held out his case.

"I—I—I—I think not!" stammered Bunter. "Thanks, but—but—Urrgh! I generally smoke about a dozen after dinner, but—but—Wurrgh—"

"Oh, just one more!" urged Monson.

"Yes—I mean, no—gurrgh!" said Bunter. "I'm all right, you know! I smoke like a—gurrgh—like a fuf-fuf-furnace in the hols! But—"

"Time we gave Pon a look in," remarked Gadsby, and the grinning Highcliffians left Bunter to himself—and the result of his cigarettes!

Bunter started to rise—and sat down again. He had a feeling as if something would happen if he moved. Slowly, by degrees, he heaved himself up and rolled out into the hall.

Vernon-Smith was standing at the radiogram, picking out a station, the Famous Five looking on.

Bunter blinked at them with a glassy blink.

"I s-s-say, you fuf-fuf-fellows!" he gasped.

They looked round. One glance at Bunter's ghastly face was enough to make Harry Wharton thankful that he had not been a man for once.

Bunter did not, as a matter of fact, look tremendously like a man at the moment. He looked more like a sick cat.

"You howling ass!" said Harry.

"Gurrgh!" gasped Bunter. "I'm all right! But—but I think that pie was a bit gamy! It wasn't the cigarettes! Wurrgh! I—I—I s-s-say, you fellows, you might give a chap a hand up to his

room! I—I—I feel gig-gig-gig-giddy somehow. Must be that bump I got this afternoon! 'Twasn't the smokes! I I smum-smum-smoke like a fuf-fuf-furnace in the high-hig-hols—grooooooogh!"

They helped Bunter to his room. He needed help. They left him gurgling, and wishing from the bottom of his fat heart that he had not been a man, even for once!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Pon's Plot!

"WHAT about bed?" yawned Gadsby.

It was midnight.

Four smoky young rascals were sitting round a table in Ponsonby's room. There were cards on the table, ashtrays, and cigarette-ends.

The rest of the house was buried in slumber.

Ponsonby, with a painful eye, was not feeling in the least inclined for bed. But his friends were tired and sleepy. Moreover, card-playing had lost some of its attractions for the knutty party. Since Harry Wharton & Co. had been at Seahill Park, the Bunder had indulged less and less in blackguardism. He still played bridge in the smoke-room, and had bets on billiards; but he had quite given up late hours and cards at midnight.

With the Bunder and his ample supply of cash absent, the Highcliffe knuts were not so keen on sitting up over the cards. Vavasour was half-asleep already.

"I'm not goin' to bed!" growled Ponsonby. He rose from the table and stepped to the glass to look at his eye.

He ground his teeth with rage at the sight of it. That black eye was about as black as an eye could be; and it was evidently a long time before it was going to be restored to normal. It was, in fact, certain to be quite noticeable when Pon went back to Highcliffe School for the next term.

Monson yawned deeply. Vavasour nodded in his chair.

"I'm not goin' to bed!" repeated Ponsonby. "And neither are you fellows. We've got somethin' to do to-night."

"What the dooce—" asked Gadsby, Pon pressed his hand to his eye.

"Do you think I'm goin' to let that fat scoundrel get by with this?" he hissed. "I'm goin' to make him squirm for it!"

His friends looked alarmed. Even Vavasour woke up and looked alarmed.

"Now, look here, Pon, don't be an ass!" argued Monson. "We agreed to let that fat fool rip when the other brutes came here, and you were a silly ass not to stick to it. Bunter would think nothin' of blackin' your other eye, or mine, either, with those ruffians to protect him afterwards."

"After all, you cut his hammock down and gave him a terrific jolt," said Gadsby. "He jolly well knew you'd done it."

"Absolutely!" yawned Vavasour.

Ponsonby stood rubbing his eye, his other eye fixed on his friends with a black and bitter look. The irritating pain, and the disfigurement, had roused all the evil in Ponsonby's nature—and there was a good deal of it. Ever since his eye had darkened, he had been brooding on vengeance.

"That's why I've left it late, so that those cads can't barge in," he said. "They're fast asleep now—Smithy the same!" He sneered. "Smithy's been a good little boy ever since those cads

came! All the better, as it happens—he might barge in."

"But what—" muttered Gadsby uneasily.

"We can get the cad—in his room!" said Ponsonby. "Who's to stop us—after midnight? They stood round him this afternoon—they can't stand round him now."

"It means a row to-morrow, and—" Pon shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't care, so long as I make that fat rotter squirm! But I don't see how they can complain of a fair fight."

"A fair fight!" repeated Gadsby.

"Yes!" said Pon coolly. "We root Bunter out of bed, shove a blanket round his head to keep him quiet, and take him downstairs, where he won't be heard yelling! The smoke-room will do—it's at the back of the house, and out of hearing of any of the bed-rooms! We get him there, and—"

"And what?" muttered Gadsby. Ponsonby laughed—an evil laugh.

"A fellow who blacks a fellow's eye, must expect to be asked to put his hands up," he said.

"Oh, don't be an ass! That clumsy blind Owl couldn't scrap with a rabbit."

"That's his own look-out! He should have thought of that before he punched me in the eye," said Ponsonby. "You fellows can stand round and see fair play. I'd be quite willin' to have the Greyfriars cads doin' the same, only they'd stop the scrap. They can't stop it now."

"If you mean lickin' the fat freak, all very well," said Gadsby slowly. "He's asked for that, and I don't see how those cads can grouse, after he's blacked your eye! But—"

"Well, that's what I mean!" said Ponsonby.

"Is that all?" asked Gadsby suspiciously. "You'll chuck it as soon as he gives you best?"

Ponsonby laughed again.

"I fancy that fat funk would give me best before we started," he answered. "No; I shan't chuck it at that! I shall chuck it when I've smashed the fat cad! He's given me one black eye. I'm going to give him two—and a nose to match. When I'm through with him, I fancy he will be sorry he barged in here for the Easter vac. He will spend the rest of it in bed!"

Gadsby set his lips.

"I jolly well knew," he said. "You can call it a fair fight if you like—but what you mean is, that you're going to get that helpless fat fool in a quiet place and knock him about. Well, it's not good enough."

"Isn't it?" snarled Ponsonby.

"No; it isn't!" said Gadsby, rising. "Thrash him if you like—if you want to stand up to that hefty brute Cherry to-morrow for doing it. But I'm not going to have a hand in any dashed hooliganism."

"You rotten cur, are you backing me up, or not?"

"Not!" said Gadsby. "I know that look in your eye, Pon—you're going to do somethin' that you'll be sorry for afterwards. Like that rotten trick you played on Courtenay at Highcliffe, end of last term—"

"Oh, shut up! I tell you," said Ponsonby, between his teeth. "that I'm goin' to break him up—I'm going to smash him! I'm goin' to keep on hittin' him till I'm too tired to hit him any more! If he can't scrap, he should keep his paws to himself. He can't give a man a black eye and then steer clear because he can't fight. He'd better learn before he hands out black eyes to his betters! That cad is goin' through it to-night!"



"Oh, look!" gasped Nugent suddenly. The Famous Five halted for a moment, their hearts throbbing. Then they ran forward. Close by the rugged rock a man lay. He was bound hand and foot and a gag was in his mouth. Unable to stir, unable to utter a sound, he lay like a log, staring up at the schoolboys with dumb appeal.

"I'm going to bed," said Gadsby. "You fellows comin'?"

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour, and he followed Gadsby to the door.

"All right, then, you cads," said Ponsonby angrily. "If you refuse to stand by me, you refuse, and that's that! Anyway, I'm going to give that fat fool the thrashing of his life!"

The cad of Highcliffe then turned to Monson.

"What about you, Monson?" he asked.

Monson hesitated.

"You're standin' by me, Monson!" said Ponsonby. "One will be enough—two fellows can handle that fat cad!"

Monson paused—but he nodded.

Gadsby and Vavasour went out, and went to their own rooms. They were not very particular; but they drew the line at the act of ruffianism that Ponsonby had planned for that night. Ponsonby could call it what he liked; but what he intended was a brutal beating-up of a fellow who could not defend himself. The thought of the wretched fat Owl tottering and groaning under merciless smashing blows was a little too much for Gadsby and Vavasour.

Monson plainly did not like the idea. Pon looked at his watch.

"Half-past twelve!" he said. "We'll give him till one, and make sure that all's quiet. That old fool, Smithy's pater, sometimes stays up late over his rotten financial swindles. Still, even if he's up, he won't hear anything at the distance."

Monson nodded.

From somewhere in the great mansion the hour of one chimed at last.

Ponsonby switched off the light.

"Come on, and keep quiet!" he whispered.

And on tiptoe, skulking in the darkness, the two young rascals groped their way to Billy Bunter's room.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Another of the Same!

"OOOOOGH!" mumbled Billy Bunter dismally.

Bunter was sleepy.

But he was not asleep.

The fat Owl of the Remove was not at the moment enjoying life.

Three cigarettes, which were nothing to Pon & Co., had worked havoc with William George Bunter. They had, in fact, plenty to work on, as Bunter had packed away enough dinner for three or four fellows. Bunter had clamped down those dinners with strawberries and cream—lots of strawberries and heaps of cream. Three cigarettes, on top of the lot, had had a frightfully disturbing effect.

Bunter had not had any supper. He had not gone to bed. He sat in a deep armchair in his room, having banked up his fire with logs, and snatched cat-naps from time to time.

Every now and then his snore rumbled through the room. But he woke incessantly, and moaned and mumbled. The worst of it was over, but he was feeling very sad and seedy. He had turned off the light, in the hope of going to sleep in the chair. But slumber's chain, which usually bound Bunter as in links of steel, failed to hold him now.

He had awakened for the umpteenth time, thrown a few more logs on the fire, and settled back into a pile of cushions. No doubt he would have nodded off again, but as he sprawled, numbling, a faint sound came to his ears.

It was a sound at his door.

Slight as it was, he knew what it meant—the door-handle had been turned from outside.

Bunter sat transfixed.

He forgot that he was sick and seedy.

His little round eyes dilated with alarm behind his big round spectacles.

What time it was he did not know, but he knew that it was very late, and that everybody at Seahill Park must have gone to bed long ago.

The thought of burglars came instantly into his mind as his door was opened softly and stealthily from without.

He dared not move. He dared not make a sound. He sat as if turned to stone while the door opened and soft footsteps came in. He heard the door softly closed again.

Someone was in the room.

He dared not stir, but he could see in the leaping glow of the log fire. Two creeping figures crossed his line of vision.

They were creeping towards his bed.

Terrified as he was, the fat Owl realised that this was a very unusual proceeding on the part of burglars. Likewise, he noticed that, dimly as he saw them in the firelight, their height was not that of men. Then it dawned on him what it really was—a Highcliffe rag!

Bunter could have kicked himself for not having locked his door. He resolved to keep it locked on future occasions. It was like Bunter to think of locking the stable door after the horse was stolen!

"What the dooce——" came an angry whisper. "He's not here!"

It was Ponsonby's voice that whispered.

"What?" came another whisper. "He must be there!"

"He isn't!"

"Oh gad!"

Bunter hardly breathed. Ponsonby and Monson were in his room, and they had found out that the bed was unoccupied. If they looked round the room

for him, they were bound to spot him. He hoped they wouldn't.

"Where the dickens——" hissed Ponsonby.

"Can't have heard us comin' and bolted?" asked Monson.

"I can't make it out. I thought the fat porker would be snorin', as usual. He must be here. He never heard us; he can't have had a suspicion."

"If he's gone——"

"Look round the room."

Billy Bunter trembled in all his fat limbs.

"Might have heard the door open, if he was awake, and slipped under the bed!" muttered Ponsonby. "Look!"

The two shadowy figures stooped to look under the bed.

Bunter, with an effort, rose to his feet. On tiptoe, he moved across towards the door.

Once he reached the door, it was all right. The Famous Five had their rooms on the same corridor, and if he had a chance of bolting into the nearest he was safe. If only he got to the door unseen while those two beasts were looking under the bed——

Bump!

It was like Bunter, of course, to barge into a chair when only silence could save him.

"Oh!" he gasped.

The two stooping Highcliffians leaped up at once.

"What was that?" exclaimed Monson.

Ponsonby did not speak. He spotted the fat figure making for the door and bounded after it.

Bunter, squeaking with affright, tore towards the door. But a clutch was on his fat shoulder before he could reach it.

"Owl! Leggo!" squealed Bunter, as he was swung back.

"Get a blanket, Monson!" panted Ponsonby.

He dragged Bunter back from the door.

In sheer desperation, the fat Owl hit out.

Thud!

For the second time Ponsonby was taken by surprise by a punch from Bunter; and, for the second time, that punch landed in an eye—the other eye this time.

Ponsonby gave a gasping howl.

The next moment Bunter was flung on the floor. Monson rushed up with a blanket from the bed, and whipped it round the fat Owl's head. Bunter, enveloped and half-suffocated, wriggled and gurgled.

But for Monson, the fat Owl would have got away, after all; for Ponsonby was pressing his hands to his eye, leaving him alone for the moment. There was a pain in that eye, and the dreadful thought rushed into Pon's mind that he was going to have another black eye.

"Got him!" panted Monson. "Here, lend a hand, Pon! He's wriggling like a dashed eel!"

"Urrrrrrggh!" came in suffocated gurgles from the interior of the blanket. "Gooogh! Oooogh!"

Bunter struggled frantically.

"Pon, old man——"

"Hold him!" panted Ponsonby. "Keep him quiet! He got me in the eye! I—I think—— Oh gad! I'll smash him! I'll slaughter him! I'm goin' to have another black eye! Oh gad!"

Monson had to exert himself to hold Bunter. But he held him, and Ponsonby stepped to a glass, and struck a match. He was more concerned for the moment about his eye than about his intended victim.

His face was almost convulsed as he

stared at his reflection in the flickering light of the match. The glass in his own room had shown him one black eye. The glass in Bunter's showed him two!

The match went out. Ponsonby stood breathing helpless fury. He turned towards the wriggling figure in the blanket in Monson's grasp, his fists clenched, his teeth gritting.

"Hold on, you ass—not here!" exclaimed Monson. "Do you want him to wake all that crew, and bring them here on our necks!"

Ponsonby checked his fury.

"Get the fat brute away!" he breathed. "He's given me another black eye! I'll smash him! I'll—I'll——" Ponsonby panted with fury. "By gad, he won't be able to crawl back to bed when I've done with him!"

"Lend a hand, and jaw afterwards!" said Monson. "The brute will get loose if you don't lend me a hand, I tell you!"

Ponsonby added his grasp to Monson's. He twisted the blanket round the fat junior's head, to tighten it. One howl from Bunter might have brought the Greyfriars fellows to the rescue. Then he whipped a sheet from the bed and knotted it round the blanket. Bunter was safe now from yelling. Only a choked gurgle came from inside the blanket.

Taking his fat arms, the two Highcliffians led him to the door. He hung his weight on them, by way of putting on the brake—till Ponsonby lunged out with a foot.

A muffled squeak came from the blanket, and Bunter walked between them to the door.

It was densely dark in the corridor outside. Only from the end, which opened on the high gallery round the hall, came a faint glimmer, from tall windows.

Bunter was half-led, half-dragged down the corridor and along the gallery to the staircase.

Below the hall was a well of gloom.

Down the broad staircase went Monson and Ponsonby, with their prisoner wriggling and mumbling feebly in their grasp. The fat junior stumbled from stair to stair, in a state of bewilderment and terror.

That the Highcliffians had planned some rag, the fat Owl, of course, knew, and he did not expect gentle usage from Ponsonby. What they were going to do he could not guess—but clearly it was something very disagreeable, as they were taking him away from his room and down the stairs—obviously to get him to a safe distance from the Famous Five.

There was no chance of escape for Bunter, and, with the blanket bound round his head, no chance of yelling for help. He could not even drag his weight on his conductors without being kicked till he moved on—and one kick was warning enough. He palpitated with terror as he stumbled down stair after stair.

But as they passed the curve of the staircase, and Bunter knew that he was near the foot of it, desperation put a new idea into his head. He gave a sudden wrench, and threw all his weight forward.

"Hold on!" gasped Monson, as he pitched. "Pon—— Oh gad!"

"Oh!" panted Ponsonby.

Bunter rolled. His weight dragged Pon and Monson forward, and they lost their balance. Bunter rolled on the stairs, while the two Highcliffians pitched headlong forward into space, losing their hold on Bunter.

It was fortunate for them that they were near the foot of the staircase.

They landed in the hall, gasping and breathless, bruised and shaken.

Bunter, sprawling on the staircase, two or three steps above them, grabbed frantically at the blanket round his head. He dragged it off and sat upon the stairs, spluttering for breath.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

PONSONBY staggered to his feet. Monson, whose head had knocked on something hard, sat up dizzily, holding his head in both hands, and mumbling.

Pon was hurt. But he was not thinking of that. He was thinking of his victim's escape.

He was out for vengeance for that black eye; and, so far, he had only bagged another of the same. He almost foamed at the thought of Bunter getting away.

"Get that cad, Monson!" he panted.

"Ooooh!" moaned Monson. "My napper—Ooooh!"

"You fool! If he gets away! Did he come down with us, or is he on the stairs?" hissed Ponsonby. "Hang him, where is he? Can you hear him?"

Bunter, squatting on the staircase hardly ten feet away, heard every word. He stilled his spluttering.

Having got loose, and got the blanket off, his idea was to bolt up the stairs. But he was too winded to stir for the moment. Darkness wrapped him like a cloak—and Bunter's cue was silence.

Ponsonby stood listening.

In the darkness, Bunter could see nothing of him, but he knew that Pon was listening for a sound to guide him. He hardly breathed. If Pon came up the staircase after him, there was nothing for it but to bolt, and take his chance in a foot-race. Meanwhile, he was still as a mouse with the cat at hand.

"Mmmmmmm!" came a mumble from Monson. "Oh, my napper!"

"Hang your napper, you fool! Where's that fat brute?" hissed Ponsonby. "Listen, can't you?"

"Mmmmmmm!"

Ponsonby groped in his pocket for a matchbox. He hardly dared switch on the electric light and illuminate the house at that hour of the night. Already he was afraid that some light sleeper might have been awakened by the bumping down the stairs.

Then, as he was about to jerk out the matchbox, a sound in the hall caught his listening ear.

His blackened eyes blazed.

Whether Bunter had rolled to the foot, or remained on the staircase, or where he might be, Pon had no idea—till he heard that sound.

It was a sound of a stealthy movement and a suppressed breath.

That was enough for Ponsonby. Someone was lurking in the darkness of the hall, and who could it be but Bunter? Certainly, no member of the household was likely to be up at one in the morning, without a light.

Without waiting to strike a match, he cut across the spacious hall in the direction of the sound.

Bump!

He ran into a figure in the dark.

With a feeling of savage gloating, he grasped at it. He heard a panting breath.

"Now——" hissed Ponsonby.

The unseen figure tore itself loose, with a strength that was surprising—if it was Bunter. That it was not Bunter did not occur to Ponsonby.

He plunged savagely after it.
"This way, Monson!" he panted.
"I've got him! This way!"

He crashed into the unseen figure as the words left his lips. His grasping hands caught and clutched.

"Now—" hissed Ponsonby.

The next moment a wave of terror swept over him, as a grasp was laid on him that was certainly not Bunter's.

It was a terribly powerful grasp; not that of a boy, but of a man, and of a very muscular man.

Ponsonby shrieked.

Who—what was it that he had seized in the darkness; that had seized him in his turn?

He forgot Bunter—he forgot everything but his fearful terror as he crumpled in that deadly grasp in the darkness.

Monson scrambled up.

"Pon—" he panted.

"Help!" shrieked Ponsonby.

"What—"

"Help! Oh, help!"

"You'll wake the house—"

"Help, help, help!"

Ponsonby's frantic cries rang far and wide. Then there was a crash, as he was flung bodily to the floor. He sprawled there, still shrieking in sheer terror.

Monson stood in dizzy bewilderment, realising that something was happening in the darkness, but not understanding what.

As he stood, someone unseen brushed past him, and he staggered.

"Pon—" he gasped.

It was not Pon! In the dark, he had an instant's glimpse of the glitter of dark, flashing eyes, then the unseen figure was past, and he heard it running up the stairs.

"Who—" panted Monson.

"What— Pon, who—"

Ponsonby still shrieked.

Someone, in the dark, had run up the stairs. But that someone was unaware that a fat junior squatted there, invisible, listening in alarmed amazement to Ponsonby's wild cries.

He discovered him the next moment by stumbling over him.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter.

"Cospetto!" came a panting exclamation as the unseen man stumbled, lost his footing, and went tumbling headlong down again.

He crashed within a yard of the bewildered Monson.

But Monson, by that time, realised that someone, hitherto unsuspected, was on the scene—a burglar, or at least an intruder of some sort. He groped for the electric switch at the foot of the staircase and turned on the light.

Instantly bright illumination flooded the spacious hall of Seahill Park. It revealed Ponsonby, jabbering with terror on the floor—and a man with a swarthy face and gleaming black eyes, panting on his back at the foot of the stairs. Monson's eyes started from his head at the sight of him.

"The gunman!" he panted.

Doors were opening and voices calling all over the house now. All the occupants of Seahill Park were alarmed.

In the gallery over the hall a figure in a flowing dressing-gown appeared. It was Mr. Vernon-Smith.

He glared down over the oaken rail into the hall.

"What does this mean?" roared Mr. Vernon-Smith. "What is this disturbance? What— Oh, great gad!"

His eyes fixed on the swarthy man,

(Continued on next page.)

The STately HOMES of GREYFRIARS

HILTON HALL

By

The Greyfriars Rhymester



(1)

On Blackmoor's grim and windy waste
Through which the travellers with no
taste

For bleak and lonely moorlands haste,
Two buildings may be sighted;
The first is large and strong and stout,
It holds eight hundred round about,
And when it's time to let 'em out
They always seem delighted!

(2)

Each room in this immense hotel
Is usually called a cell:
It isn't very nice to dwell
In rooms so small and narrow!
But guests are fond of them, they say,
And cannot tear themselves away;
They wear a colour-scheme of grey
Embroidered with broad-arrow!

(4)

Now Hilton of the Fifth is nice,
And as a rule, his only vice
Is making friends with Stephen Price,
Whose ways he should be scorning;
He smokes a little now and then
When Price is with him in his den,
Until the other Fifth Form men
Give Price this solemn warning—

(6)

When Stephen Price is not around,
A nicer fellow can't be found
Than Hilton, though, of course, he's
bound
To be a bit Fifth-Formy!
And if Removites pull his leg
Or try to take him down a peg,
Or say: "Old fellow!" or "Old
egg!"
The outlook's often stormy!

(8)

And at the ancient Hall you'll see
The Hilton picture gallery;
Though heroes all, you must agree,
They weren't too strong on faces!
In fact, no visitor forgets
Those pop-eyed admirals, and sets
Of bottle-bokod baronets
In periwigs and laces.

(3)

The other building, to the right,
Is old, and quite a handsome sight,
"With storied windows richly dight,"
To quote the poet Milton;
Half-hidden under beeches tall,
With massive stones in tower and wall,
It stands in pride as Hilton Hall,
The home of Cedric Hilton.

(5)

"Look here!" they say. "You think
you're smart,
But one day you'll be in the cart,
And after that you'll soon depart
To do a spot of labour
Quite near your pal at Hilton Hall,
But you won't be allowed to call;
You'll just live close to him, that's all!
In fact, his next-door neighbour!"

(7)

In history the Hilton clan
Have been sea-rovers to a man,
Their daring exploits first began
With Grenville, Drake, and Howard.
With them they swept the Spanish Main
And plundered Spanish ships for gain,
Thus by the Spaniards they had slain
The Hilton wealth was showered.

(9)

But nowadays no Hilton strives
To make his bag of Spanish lives;
They're country men with country wives,
The stock the Empire's built on!
The sea still runs in every vein,
And when our country starts again
To sweep some other Spanish Main,
We shan't lack Cedric Hilton!

Next Week: M. HENRI CHARPENTIER (MOSSOO).

scrambling to his feet. The Italian dragged out a weapon as he scrambled up.

Bang!

It was not the Italian who fired, however. Mr. Vernon-Smith, leaning over the oaken balustrade, aimed a revolver at him and pulled the trigger, and the bullet cut a strip of skin from the swarthy chin.

Monson dashed away across the hall, Ponsonby scrambled after him. Billy Bunter, on the stairs, yelled with affright.

Above, there was a scamper of bare feet, as a crowd of Greyfriars fellows, in their pyjamas, came running into the gallery behind the millionaire.

"Father!" shouted the Bounder.

"Stand back!" snapped Mr. Vernon-Smith, without looking round. "Do you want to stop a bullet? Stand back, all of you!"

"The gunman!" panted Bob Cherry. Bang, bang!

Two shots were blended almost into one. The Italian below, his swarthy face convulsed with fury, fired up at the millionaire, as Mr. Vernon-Smith, leaning over the balustrade, fired a second shot down at him.

The bullet from below grazed the millionaire's shoulder, passed at an upward angle over the Bounder's head, and crashed into the ceiling. The bullet from above went nearer to its mark, tearing along the Italian's shoulder, and drawing from him a scream of pain and rage.

The next moment the gunman was running across the hall.

Monson and Ponsonby dodged desperately out of his way.

Smithy, staring down from the gallery, yelled to them:

"Stop him! Bag him, you fools! Collar him!"

Ponsonby and Monson would as soon have stopped a tiger. The desperado dodged under the gallery, and scuttled down one of the corridors. He vanished into the smoke-room.

Mr. Vernon-Smith, with gritting teeth, came plunging down the stairs, revolver in hand. But the Italian was gone.

A few moments later, the millionaire was standing at the open window of the smoke-room, pumping bullets into the shrubbery outside, in the hope of "getting" the desperado as he ran. But the man was gone, and he jammed the revolver into the pocket of his dressing-gown, and tramped back frowning into the hall.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Safety First!

"GOIN'?" smiled the Bounder.

"Yes!" snarled Ponsonby.

It was morning.

There had been little sleep the remainder of that eventful night for anyone at Seahill Park. Least of all for Pon & Co.

Even in the broad daylight of a spring morning Ponsonby shuddered and shivered at the recollection of that savage grasp laid on him in the darkness of the night. He had not closed his blackened eyes since.

Mr. Vernon-Smith, having learned how it came about that the Highcliffians were up, had spoken some rather sharp words to Ponsonby. For that Pon cared nothing. But he cared a great deal about lurking gunmen in the dark, and whizzing bullets. Not for all the ample wealth of the Bounder of Greyfriars would Ponsonby have passed another night in the millionaire's mansion.

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He had sat awake till daylight; and got busy at an unaccustomed early hour. When he came down to breakfast, with a pale and haggard face, adorned by two black eyes, he had packed to go, and curtly informed Vernon-Smith that he was going that morning—and that his friends were going with him.

Mr. Vernon-Smith—quite unshaken by the wild episode of the night—had already breakfasted and gone to his study. The Famous Five were in the breakfast-room with the Bounder, when the pale and weary Highcliffians came down. Billy Bunter—with his door safely locked—was making up for lost time in the matter of sleep.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not look much the worse for wear. They had turned out at the alarm in the night, but it had not shaken their nerve to any extent. Certainly they had not the remotest intention of clearing out because danger had stalked abroad in the hours of darkness. But they had rather wondered whether the Highcliffe knuts would stick it. They were not surprised to hear that Pon & Co. were going.

Ponsonby gave their bright and cheery faces an evil glance. Gadsby and Monson were sulky, and Vavasour had a tendency to peer over his shoulder, as if he expected a desperate gunman to drop in any moment.

"Sorry to lose you, Pon, old man!" said the Bounder, with a sarcastic smile. "Findin' it a bit too excitin'—what?"

"I'm fed-up, if you want to know," answered Ponsonby sullenly, "and the sooner I get away the better I shall like it!"

"Absolutely!" mumbled Vavasour.

"You're losin' the polish of your manners, Pon!" said the Bounder banteringly. "That isn't the way guests take leave in the best circles, old bean!"

And the Greyfriars fellows grinned over their eggs and rashers.

Ponsonby gave an angry grunt, and slumped down in a chair to eat his breakfast. His nerves were in rags and tatters, and his temper savage.

He was going, because he dared not remain. Banging firearms and bullets crashing into ceilings and walls were not in the least to his taste. And he had to go, with his black eye unavenged—only another of the same added thereunto. He had no manners to waste on Smithy or anybody else.

Vernon-Smith, as a matter of fact, was not sorry that they had decided to go. Now that the Greyfriars fellows were there, he was growing more and more fed-up with the dingy black-guardism of the Highcliffe knuts. But he knew why they were going, and he did not take the trouble to conceal his contempt.

"You won't stay to lunch, old thing?" he asked, with a private wink at the Famous Five.

"No!" grunted Pon.

"Thanks all the same, old man!" said Gadsby, who had not quite thrown all manners to the winds like his leader.

"The fact is, we don't get on with your other visitors, Smithy," said Monson. "So, on the whole, we think we'd better clear."

"Absolutely!" assented Vavasour.

"That didn't bother you a lot yesterday, did it?" grinned the Bounder. "All right, I'll tell Larkin to have foot-warmers put in the car."

Harry Wharton & Co. chuckled—they could not help it. It was so clearly a case of "cold feet," that it was not of much use for Pon & Co. to attempt to disguise why they were departing so abruptly.

Pon & Co. made no rejoinder to the Bounder's gibe. They tucked into

breakfast, evidently anxious to be gone.

"You fellows leavin' me, too?" asked the Bounder, looking round at the chums of the Remove. "Are you goin' to leave me with Bunter as my only protector?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"We're not going, Smithy, unless you're tired of our company. What happened last night makes no difference to us."

"Of course, I knew that," said Vernon-Smith. "When Bunter suggested your coming here, he said you'd come all the more if a chap was in danger—that was the kind of fatheads you were! They ain't fatheaded like that at Highcliffe."

Ponsonby rose from the table, his breakfast half finished.

"You men comin'?" he asked, scowling.

"Absolutely!"

"Larkin, order the car for Mr. Ponsonby and his friends," said the Bounder. "There's a good train at nine, Pon—you're an early bird to-day! Have you ever travelled at nine in the mornin' before? A gunman over night bucks a fellow, doesn't it?"

Ponsonby, without answering, tramped out into the hall, followed by his friends.

The Bounder laughed contemptuously.

"What a crew!" he remarked. "By gum! I fancy Pon wouldn't have turned out in the middle of the night to rag Bunter if it had occurred to him that the gunman might be buttin' in—what?"

"Hardly!" grinned Bob Cherry. "He seems to have collected another black eye from the old porpoise. Jolly lucky he did turn out, though. Goodness knows what might have happened if he hadn't run into the desperado, and raised the alarm!"

"Yes, it was lucky." The Bounder's face became very serious. "There's half a dozen men patrolling the place, but he got through them somehow, and seems to have got in at the smoke-room window. I suppose he was going to root all over the place in the dark, hunting for pater's room, if Pon hadn't barged into him in the dark. Pon's been useful, though he doesn't look ornamental at the moment. Hallo, there's the car! Comin' out to see them off?"

"I don't think they'd appreciate it!" said Harry.

The Bounder chuckled, and followed his Highcliffe guests into the hall, leaving the Famous Five with smiling faces.

The car was on the drive, and a footman placing the suitcases on it.

Pon & Co. certainly did not want the Famous Five to see them off. Neither did they seem to remember the existence of Mr. Vernon-Smith. Pon, in fact, had no word for his host before he left. He stalked out to the car, without a word or a look for Smithy.

The others mumbled a few hasty words, and followed Pon.

The Bounder stood grinning in the doorway as the car rolled away down the drive. To the Bounder, who hardly knew what fear was, there was something irresistibly comic in this sudden flight of the Highcliffe party. However, if Pon & Co. were eager to go, he was quite pleased to see the last of them; and he did not waste another thought on the Highcliffe knuts when they were gone.

"Lovely mornin' for a bathe!" he called into the breakfast-room. "Comin' down to the beach, my merry men?"

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

A cheery party walked down the path to the gate in the sea-wall and went out on the sunny beach.



"Father!" Vernon-Smith's voice came in a croak of exhaustion as he rushed in at the French window and grasped his father's assailant. A second more and Bob Cherry was in the room, and after him came the rest of the Famous Five—and after them the Seahill constable, grasping his truncheon!

It was an hour later that a fat figure appeared in the gallery over the hall and blinked down through a pair of big spectacles.

Larkin, who was in the hall, glanced up.

"Where's Smithy, Larkin?" called out Bunter.

"Master Herbert has gone out, sir."

"Beast! Where's the other fellows?"

"Master Herbert's friends have gone out with him, sir."

"All of them gone out?" gasped Bunter.

"Yes, sir."

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter hurried back to his room. A door slammed, and a key turned. On the safe side of a locked door Bunter breathed more freely. Like Pon & Co. Bunter had "safety first" as his motto!

Unaware that Pon & Co. had shaken the dust of Seahill Park from their feet, Bunter hunted cover promptly at the news that the Greyfriars fellows had all gone out. The bare thought of falling in with Ponsonby, unprotected, after having bestowed two black eyes on that lordly youth made the fat Owl shiver.

"Rotters—going out and leaving a chap on his own! Beasts!" granted Bunter. "The sort of thing a chap might expect, after all I've done for them!"

He rang the bell. A tap came at the door. Then the door-handle was turned—but the door did not open!

"Who—who's there?" squeaked Bunter.

"Frederick, sir! You rang, sir!"

"Bring my breakfast up here, Frederick! Tell Larkin I'm breakfasting in my room this morning!"

"Yes, sir."

Bunter waited impatiently. In ten

minutes there was another tap at the door. The footman had arrived with a tray.

"Who's there?"

"Frederick, sir, with your breakfast," answered a surprised voice. "The door does not seem to open, sir—"

"Anybody else there in the passage?" called out Bunter.

"No, sir."

"Sure?" asked Bunter cautiously.

"Quite sure, sir."

"Oh, all right!"

Bunter unlocked the door and opened it. Frederick entered, with a well-laden tray. Bunter slammed the door shut at once, and turned the key. He was not taking any chance of a sudden rush, if the enemy was on the watch!

Frederick was a well-trained footman, but he could not help looking surprised. Bunter's strange proceedings mystified him.

However, he set down the tray and turned to the door.

"Wait a minute!" said Bunter.

"Yes, sir!" said the amazed Frederick, fairly goggling at Bunter as the fat Owl put a fat ear to the key-hole and listened.

Satisfied that there was no sound of an enemy, Bunter turned back the key. "Quick!" he snapped.

He opened the door about a foot and waved impatiently at Frederick. He was eager for him to go, so that he could lock the door again at once.

Frederick lost no time. He was, in fact, as eager to go as Bunter was for him to be gone. He was of the opinion that the stout young gentleman had gone a little out of his mind.

The footman almost jumped out. Bunter slammed the door swiftly, and locked it. Then he sat down to breakfast.

It was a well-laden tray. Bunter's tastes were known at Seahill Park, and breakfast for five or six had been placed on the tray. That saved more trips upstairs. But Billy Bunter cleared the tray. It was against his principles to leave anything eatable uneaten, if he could help it.

After which, he took a rest in his armchair. Presently, however, he rang. Footsteps, and a tap!

"Who's there?" called out Bunter.

"John, sir! You rang, sir?"

"Have those beasts come back yet? I mean, my friends."

"No, sir!"

"When are they coming back?" howled Bunter.

"I think they are spending the morning on the beach, sir, and Mr. Larkin expects them in to lunch."

"Beasts!" roared Bunter.

John, quite startled by that roar, departed, sharing Frederick's opinion that the stout young gentleman was going a little out of his mind!

The stout young gentleman was left in an exceedingly bad temper!

Until the Greyfriars fellows came back, he dared not venture forth. What Pon had been going to do the previous night, but for the desperado, he did not know, but whatever it was, he had no doubt that Pon would do it if he caught him on his own. Bunter was booked for a morning in his room!

Not till it was nearly time for the gong to sound for lunch did he hear footsteps and cheery voices in the corridor. The Greyfriars fellows had come in, and were coming up to their rooms.

Then the fat Owl, at last, rolled across to his door and unlocked it. He glared out into the corridor, with a

glare that nearly cracked his spectacles.

"Beasts!" he hooted.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Not down yet, Bunter!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Know it's half-past twelve?"

"Rotter!" howled Bunter.

"What's bitin' the fat frog?" asked the Bounder in surprise.

"The bitefulness seems to be terrific."

"Anything up, Bunter?" asked Harry.

"Beasts! Cads! Rotters! Keeping a fellow sticking in his room all the morning!" howled Bunter. "Going off and deserting a chap, after promising to keep those cads from ragging—yah! I've had to stay in here with the door locked all the morning—"

"What?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cackle!" roared Bunter indignantly. "Rotters! Beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Johnny Bull. "Mean to say you've locked yourself in all the morning because of Pon—"

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

"What could a fellow do?" snorted Bunter. "Four of the cads—and I can't handle more than two of them—or three at the most—at once! Leaving a fellow to be ragged by those Highcliffe cads—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You benighted ass!" gasped Harry Wharton. "Pon's not after you this morning—ha, ha, ha!—no danger, old fat bean—ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" snapped Bunter. "The fact is, they nearly had me—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"I'm not afraid of the cads, as you jolly well know!" declared Bunter, while the juniors stared at him blankly.

"But I can't handle the whole gang. I had to dodge into my room when they rushed at me—"

"They—they—they rushed at you?" gasped Vernon-Smith.

"Yes, the whole gang of them! I wouldn't have minded two or three, but it's no good saying I can handle four—I can't! I've had to keep my door locked, with those Highcliffe cads waiting in the passage for me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Think it's funny to stick in a room all the morning, with those rotters waiting outside to collar me—"

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

"Look here—" bawled Bunter.

"You frabjous ass!" roared Bob Cherry. "The Highcliffe chaps went after brekker this morning—they were gone before we went out."

"Eh?"

"They were a hundred miles away, most likely, before you turned out of bed—"

"Oh!"

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

The idea of Billy Bunter locking himself in his room all the morning, in terror of the Highcliffians, who had long been gone, took the juniors by storm. They roared, and yelled, and howled. They almost wept!

"Beasts!" hooted Bunter.

And he rolled away down the passage,

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Footprints in the Sand!

"LARKIN!" rapped Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Sir!"

"Mr. Vasco has not come?"

"No, sir!"

"Show him into my study immediately he arrives."

"Very good, sir!"

Mr. Vernon-Smith, with a snort, stood staring out of the doorway into the sunlit gardens and lawns of his palatial residence on the Sussex shore. He was frowning portentously.

Harry Wharton & Co., who were in the hall, carefully did not notice that the millionaire was in a bad temper. The Bounder gave them a grin. Billy Bunter, sprawling in a deep chair, blinked at Mr. Vernon-Smith through his big spectacles. Mr. Vernon-Smith seemed very much annoyed.

He stared down the long avenue, with an angry stare, as if in expectation of seeing someone arriving. No one was coming, however, and Mr. Vernon-Smith turned back into the hall, grunting.

"He's late, father!" remarked the Bounder.

The millionaire snorted.

"He should have been here immediately after lunch," he snapped. "That is more than an hour ago. My time is being wasted."

Mr. Vernon-Smith's time was of immense value. And he was accustomed to having his directions obeyed to the minute. He had fixed that afternoon for going through the Portuguese documents, in connection with the N'gombo Concession, with the aid of the Portuguese interpreter, Senhor Joao Vasco, specially sent down from London.

Mr. Vasco should have arrived after lunch. He hadn't! Even if he had lost a train, he should have arrived by now. But he hadn't! No wonder Mr. Vernon-Smith fumed. Common mortals might wait for Mr. Vernon-Smith—they often had to, for hours and hours. But Mr. Vernon-Smith did not like waiting for common mortals.

He gave another glance out at the avenue, and then walked down the passage that led to his study at the back of the mansion. He snorted as he went. It was irritating, annoying, amazing, that Mr. Vasco should be late, when Mr. Vernon-Smith was actually waiting for him. But there it was, and even the millionaire had to make the best of it. His study door was heard to slam, in the distance.

"The pater's in a bate!" grinned Smithy. "That ass will get his hair combed, for keeping him waiting, when he blows in. I'd rather not be in his shoes when he sees the pater. Coming out?"

"Ready, old bean," said Bob Cherry, at once. Bob was always ready to go out of doors.

"Coming, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton.

"No fear!" answered Bunter promptly. "What is there to go out for, fathead? Those Highcliffe cads ain't here now."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ripping now they're gone, ain't it?" said Bunter, settling down more comfortably in an ocean of cushions in the armchair. "A chap can get a nap after lunch now, in peace. If those brutes were here, I should have to come fagging down to the beach with you—I jolly well know you're too jolly selfish to sit in here for a couple of hours while I take a snooze."

"Right on the wicket—we are!" grinned Bob. "Thanks for making our walk this afternoon so pleasant, Bunter."

"Eh?" Bunter blinked at him. "How shall I be making it pleasant, you ass, when I shan't be with you?"



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"That's how!" explained Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!"

The six juniors sauntered out, leaving Bunter to enjoy a prolonged nap—in peace at last, now that Pon & Co. were off the scene. The wicked had ceased from troubling, and the weary Owl was at rest.

Herbert Vernon-Smith looked as merry and bright as the other fellows, as they walked down to the gate in the sea-wall, and went on the shining beach.

Smithy, as well as Bunter, felt it rather a relief for his Highcliffe guests to be gone. Really and truly, he liked the open air with the Famous Five better than cards or billiards indoors with Pon & Co.

The juniors tramped along the golden sands, towards the cliffs at the end of the bay, in cheery spirits. Not once had Pon & Co. set foot on those rugged cliffs, honeycombed with caves, attractive as they were to the chums of the Remove.

The foreshore at Seahill Park was part of the property, and closed to the general public, so the Greyfriars fellows had it to themselves. The tide was out, leaving the sand firm, but wet; and the half-dozen juniors left a very clear trail of footprints as they walked along.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry suddenly. "Somebody else about here, Smithy?"

"Nobody else here, fathead," answered the Bounder. "This is a private beach, and it leads to nowhere—the cliffs block it up at the end."

Bob grinned, and pointed to a track in the sand.

From the direction of the distant town of Seahill, that track came, and it passed on, towards the cliffs at the end of the bay.

Smithy glanced at it carelessly.

"Nobody has a right here," he said. "Still, no harm in a fellow walking along the shore, if he wants to. Come on—we left the boat up by the cliff this morning."

"Hold on, though," said Bob. "This is rather weird."

"What is?"

"If you'd learned as much about scouting, old bean, as you have about bridge and banker and billiards, you'd see!" grinned Bob. "Look at it, you fellows—and remember you're scouts, and read the jolly old sign."

Bob Cherry was keen on scouting, as on all outdoor occupations. Something about that trail in the sand had struck him, and excited his interest and curiosity.

The other fellows came to a halt; Smithy looking impatient. But the Co., who were all good scouts, noticed at once what Bob had spotted.

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "That's odd."

He looked along the beach towards the mass of cliffs at the end. No one was to be seen there. The place seemed absolutely solitary, except for the sea-gulls.

"What the dickens—" exclaimed the Bounder impatiently.

"Can't you see?" said Bob. "There's a double track going along towards the cliffs, and a single track coming back."

"Oh!" said the Bounder.

"Two sportsmen went along here, coming from Seahill, and heading for those cliffs, not more than an hour ago!" continued Bob. "One of them went back—so the other's still there. But he's not in sight, see?"

The Bounder, looking at the trail, nodded.

Now that he gave it attention, he could see the tracks of two different pairs of boots, side by side, going in one direction. Heels and toes were quite legibly marked in the sand; one pair larger than the other.

In the other direction was a single track of boots, the toes pointing the other way. It was the track of the smaller pair of boots.

Two men had walked along the beach from Seahill, going to the cliffs. One of them had walked back.

Nobody, however, was in sight. Yet the footprints in the sand told that one of the two had remained.

"That's queer!" said the Bounder. "Can't see anything of the man! Let's get on—we're going that way, anyhow."

The Greyfriars fellows walked on, keeping to the trail in the sand. It led them right along the bay to the cliffs at the end. As there was no outlet at the western end, it was puzzling what had become of the man who had not walked back. Certainly, he might have gone into one of the caves, but there seemed no reason why he should remain there out of sight.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly.

They were close up to the cliffs, when he uttered that startled exclamation. He threw himself down on his knees, scanning the sand with a startled face.

"What—" asked the Bounder testily.

"Foul play!" said Bob quietly.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Hand of the Desperado!

"FOUL play?" repeated the Bounder blankly.

"Look!" said Bob, in a tense voice.

"By gum!" said Johnny Bull. "That's why he never came back! What—what's become of him?"

The Famous Five, with startled faces, scanned the traces in the sand, and then the dark, rugged cliffs, rived with fissures and caves, that closed the end of the bay like a massive wall. No one could be seen—there was no sign of life, save the calling gulls.

Their faces were a little pale.

"By gad!" The Bounder breathed hard. "What on earth can have happened here? It must have been after we went in to lunch—nobody was here this morning."

The "sign" in the sand was as plain as print to scouts like the chums of the Remove.

Up to that spot the double track could be read; but at that spot it ended. Beyond that spot a single track ran on to the cliffs.

On that spot, where the juniors were now standing, one of the two men had stopped—and vanished. It looked as if he must have risen into the air like a bird. What had become of him?

The man with the small feet had walked on to the cliffs, and then walked back to Seahill.

The man with the larger feet had stopped there—and disappeared!

The juniors looked at one another. Harry Wharton cast a glance towards the sea, rolling bright and blue, and shivered. The thought was in his mind that those rolling waters might have told a tragic tale.

"Not that!" said Bob, understanding his look. "There's no sign of a track going down to the water."

"No!" said Harry, with a deep breath. "But—what—"

"It's a giddy puzzle!" said Bob. "Big foot and little foot walked as far as this together. Little foot walked on—but the other—"

Stooping to scan the trail, Bob moved on.

"Got it!" he said quietly. "Look!" He pointed to the track of the small boots. "See—it's deeper here—every track fairly punched into the sand."

"Well, what?" asked Smithy.

"He was a heavier man when he went on from here, to leave those deeper tracks," said Bob. "That means that he was carrying something—a heavy weight."

The Bounder whistled.

"A body?" he breathed.

"Alive or dead?" said Bob Cherry, his face very pale. "Look how the toes are driven into the sand—he was bending forward to carry a heavy weight on his back. He carried it on to the cliffs, and—and left it there. Come on, for goodness' sake!"

There was no doubting the story told by the footprints. The man with the smaller feet had tramped on to the cliffs, carrying the other man on his back. Evidently he had left him there. That was obvious enough, in any case; but it was proved by the fact that the returning trail of the small boots was lighter—the man, coming back from the cliffs, had been carrying nothing.

With beating hearts, the juniors hurried on—hardly daring to think what they might discover at the end of the trail.

At the foot of the cliffs was rough shingle, where the trail was not so easy to pick up. Here and there, however, were patches of sand—and "sign" led them on, to the opening of a cave.

They had easily guessed that the trail would lead to a cave, as nothing was to be seen of the man who had been left there. Now they knew it. They tramped out of the bright spring sunlight, under a rugged arch of rock.

The cave extended back deep into the cliff, and the interior was deeply dark, after the bright sunshine of the beach.

But their eyes very soon became accustomed to the gloom as they pressed on—silent, with set faces.

Alive or dead, a man had been carried into that cave and left there. Alive was more likely; for a body, surely, would have been slid into the sea, to be carried away on the outgoing tide. But they dreaded what they might see at the end of the cave.

"Oh, look!" gasped Nugent suddenly.

The way was closed by rugged rock twenty yards in the cliff. The gloom was deep, but they could see about them. Frank Nugent, with a shaking hand, pointed to a dark object that lay close against the rock.

The Famous Five for a moment halted, their hearts throbbing.

The Bounder ran forward. His voice was heard a moment later:

"Alive! Come on!"

"Oh, thank Heaven!" gasped Harry Wharton. They ran on.

Close by the rugged rock a man lay. Bright black eyes, from a dark, black-bearded face, gleamed up at the juniors—very much alive.

But the man could not stir—he could not speak. He was bound hand and foot, with cords tightly and cruelly knotted. A gag was bound in his mouth. Unable to stir, unable to utter a sound, he lay like a log—only his eyes alive, staring up at the schoolboys, with dumb appeal.

"A foreigner!" muttered Bob. "Not—not—"

The sight of a swarthy, foreign face the gleaming black eyes brought the recollection of the Italian desperado into the minds of the juniors.

But it was not the Italian. He was of a dusky Latin race, but different from the Italian, who wore no beard. This man had a bushy black beard.

Whoever and whatever he was, the Greyfriars fellows were there to help him. As they bent round the hapless man, they could see a streak of blood on his dusky face, oozing out from under the dark hair. He had been struck down by a blow on the head—evidently at the spot where his trail had ended on the sand. The man with the smaller boots had walked with him as far as that spot—then struck him down, and carried him into the deep cave, and left him bound and gagged there.

Why, was an utter mystery. That, however, did not matter at the moment. The juniors sawed at the cords with their pocket-knives, and removed the gag from the dusky jaws.

The hapless man gasped and panted for breath. He tottered, as helping hands lifted him to his feet and supported him.

"All right now, sir?" said Harry Wharton.

The man groaned, and put his hand to his head.

"Sim, sim!" he muttered.

The juniors looked at him very curiously. That word, with which they happened to be acquainted, told them that the man was a Portuguese.

But he went on in English, with a strong foreign accent:

"Zank you! Oh, t'ousand times zank you, young ones! He say zat he come after some time, and let me to go—but—but—" He shuddered.

"The man who walked with you from Seahill?" asked Bob.

"Sim, sim! But you know—you see?" asked the man in astonishment. "I know not zat one see—"

"Oh, no—we picked up the trail in the sand," explained Bob. "Jolly glad we did, sir! Come out of this!"

They helped the man down the cave to the open air. There he sank down on a boulder, with his hand to his head.

"This is a matter for the police," said Vernon-Smith quietly, "and the sooner they hear of it the better. This chap looks all in—but one of us can cut along the beach to Seahill, and put Inspector Stucco wise to it. Tell us what happened, sir—and describe the man."

"Sim, sim!" muttered the foreigner. "I understand not—I know not why he shall do zis zing. I am in a train, and zis man he is in a train—he is very agreeable, and we talk in a train. We leave a train at Seahill, and I zink I take one taxi. But he say, no, it is one very nice walk, and a short cut by a beach, and I walk wiz him."

The juniors listened in silence. The foreigner, evidently, had been entrapped by some rascal who had met him on the train, coming to Seahill Station.

"We walk, and we talk!" he went on. "We walk by ze beach, and I zink zere is a way to Seahill Park zat way—"

"You were coming to Seahill Park?" exclaimed the Bounder. "My father's house!"

"Sim, sim! Ze Senhor Vernon-Smith—"

"Oh, great Scott! Then you're the man he's expecting this afternoon—Joao

Vasco, the interpreter?" exclaimed Smithy.

"By gum!" gasped Bob. "That's why he never came, then! You're Mr. Vasco?"

"Zat is my name," said the Portuguese. "Sim, sim!"

"Has he robbed you?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Nao. He take nozzing!"

"Then why—"

The Greyfriars fellows were utterly amazed. It was surprising enough that the Portuguese interpreter expected by Mr. Vernon-Smith at Seahill Park, had been entrapped on his way, and left, bound and gagged, hidden in the cave a mile from the house. But unless his assailant's motive was robbery, there seemed no motive at all. And the man had not been robbed!

"I know not—I know nozzing. We walk so far, and I say, where is ze house? He give me one knock on ze head!" groaned Mr. Vasco. "I am stun! I open ze eye once more, and I am in a cave. I am tie. I am gag! Why, I know not! But he say—he leave me for one time, and he come later, and I go!"

"Well, that beats Banagher!" said Bob Cherry. "Unless the man was mad, why did he play such a ghastly trick?"

"He must have wanted to keep Mr. Vasco out of the way for some reason," said Harry Wharton. "But why?"

"The police will find that out when they get him," said the Bounder. "What was the man like, Mr. Vasco? You can describe him?"

"Sim, sim! I know him anywhere! He is one Italian—"

The Bounder jumped.

"An Italian!" he panted.

"Sim, sim! Italiano?"

"The gunman!" said Vernon-Smith, between his teeth. "The desperado! But why, in the name of all that's made, has he done this?"

But almost before he had uttered the words, he knew. He reeled against a rock, his face white as chalk.

"My father! Oh, my father!"

"Smithy!" exclaimed Bob.

"Don't you see?" The Bounder groaned. "This man, Vasco, is a stranger at the house. He's been got out of the way—why? Can't you see? Why should he be got out of the way? That villain—that hound—can't you see? He's going there in some disguise—he's going there as the Portuguese expected from London this afternoon—he will be shut up with my father in his study—oh Heaven!"

For a second the Famous Five stared at Smithy.

Then they understood—and they knew that he was right. That explained everything. Baffled at all points by the careful watch kept at the millionaire's house, this was the desperado's last desperate throw of the dice. They knew it.

"My father!" groaned the Bounder. "And we're a mile away—and that man—any minute—" He pulled himself together. "There may be a chance yet!" He was running as he uttered the words—running like a madman along the beach towards the distant mansion.

"Come on!" panted Harry.

Leaving Senhor Vasco sitting on the boulder, staring after them, the juniors raced after Smithy.

Vernon-Smith was running as if for

his life! He was running for his father's life! The Famous Five were good on the cinder-path, but they found it hard to keep up with the Bounder of Greyfriars. His feet seemed scarcely to touch the sand as he flew.

Hard and fast, breathless, streaming with perspiration, their hearts throbbing in great jumps, the Greyfriars fellows raced, and the sand flew under their feet as they ran and ran—with a life staked on their speed.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Foiled at the Finish!

"MR. VASCO!" announced Larkin.

"Show him in!" grunted Mr. Vernon-Smith.

The millionaire was seated at a table placed by the open french windows of his study. Documents in the Portuguese language were spread out before him. With those documents, however, Mr. Vernon-Smith was unable to deal until the interpreter arrived. He was growing more and more irritable, as he waited for Senhor Joao Vasco.

Outside, the spring sunshine glimmered on the shrubberies. A policeman's helmet could be seen there—a constable was pacing the shrubbery paths. Several more men were on watch and ward, in various places. Mr. Vernon-Smith was very safely guarded: and he was not wasting a thought on the man who sought his life—the man from Milan, who was his rival for the tin mines of N'gombo. His chief feeling at the moment was angry irritation at the delay of Senhor Vasco.

He turned his head as Larkin showed in the man, who had come at last. He saw a man in a shabby frock coat, with a dark face almost hidden by a black beard and moustaches and a pair of large horn-rimmed spectacles.

In that dark face there was nothing that the millionaire could recognise. Except that he was swarthy in complexion, the man bore no outward resemblance to the man from Milan—and a swarthy complexion, of course, was expected in a native of Portugal.

"Mr. Vasco?" rapped the millionaire.

"Sim, senhor!" answered the newcomer, with a bow. His voice was husky, and he coughed a little as he spoke.

"Speak English, please!" rapped Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"Yes, sare!" said the black-bearded man.

"You are late!" snapped the millionaire. "I expected you immediately after lunch, Mr. Vasco. I gave directions for you to be here at two; it is now nearly four."

"I am sorry, sare, but I lose a train—"

"Nonsense!" snapped Mr. Vernon-Smith. "However, now you are here, let us get to business. These are the documents I desire you to translate. You can go, Larkin."

The butler withdrew and closed the door.

The man who called himself Joao Vasco laid his hat on a chair and came towards the table at the window.

Mr. Vernon-Smith did not give him a second glance. To him the man was merely a machine to get certain work

done. He was irritated, but he was not going to waste valuable time in indulging his annoyance.

"Sit down there, Mr. Vasco." He pointed to a chair. "Now, you will go through these documents with me, reading them aloud word for word. I know very little Portuguese, but I desire to follow the wording as closely as possible. You understand?"

"Yes, sare."

"Let us proceed, then," grunted Mr. Vernon-Smith.

Had he wasted a glance on the interpreter he might have noticed that "Mr. Vasco" was looking at him over the top of his horn-rimmed glasses—which, apparently, he did not need to use. He might have caught something familiar in the deadly glitter of the black eyes. But Mr. Vernon-Smith was placing the N'gombo documents for him to read, and he noticed nothing.

The swarthy man glanced from the window. Hardly six yards away the Seahill constable was standing.

The french windows being wide open, the constable had a view of part of the interior of the room. He was glancing at the foreign-looking man, who had joined the millionaire at the writing-table.

The black-bearded man breathed hard for a moment.

"You will excuse, sare—" he murmured in his husky tones.

"What—what?" rapped Mr. Vernon-Smith.

"I have one leetle, what you call, cough, sare. If it please you to move a leetle from ze window—"

"Oh, as you like!" snapped Mr. Vernon-Smith impatiently. "I do not notice any draught. But you may move the table if you choose. Lose no time."

"Yes, sare."

The black-bearded man pushed the table along a little so that it was no longer in front of the open doorway. The constable in the garden was barred from sight.

Neither was he looking towards the french windows now; he was staring across the shrubbery at something that had caught his eyes from a distance.

That that "something" was a bunch of Greyfriars juniors cutting across the gardens, running like madmen, the two men in the study could not know. But the Seahill constable outside stared at them in surprise, wondering why they were racing in the bright sunshine towards him at so desperate a speed.

"Now!" rapped Mr. Vernon-Smith when the table had been moved. "Now, let us waste no more time, Mr. Vasco! Now—"

He broke off in sheer amazement as the black-bearded man, out of sight from the garden now, turned on him suddenly like a tiger.

Before Mr. Vernon-Smith knew what was happening two muscular hands were at his throat and he was borne over backwards.

He went down on his portly back with a gasp—that was shut off as the iron fingers compressed his throat.

Dumbfounded, the millionaire stared up at the dark face above him.

A sinewy knee was planted on his chest, pinning him down on his back on the floor; two hands that seemed as strong as steel gripped his throat.

He resisted madly, but helplessly. The black-bearded man was twice as strong as the middle-aged City man, and he had the millionaire at a hopeless disadvantage.

Madly Mr. Vernon-Smith clutched at the choking hands on his throat; wildly, frantically, he strove to cry out.

(Continued on next page.)



COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS - AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

"Things are looking up,
Things are looking gay,
Things are getting better,
Better, better every day!"

THE foregoing was sent in by Fred Longstaff, of Queensland, Australia, who has been reading the MAGNET for the past five years. "There's no getting away from the fact," Fred goes on to say, "the old paper is definitely getting better and better every day!"

Thanks very much for your cheery and inspiring letter, chum from Down Under. May you still continue to read and enjoy the MAGNET in the years to come. No, there's not such a very long way to go before we reach our jubilee number! You wonder if I will still be "in the office" then? Well, considering the vast number of loyal supporters I have at the present moment it's well "on the cards" I shall still be keeping the old flag flying!

Anyway, you fellows, it always has been and always will be my aim to please you in every respect and help any of you when it lies in my power. A word of advice is worth a load of pity—what?

Talking of giving advice reminds me of some of the strange questions I have been asked from time to time. I quote only a few here: I want to grow a moustache—what age should I start shaving my upper lip? Should my sister, who is fourteen years old, walk out with a boy friend? How to stop a tortoise from hibernating? What makes the holes in Gruyere cheese? How many legs has a centipede? Is it lucky to be bandy? And so on.

Now for a few recent ones, together with my answers: "Is it bad luck to walk under a ladder?" (Yes, if a decorator drops a pot of paint on you!) "Did Johnny Bull come to Greyfriars on a scholarship?" (No; he came by train.) "What is a net made of?" (A number of holes tied together). "How does a skunk smell?" (Awful!) "How long has the Greyfriars tuckshop been open?" (Ever since Harry Wharton & Co. developed appetites.) "How long is Billy Bunter going to keep on eating?" (Until he gets fed-up!) "Will Vernon-Smith, the Bounder, ever turn over a new leaf?" (Yes; when he's strong enough!) I'll need a wet towel round my forehead if I go on much longer!

Changing from the humorous to the sublime, as it were, I must delve into the letter-bag to see what answers are wanted this week. The first query is: What is the

MOST DEADLY OF ALL SNAKES?

I don't think I am far wrong in saying the cobra. This particular species of reptile has the power of inflating the skin of the neck into a kind of hood when excited; hence its name, cobra di capello (hooded snake). Cobras feed

largely on other snakes, but also take birds' eggs and small mammals. They never attack man unless provoked or frightened. The cobra is responsible for heavy mortality among the native population of India.

The next letter comes from Horace Gaynor, Walsall, who asks: What is the meaning of

CONTRABAND OF WAR?

Goods, materials, or other commodities, which international law forbids neutrals to supply to belligerents in times of war, are termed contraband of war. The articles which constitute contraband are, in general, divided into two classes: (1) those which have direct application to naval and military use, and (2) those which are fit for, and can be employed for, military and naval purposes, but are not directly prepared for that sole use.

"Magnetite," of Wolverhampton, has got me fairly stumped. He wants to know what is the highest price paid for a seat along the Coronation route. Sorry I can't help you, chum. And, what's more, I'm sure nobody else could supply the answer. Prices for these seats vary considerably and business done on these lines is "strictly private."

Talking of the Coronation, however, brings me to the most important question of all. What has the MAGNET got in store for you fellows next Saturday? A topical school story, you can bet your sweet life on that!

In a few days time the streets of London will be crowded to overflowing with people "up" for the Coronation, and among this vast multitude will be Harry Wharton & Co. and Billy Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove. Tens of thousands of voices will greet their most Gracious Majesties as they pass by in state, and probably the loudest of all will be the cheers of the Greyfriars party. Whether you are fortunate enough to see the Coronation or not, you're bound to revel in reading the splendid story by famous Frank Richards, entitled:

BILLY BUNTER'S CORONATION PARTY!

which will appear in next Saturday's MAGNET. A special Coronation number of the "Greyfriars Herald" has been prepared for this issue, too, and I'll bet my best Sunday hat that you'll give it full marks. As for the Greyfriars Rhymester, he'll be "on parade," as usual, with another sparkling set of verses.

Before closing down I must remind you once again not to miss the spanking fine yarns dealing with the early adventures of Harry Wharton & Co., now running in our companion paper, the "Gem."

YOUR EDITOR.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,525.

But he could not utter the faintest sound. His portly cheeks became purple, his eyes started from their sockets; wildly he stared at the dark face bent over him.

The horn-rimmed glasses had fallen off; the black eyes blazed down at him like a wild beast's. And he knew! The disguised face was still unfamiliar; but he knew those gleaming, glittering, ruthless eyes now; he knew that he was in the grasp of his enemy, and that this time he was doomed. Only a few feet away, the scene would have been in full view of the constable in the garden, but the shifting of the table had altered that.

"Cospetto!" The Italian's voice came in a whisper. "You know me, signor—yes? This is the finish! N'gombo will be Italian, signor! I win the game at last! Non e vero?"

The millionaire tore helplessly at the throttling hands. The ruthless face stared down at him, as the steel-like fingers gripped and gripped. A minute more and the long contest for the N'gombo Concession would have ended in a victory for the man from Milan.

There was a hurried tread, and a schoolboy, crimson, breathless, sweating, shot in at the french windows.

"Father!" The Bounder's voice came in a croak of exhaustion. One look—and Herbert Vernon-Smith was on the man who grasped his father.

His hands gripped the thick black hair, and tore the Italian backwards. Taken utterly by surprise, the man from Milan rolled off his victim, and Mr. Vernon-Smith, released from that choking grip, panted and panted and panted for breath.

Like a snake, the man from Milan twisted round on the junior who had grasped him and dragged him back. But as he did so, Harry Wharton came leaping in at the french window.

As the Italian wrenched at the Bounder's grip, Wharton hurled himself at the black-bearded rascal and seized him. A second more, and Bob Cherry was in the room, and after him came Johnny Bull, Nugent, and Hurrée Jainset Ram Singh—and after them, the Seahill constable, grasping his truncheon.

Six pairs of hands were on the Italian.

He struggled and fought like a savage animal. His coat was split and torn—the black beard and moustaches brushed from his face—as he wrenched, and tore, and clutched, and clawed, and strove madly to get at a weapon.

Mr. Vernon-Smith sat up dizzily, his hand to his throat, which was black and bruised. He gasped, and gasped, unable

to get on his feet. In a panting bunch, the Greyfriars juniors and the desperate Italian rolled on the floor, knocking furniture right and left. The din was heard far and wide—the door opened, and Larkin's amazed faced stared in—behind him, Billy Bunter's spectacles gleamed.

The Italian, at last, succeeded in wrenching an automatic from his pocket.

But the constable was watching for a chance to strike in. Even as the deadly weapon appeared in the swarthy hand, the truncheon came down with a crash on the dark head.

One gasping groan came from the Italian, and he rolled on the floor, stunned and senseless.

The Greyfriars juniors, panting, scrambled up. The man from Milan lay senseless at their feet, and a moment

WHO SAYS ANOTHER
GRAND YARN
OF
GREYFRIARS?
Then read:
"HARRY WHARTON'S
ENEMY!"
this week's tip-top tale dealing
with the early adventures of
Harry Wharton & Co., in the
GEM
On Sale Now 2d.

later, a pair of handcuffs clicked on the swarthy wrists.

Vernon-Smith, exhausted, breathless, staggered towards his father. Larkin ran in to help the millionaire to his feet.

"Father!" panted the Bounder.

Mr. Vernon-Smith gurgled for breath.

"Thank Heaven we were in time!" The Bounder leaned on the table, breathing almost in sobs. "Oh, father!"

"Herbert, my boy! You've saved me—you and your friends! You've got that scoundrel safe, officer?"

"Safe enough, sir! That's the man?"

"That's the man—the gunman!" Mr. Vernon-Smith's voice was hoarse and broken, but there was a note of deep satisfaction in it. "We've got the scoundrel at last—he will keep out of mischief for the next ten years! Larkin, ring up Inspector Stuce!"

The man from Milan was still insensible when a car bore him away to the police station—handcuffed, between two constables. He came to his senses within stone walls, to realise that he was defeated; that a long term of penal servitude lay before him; that the struggle for N'gombo was over. It had ended, for him, in defeat and disaster, and his game was up at last!

"I say, you fellows!" "Hallo, hallo, hallo, old fat man! Coming for a fifteen-mile walk?"

"You silly ass!" said Billy Bunter. It was the following afternoon.

Mr. Vernon-Smith, with a rather sore throat, but otherwise much his usual self, was busy in his study with Portuguese documents and Senor Joao Vasco—the genuine owner of that name this time.

Billy Bunter was reposing in the hammock under the big beech on the lawn, resting after his exertions at lunch.

The Bounder and the Famous Five came out in a cheery crowd.

"I say, you fellows, you can go out if you like," went on Bunter.

"Thanks!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"What I mean is, I don't want you!" explained Bunter. "All right now those Highcliffe cads are gone. In fact, I'd rather you cleared off, while I get a bit of a snooze. You're too jolly nqisy, you know. One of you might stay a bit and rock this hammock for me. Only till I nod off, you know."

Bob Cherry paused.

"Wait a bit, you men, while I rock Bunter," he said. "Mustn't be selfish."

"I should think not, after all I've done for you!" grunted Bunter. "Now, then, rock it gently, old chap—"

"Like that?"

"Ow! No! Don't swing me like that!" yelled Bunter. "You silly ass, I shall fall out—you howling idiot, stoppit—I say, you fellows, stoppin—oh, you beast—leggo—yaroooooh!"

Bump!

"Yarooooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter roared. And the chums of the Remove, chortling, walked away to the beach, and left him to roar.

THE END.

(First comic, first served! Watch out for next week's **GRAND CORONATION NUMBER** of the **MAGNET**, in which you will find a special story, of Harry Wharton & Co., entitled "**BILLY BUNTER'S CORONATION PARTY!**" It's the type of yarn you've all been waiting for, chums. An early order will avoid disappointment!—Ed.)

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MOLLY BIRCHEMALL'S CRICKET MATCH!

Complete St. Sam's Yarn

By DICKY NUGENT

"I refuse!"
"But, pop—"
"It's no good you argu-
ing the toss, my dear!"
said Doctor Birchermall,
firmly. "I have already
decided who is going to
represent St. Sam's against
the girls' cricket team from
St. Gert's and all your talk
won't make the slightest
difference. I refuse!"

Molly Birchermall pouted.
The Head's pretty dawter
was accustomed to getting
her own way, and it came
as an unpleasant surprise
to be denied a simple
request by her doting father.

"Really, pop, it's horrid
of you!" she cried, in her
rippling, mewling voice.
"The only reason I fixed
up the match was because
I wanted my skool friends
to play against Jolly and
his friends."

"And the only reason I
allowed the match, my
dear," said the Head, "was
that I wanted the yung
ladies to be defeated so
heavily that they would
never again have the nerve
to challenge such a famous
cricketing skool as St.
Sam's!"

Molly Birchermall bust
into a ripple of laughter.
"I like that, I must say,
pop! Why, the team
you've chosen couldn't beat
a team of cripples!"

Doctor Birchermall's eyes
gleamed with indignation.
"Ho, they couldn't,
couldn't they? Are you
aware, my girl, that I
myself am the captain?"

"Why, of course, pop!
That's enuff to kill their
chances, for a start!"

"I hoap you are not
trying to be sawey to your
own pop, Molly!" snorted
the Head. "I've got to-
gether a ripping team, I
tell you. Apart from my-
self, there's Mr. Lickham—"

"Mr. Lickham!" trilled
Miss Molly, with another
unanswered lark. "He duzzent
know the difference between
a cricket-ball and a cokor-
nut!"

"Then there's Mr.
Justiss and Mr. Swishingham
and Mr. Chas. Tyzer," went
on the Head, enthusiastically.
"And the boys I've
chosen are all loyal youngsters.
There's Swotter major and
Weedy and Skellington—"

"Bookworms or slackers,
all!" rippled Molly
Birchermall, with a stamp of
her dainty foot. "I tell
you you don't stand an
earthly against St. Gert's
with your team of scare-
crows! Let us play against
the Fourth instead, pop,
there's a duck!"

But Doctor Birchermall
didn't seem in the mood to
be a duck.

Seeing that it was a
waste of time to say any
more, Miss Molly gave a
hawty toss of her pretty
head and flounced out of
the Head's study.

Four cheery-looking
juniors were waiting for
her at the end of the passidge.
They were Jolly and Merry
and Bright and Fearless—
all firm friends of the Head's
dawter. Their faces fell,
when they saw the angry
gleam in Molly Birchermall's
eyes.

"No luck, Miss Molly?"
asked Jack Jolly.

"None whatever, Jolly,"
replied Miss Molly. "If
he wasn't my own pop, I
should call him an obstinate
old donkey!"

"Never mind!" said
Frank Fearless. "You've
done your best, Miss Molly,
and it's not your fault if
you've failed. You won't
mind if we have a try now,
will you?"

Molly Birchermall smiled
mischievously.

"I believe you've sud-
denly struck a wonderful
branewave!" she trilled.
"If so, Fearless, you can
go ahead with plezzure as
far as I'm concerned!"

"All screen, then, Miss
Molly—we will!" grinned
Fearless. "This way, you
fellows! There's something
I want to wisper in your
ears!"

He led the rest of the Co.
away to their own quarters,
and Miss Molly, with a
slightly more hopeful look
in her pretty eyes, tripped
off to the Head's house.



"Which the yung ladies
are 'ere, sir!"

Binding, the page, poked
his boot head into Doctor
Birchermall's study and made
that announcement—and
the Head jumped.

"Here already, Binding?
Why, they're an hour earlier
than I thought! I must
get changed at once. Run
down to Big Side and tell
them I won't be long—and
tell the rest of the team to
report at the pavilion at
once!"

"Yessir!"
Binding vanished, and the

Head turned to an old
wooden chest where he kept
his sports clothes. He
muttered angrily into his
beard when he found that
his flannel trowsis and
cricket shirt had been eaten
away by moths.

"Bust it! I shall have
to wear my football outfit,
that's all!" he said.
He did a quick-change act
behind a screen, then set
out for Big Side.

The fellows he met on the
way farly rubbed their eyes
when they saw the Head
dressed for footer, while
Molly Birchermall and her
fellow-cricketers greeted him
with looks of sheer amaze-
ment.

"Really, pop, you
shouldn't dress up like
this," protested the Head's
dawter. "It isn't cricket."
"Isn't it, my dear?"
grinned Doctor Birchermall.
"Well, you just wait till
we start playing and then
see what you think it is!"

The game began.
But it was quickly seen
that the Head's promise
of real cricket was an
optimistick forecast!

The Head's eleven batted
first and the Head put in
himself and Mr. Lickham
to start the innings.

The St. Gert's players,
who were all hefty, broad-
shouldered yung ladies, with
the eggseption of Molly

a shrug, he turned back to
the pavilion.

"Bless my sole! That
only shows that even an
absolute jeniuss at cricket
can be bowled for a duck
sometimes!" he snorted.

The Head's departure was
the start of the most
commical procession that
had ever been seen on Big
Side. One after the other,
the batsmen went down
to the wicket—and one after
the other they returned
after one ball! In two
overs, Doctor Birchermall's
eleven were all out for a
score of nil!

Amid shrieks of lafter,
St. Gert's then sent two of
their yung ladies in to bat.

The Head himself bowled.
But any hoaps he mite have
had of getting St. Gert's out
for nil vanished at the first
ball, for the St. Gert's
player promptly nocked it
to the boundary. As it
was a single innings match,
that finished the game.

Doctor Birchermall didn't
stand on ceremony in taking
his departure. While the
cheers of the crowd were
still resounding across Big
Side, he fled—with the rest
of his team following him!

And it was then that the
St. Gert's "yung ladies"
removed their wigs—to re-
veal the grinning faces of
Jack Jolly and his merry
men of the St. Sam's
Fourth.

"Our win, I fancy, Miss
Molly!" said Jack Jolly.
Molly Birchermall gave a
rippling lark of amowse-
ment.

"Yes, rather!" she trilled.
"Thanks to Fearless, we've
got rid of pop and his silly
team before even the proper
St. Gert's team has arrived.
Now go and get changed
again, boys—and all I hoap
is that St. Gert's give you a
better game than that!"

And, although the Fourth
won a farly easy viktory
against their girl rivals later
in the afternoon, they had
to confess that a better or
more enjoyable game could
not have been imagined!

(Don't miss the rib-tickling
yarn from Dicky Nugent's
pen in next week's great
number, chums!)

STOP PRESS

SPECIAL
CORONATION
NUMBER OF THE
"HERALD"

Next Saturday.



The GREYFRIARS HERALD

No. 239.

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

May 8th, 1937.



ENGLISH SCHOOLS SUIT CHINESE "Gleyfliars Velly Nice!"—WUN LUNG

"Honourable Sir," ran
a letter we received from
China the other day; "this
is to ask you if you can
confidently recommend
Greyfriars School as a suit-
able school for my son. He
is a quiet, well-mannered
lad, brought up amongst
well-to-do handits. He is
extremely clever, especially
at inventing original new
tortures for enemies. He
also shows considerable skill
at chopping off prisoners'
heads with the sword."
"Awaiting your reply,"
"Your despicable servant,
"Hi Hi."

Delighted to have this
new evidence of the con-
tinual spread of the fame
of Greyfriars into the remote
parts of the earth, we rushed
off to see what Wun Lung
of the Remove thought
about it.

"What is the reaction
of the Oriental mentality
to English education, k-i?"
we asked him.
Wun Lung's reply was not

illuminating. It was "No
savvy!"

When asked what he
thought of Greyfriars as a
school, the Chinese smiled—a
smile that was childlike and
bland.

"Me tinkee Gleyfliars
velly nice!" he said.
Further questions only
caused him to fall back on
"No savvy!" again; but
anyway we'd gained our
point—Wun Lung was will-
ing to recommend Grey-
friars. And on the assump-
tion that what suits one
Chinaman suits the lot, we
are thinking of writing back
to Hi Hi, strongly advising
him to send his promising
yung hopeful over.

We can foresee him being
a very useful addition to the
Remove forces in the event
of another outbreak of war
between Greyfriars and
Highcliff.

With an experienced
Chinese torturer and execu-
tioner on our side, Pon & Co.
will think twice before giving
battle—however much the
odds may favour them!

HOW BUNTER CLIMBED THE GREASY POLE By PETER TODD

For weeks Bunter has
had a secret.

At odd moments, chaps
have been surprised to dis-
cover him in a corner of the
gym, trying to climb a rope,
or in a corner of the quad,
trying to climb a drainpipe.

Inquiries failed to estab-
lish the reason for this
sudden passion for gym-
nastics. Bunter's reply
was either "He, he, he!
Wouldn't you like to know?"
or "Yah! Find out!"—
according to his mood!

But he let the cat out of
the bag eventually. Wharton
gave him half a dozen jam-
tarts and Bunter gave
Wharton his secret.

He was practising to climb
the greasy pole in the Friar-
dale Sports and win the tuck-
hamper that reposed on top
of it!

Bunter took it jolly seri-

ously, I can tell you. He
became quite a dabster at
climbing odd drainpipes and
flagposts.

By the time he came to
face his great ordeal, last
Wednesday afternoon in the
sports field at Friardale, he
was supremely confident.

But there was one big
difference between the poles
he had practised on and the
pole he had to climb for the
actual competition. The
latter was greased!

Instead of shinning up
that pole like a fat monkey,
as he'd hoped, Bunter slid
down like a ton weight!

"Never mind, Fatty!
Try your luck again!" was
the roar that went up from
the crowd.

But for once Bunter knew
when he had had enough.
He rolled away, without try-
ing his luck a second time.

"WHEN IS A BEARD NOT A BEARD?"

Pianist's Poser Puzzled Police!

A long-haired musician
with a fungoid-looking
growth round his chin,
Claude Hoskins by name,
was charged before Judge
Brown at the Woodshed
Sessions last Thursday with
growing a beard, contrary
to the Young Shavers
Control Regulations.

Judge Brown (ex-
amining prisoner through
his opera-glasses):
"Great Scott! What
is it? Is it human?"
(Laughter.)

P.c. Bulstrode: "The
police are satisfied, your
honour, that prisoner is
a human being belong-
ing to the Shell Form."

Judge: "Well, it's
nice to know there's one
human being in the
Shell. I always thought
they were rabbits! Pro-
ceed with the case!"

P.c. Bulstrode then gave
evidence of arrest. He said
that he found Hoskins
sitting at a piano in the
music-room, engaged appar-
ently in smashing a piano
to pieces.

Prisoner: "That's a
whopper! As a matter of
fact, your honour, I was
playing my unfinished
symphony!"

Judge: "What's the dif-
ference, then?" (Laughter.)
Proceeding, P.c. Bul-
strode stated that his at-
tention was drawn to the
condition of prisoner's chin,
and he formed the opinion
that it displayed undoubted
symptoms of developing
a beard. He, therefore,
arrested prisoner and warned
him as per regulations.

Judge: "What did he
say, old chap?"

P.c. Bulstrode: "He
said 'What a cheek!' I
said 'Yes, and what a chin,
too!' It's a wonder you
haven't been arrested be-
fore!" (Laughter.)

Prisoner then said "Any-
way, I'm not growing a
beard." He then asked me
a conundrum: "When is a
beard not a beard?" and,
when I gave it up, said
"I can hardly 'beard'"
to tell you the answer!"
(Groans and moans).

Judge (to prisoner):

"Have you anything to
say in your defence?"

Prisoner: "Yes. I
haven't jolly well got a
beard, that's all!"

Judge: "How you can
stand there and tell such
a barefaced fib is beyond
me."



me. Anyone with half an
eye can see that you've got
a proper beaver!"

Prisoner: "I tell you
I haven't got a beard!"

Judge (angrily): "I've
had enough of this. You are
sentenced to have your
beard shaved off by the
police barber. Get busy,
Bolsy!"

P.c. Bolsover then en-
tered the dock, armed with
a shaving brush and razor,
and began to lather prisoner,
while the latter struggled
wildly in the hands of two
burly constables. After
lathering for a couple of
minutes, P.c. Bolsover was
observed to start violently
and mutter:

"Oh, scissors!"

Judge: "Want a pair?"
P.c. Bolsover: "Nunno,
your honour. I shan't need
scissors—nor a razor, if it
comes to that! The prisoner
hasn't got a beard, after
all!"

Judge: "Wha-a-at!"

P.c. Bolsover: "Fact,
your honour! Now that
I've given him a lather,
I can see that it isn't a
beard after all. It's only
dirt!"

Amid laughter, prisoner
was then removed to a
bath-room for the purpose
of having his face washed,
and the Court adjourned.

SHOULD SCHOOLBOYS RULE THE ROOST?

H. VERNON-SMITH, Says: "YES!"

I've always held the opinion that I can look after
myself just as well as any beak can look after me,
and I think the results are always likely to be much
better. As I know of no reason why the same shouldn't
apply to other chaps, I certainly support the pro-
position that schoolboys should rule the roost!

The old idea that no fellow could expect to develop
into a good citizen without being flogged at frequent
intervals and bullied all the time went out with
crinolines and side-whiskers!

The new idea that freedom gives a chap a
chance to develop his own individuality
came in as the other went out. But if you
imagine that it has reached the cloistered
seclusion of Greyfriars, you're a giddy
optimist! It takes a century at least for a
new idea to get into this old sanctuary!

Why the dickens should it be supposed
that a dreamy old Greek scholar like the
Head or a dyspeptic old student of Roman
history like Quelch ought to tell me what
to do and what not to do? I know better
than either of them!

Don't run away with the idea that I object
to them completely. I don't mind them
teaching me Greek and Latin. They're well
fitted for that job. But when they try to
rule my private life, they're dealing with
something about which they know very
little. They achieve nothing, anyway,
except bad temper and friction on both
sides!

Wharton and other idiots like him think
we must have discipline. Agreed! But
not other people's! I'd probably be a model
schoolboy if there were no rules. I'd apply
that self-discipline about which Wharton
bleated last week!

But I can't stand being governed by
others. That's why I say that schoolboys
should rule the roost!

HARRY WHARTON SAYS "NO!"

Smithy talks a lot of rot!
You have to learn to obey before you can
command.

If we all ruled ourselves at Greyfriars, we
should soon drift into a state of giddy
anarchism—because most of us wouldn't
trouble to rule!

The Head may be principally a Greek
scholar and Quelch may be principally an
authority on Roman history. But don't
forget that they know a lot about training
boys, too!

They go to a lot of trouble to train us to
be orderly schoolboys for a very good reason.
It teaches us to be orderly citizens after we
leave school behind us.

I believe in freedom as much as Smithy
does. But freedom is like everything else—
if you get too much of it and get it too easily,
you don't appreciate it. In the end, you
even grow tired of it.

Restrictions are irksome—but they teach
you to value the freedom you get when
they're lifted. I don't always like it myself
—but I still plump for the beaks continuing
to rule the roost at Greyfriars!

Smithy is different—naturally. He
always was a law unto himself and always
will be!

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