

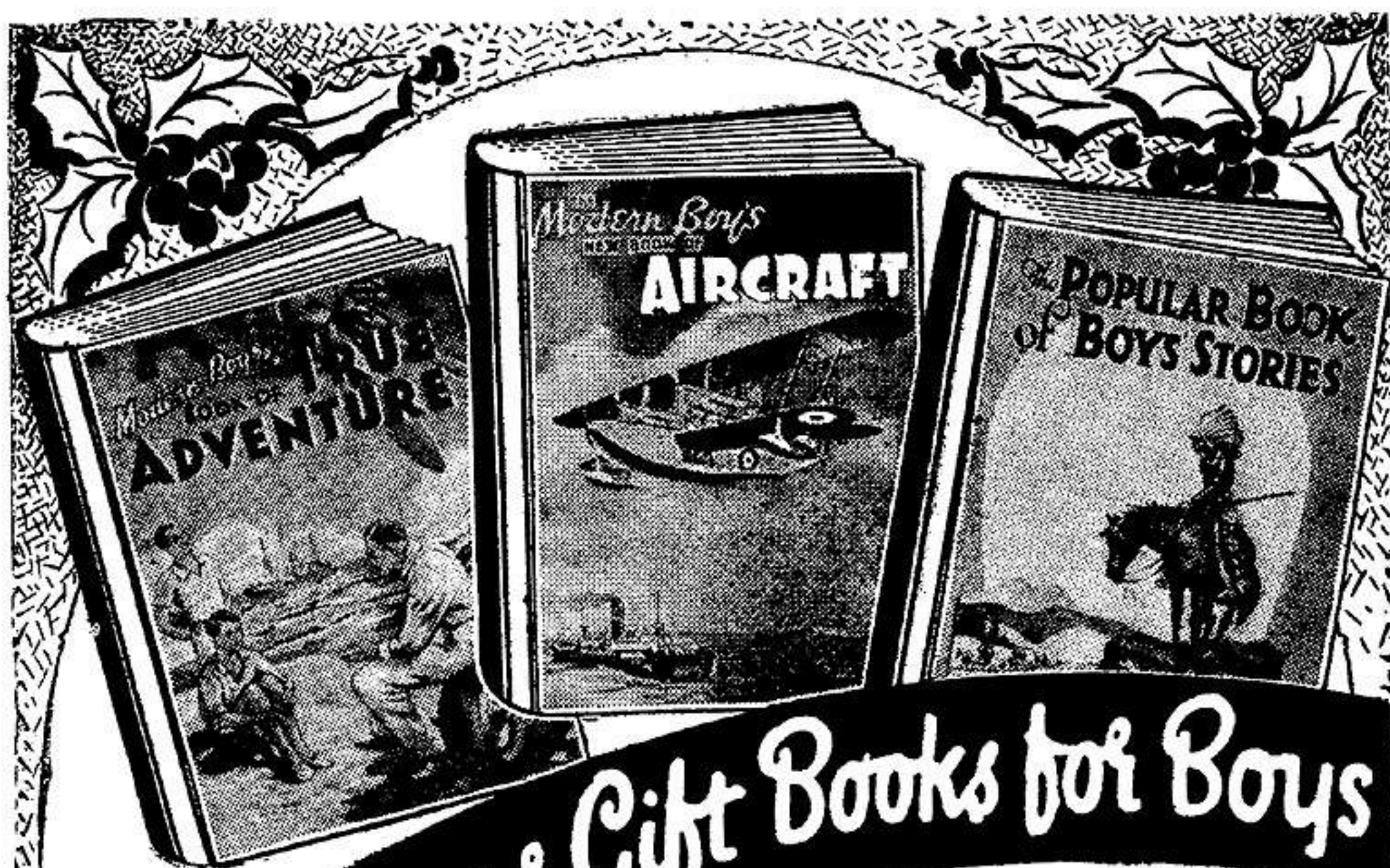
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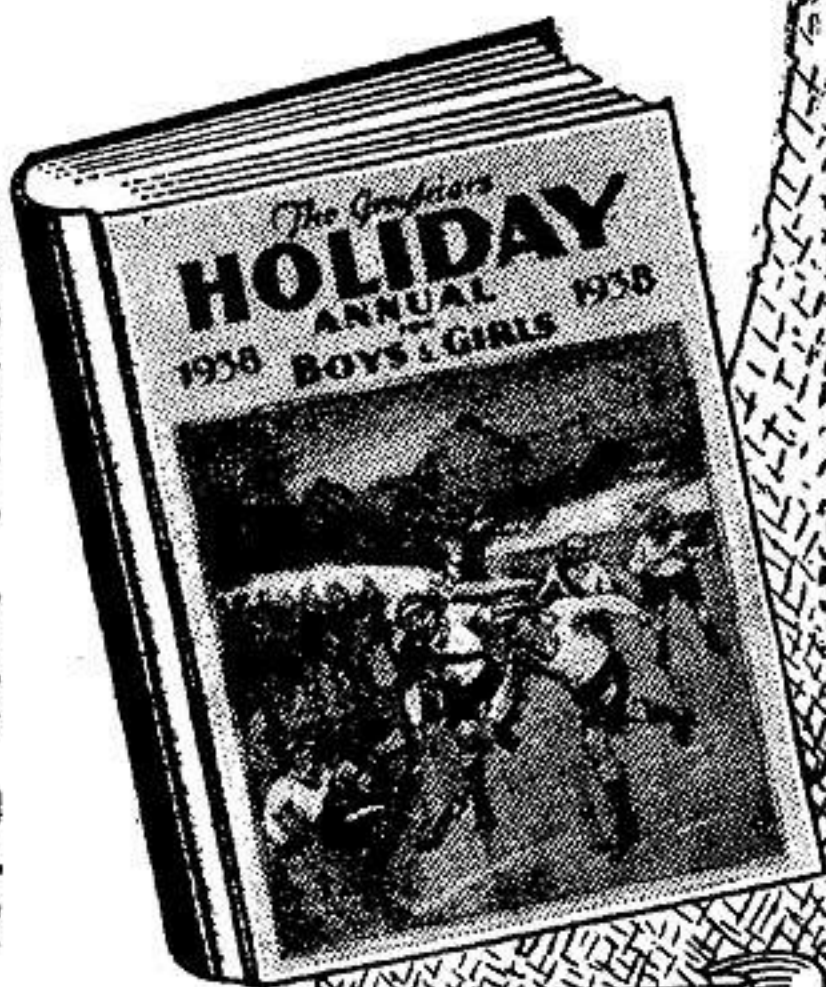
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The Wraith of Reynham Castle!



Johnny Bull stepped behind the ghostly figure in the doorway, a thick stick gripped in his hand!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

His Lordship is Late!

"HERBERT!"

"Yes, my lord!"

"My riding-kit, George!"

"Yes, my lord!"

"And buck up, Francis—my friends are waiting for me!" said Billy Bunter languidly.

"Very good, my lord!"

James, the valet, answered to the names of Herbert, and George, and Francis, without turning a hair.

Now that Billy Bunter, the fat ornament of the Greyfriars Remove, had a valet, he had become far too aristocratic to remember that valet's name.

Perhaps Bunter overdid it a little.

It was rather Billy Bunter's way to over-do things.

Fearfully aristocratic as Bunter thought it was to forget servants' names, there really was a limit.

Still, it was hardly a week since Billy Bunter had become "my lord" at Reynham Castle; so he was not quite used yet to being a nobleman.

Being a nobleman, in Bunter's happy opinion, meant swank. Of that quality, William George Bunter had lots and lots. All he ever needed was a chance to display it. Now he had the chance.

Owing to a strange series of circumstances, Billy Bunter was playing the part of Lord Reynham, in his lordship's castle in Sussex. And Bunter's idea was to play that part for all it was worth—and a little over.

It was ten o'clock on a cold and frosty morning.

This was rather early for Bunter to turn out in holiday time. But he had

arranged to go riding with his friends that morning.

Not that Bunter would have kept to the arrangement if left entirely to his own devices. Having breakfasted in bed, he had settled down to another snooze, regardless of the fact that Harry Wharton & Co. were ready, and that the grooms were holding the horses on the avenue. But his snooze had been interrupted by Bob Cherry.

Regardless of the fact that Billy Bunter was, for the nonce, a lord, and therefore to be treated with great respect by common mortals, Bob had barged in, yanked off the bedclothes, and rolled his fat lordship out of bed with a bump.

So Lord Bunter was up at that unusual hour.

It was now James' privilege to encase his lordship in his riding clothes. Lord Bunter was quite unable to do anything unaided.

Bob had announced that they would wait ten minutes. When twice that length of time had elapsed, Bunter was still in the process of being dressed by James.

There was a tramp of feet in the King's Room—the magnificent apartment honoured by Lord Bunter's occupation. Billy Bunter blinked at the communicating doorway. His guests, evidently, were coming to hurry him up.

"Shut that door, James!" he said hastily.

In his haste, he forgot to forget that James' name was James!

"Yes, my lord!"

James shut the door on the King's Room.

The next moment it burst open again with a crash. Bob Cherry tramped in. Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Janset Ram Singh looked in after him. Four members of the Famous Five of Greyfriars were at Reynham Castle. All the four looked impatient.

"Ready?" roared Bob Cherry.

"Don't yell!" said Bunter reprovingly.

"You fat ass——"

"I wish you fellows would remember that you're not in the Remove passage at Greyfriars now!" said Bunter severely. "Not so much row, Cherry!"

"You blithering bloater——"

"That will do!" said Bunter, with a wave of his fat hand. "Go down and wait for me. I may be down in a quarter of an hour!"

"We're to wait another quarter of an hour?" asked Harry Wharton.

"That's it!"

"I don't think!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"I know that, Cherry! You never do!"

"Why, you cheeky porpoise——"

"Buck up, you fat ass!" said Frank Nugent. "You can't keep the horses standing about in the cold!"

"I suppose I can do as I like with my own horses!" said Lord Bunter, blinking at him through his big spectacles. "Don't be cheeky, Nugent!"

"My esteemed idiotic Bunter——" began Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"You shut up, Inky!"

"Look here, fathead!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"I've asked you, Wharton, to remem-

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ber that you're not in the Remove passage now!" said Bunter calmly. "I expect rather better manners at my castle. My boots, Ronald! Shut that door first, though!"

"Is James' name Ronald now?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I should prefer you not to be impertinent, Cherry!" said Lord Bunter. "Get out, and let Archibald shut the door!"

"Archibald?" gasped Bob.

"I mean Frederick! You are perfectly aware, Cherry, that I can't remember that my man's name is James!" said Bunter, with dignity.

"Oh, my hat!"

A faint grin flickered, for a moment, on James' usually expressionless face.

James, like all the numerous staff at Reynham Castle, from Jasmond, the butler, down to the youngest footman, believed that Bunter was Lord Reynham. His lordship's guardian, Sir Peter Lanchester, had contrived that, for his own special purposes. Even his lordship's cousin, Captain Reynham, believed the same. To all of them, Bunter was his lordship, home after a long absence. But what they all thought of his lordship was another matter.

It was possible that, in the servants' hall, below stairs, there were many remarks that would have surprised and annoyed his lordship, could he have heard them.

"Now buzz off!" said Bunter. "I mean, leave me! I prefer not to be disturbed while my valet is dressing me."

"Oh, come on!" said Harry. "We'll get off, Bunter, and you can follow on; we're going through the park."

"I've told you to wait for me!" said Bunter.

The captain of the Greyfriars Remove gave him a look.

On the footing of an ordinary guest, no doubt he would have departed from Bunter's stately castle, and that would have been that. But the chums of the Remove were not on the footing of ordinary guests at the castle. They were there to protect Bunter from the kidnapping gang that were after Lord Reynham. Having promised to stay, they could hardly go and leave the fat Owl of the Remove to it.

"You fat, frabjous, foozling freak—" said Harry.

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"You burbling bandersnatch!" booted Bob Cherry. "Do you know that you're asking to be booted?"

"Silence!"

"Wh-a-at?"

"I said silence! You disturb me! Go away quietly, and wait downstairs till I'm ready! That's all!"

"Captain Reynham is waiting, too!" said Nugent.

"Let him wait!" said Lord Bunter. "I'm not likely to hurry myself for a poor relation."

"You silly, fat, cheeky, footling, frabjous fathead—" hissed Bob.

"Any more cheek, Cherry, and I shall order Frederick to turn you out of the room!" said Bunter haughtily. "You're not in the Rag at Greyfriars now, Cherry! I insist upon your behaving yourself."

Bob Cherry gasped. He did not answer in words. He made a sudden jump at Bunter, and grasped him by a fat neck.

There was a roar from his lordship as he twirled in Bob's hefty grasp.

"Yaroooh! Leggo! Beast!"

Thud!

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A riding-boot landed upon riding-breeches, and Lord Bunter went whirling. He collided with James, grabbed at him for support, and dragged him over as he went to the floor.

"Ow! Wow!" roared Bunter.

"Oh, my lord!" gasped James.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Removites as Lord Bunter and his man were mixed up on the floor, with the riding-boots that James had been about to put on his lordship. It was quite a mix-up.

"Yoo-hoop!" roared Bunter. "Oh crikey! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Leaving his lordship and his lordship's man to sort themselves out, the chums of the Remove departed.

A few minutes later a clattering of horses' hoofs on the avenue told that they had started on the ride—which was, of course, fearful cheek on their part, and extremely annoying to that new, but important, member of the peerage, Lord Bunter.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Hot Chase!

"O H, ripping!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Gallop, gallop!

"The ripfulness is terrific!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Topping!" said Harry Wharton.

"Who wouldn't be a jolly old lord, with a jolly old castle, and jolly old tons of oof, and jolly old gee-gees in the jolly old stables!" said Bob. "Must be a jolly old life—what?"

"What-ho!" said Frank Nugent.

The keen winter wind whistled past the juniors as they rode, and stung their cheeks. The sky was like steel, banked here and there with clouds that told of more snow to come. Just before Christmas, the December day was cold and bitter, the whole landscape frosty. But it was a ripping morning for a ride, and the chums of the Remove were enjoying themselves.

There had been a fall of snow, but it had thawed away. Mists were rising, and looked like thickening later, but at the moment all was sharp and clear. It was Christmas Eve, and that day Johnny Bull was coming along to join his comrades for Christmas.

It was not wholly satisfactory in some ways to be Bunter's guests; but, having promised to see the fat Owl through the Christmas holidays, the Co. really had little choice about that. But there were compensations. This glorious ride on a frosty morning was one of them. Everything that wealth could buy was to be had for the asking at Lord Reynham's castle, and there was no doubt that wealth could buy quite a lot of very agreeable things.

The juniors had ridden through the park and out at a gate that gave on the open downs. They rode at a gallop on the frosty downs in a keen wind, with a glimpse of the sea in the distance.

The loss of Lord Bunter's society did not unduly depress them. Of that, in fact, they usually had enough and to spare. And had Bunter been with them, they would have had to content themselves with a very leisurely trot; and even at an easy trot, it was probable that his lordship would have fallen off a few times, and the other fellows would have had to dismount and pick him up—which would not have added to the enjoyment of the morning's ride.

"I suppose Bunter will be all right?" remarked Harry Wharton, with a backward glance at the mass of leafless trees in Reynham Park.

Having hung about half an hour for

Bunter, the captain of the Greyfriars Remove felt that he really had done all that could be expected. Looking after Bunter was one thing, but hanging about all the morning waiting for a lazy slacker who did not choose to get a move on was quite another.

"Captain Reynham is waiting for him," answered Bob. "He won't be alone. I suppose we couldn't leave him alone, in the giddy circles. But the captain will see him safe if anything turns up."

"Jolly good-natured of him to wait for Bunter!" said Nugent.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"I don't think he's frightfully fond of his rich Cousin William," he said. "But, as Bunter put it with such exquisite taste, he's a poor relation, so I suppose he has to keep in with the jolly old lord."

"It's a queer business!" said Harry Wharton, with a thoughtful frown. "From what I can make out, the real Lord Reynham is a chap in weakly health, with his nervous system upset by those rotters trying to kidnap him when he was a little kid of eleven or so. His guardian's parked him at some school under an assumed name to keep him safe, and led those kidnapping blighters to believe that the school was Greyfriars and the name Bunter. And—"

"And they've fallen for it!" grinned Bob. "They're after Bunter like terriers after a rat; and if they knew he really was Bunter, they wouldn't take him at a gift!"

"But it's queer!" said Harry. "Of course, such a game had to be kept fearfully secret from everybody at the castle, or the Smiler and his gang would soon have got wise to it. But I should have expected old Sir Peter Lanchester to let the captain into it—his own nephew, and cousin of the real lord. But Captain Reynham is kept in the dark, like everybody else."

"I suppose the old bean thought he couldn't be too careful," said Frank. "He was fearfully worried, I imagine, when Bunter let us into it. He never wanted any Greyfriars fellows here with Bunter—though now we know he's glad to keep us under his eye."

"And there's more coming," said Harry. "Johnny Bull to-day, and Bolsover major and Skinner later. The old bean planned for Bunter to play at being a lord and draw the kidnappers, and give his detective, Tomlinson, a chance at them; but Bunter doesn't seem to be fearfully keen on running into danger."

"The fearfulness is not terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"The fact is, that old bean, Sir Peter, is a bit of an old ass!" said Bob. "Goodness knows what that gang are going to do with Lord Reynham if they ever get hold of him! It can't be a ransom stunt; they wouldn't be after him for years on end if it was that. Whatever they mean, it would be pretty rough on Bunter if he tumbled into it."

"Well, he asked for it by coming here to play at being a lord!"

"The fat ass was thinking of swank and turkeys and Christmas puddings!" chuckled Bob. "As soon as the danger cropped up, he was in a fearful hurry to get some pals round him! Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that a car?"

"A car—here!" exclaimed Harry.

The juniors were two or three miles from the castle by this time. The frosty, rugged downs spread round them on all sides, with no trace of a road.

It was open pastureland for mile on mile, and not even a path was to be seen. A motor-car in such a place would have been very surprising,

But Bob Cherry pointed with his riding-whip. At a distance, half-hidden by a group of frost-rimed willows, a small saloon car stood at a halt, with the driver sitting at the wheel, and a man lounging by, smoking a cigarette.

Harry Wharton pulled in his horse. "That's rather queer!" he said quietly. "Looks like a bridle-path yonder, but it's no road for a car. I wonder—"

Bob chuckled.

"The jolly old kidnappers?" he asked.

"Well, I don't see what a car is doing here," answered Harry. "Bunter might have been with us."

"How the dickens would they know?"

"They might," said the captain of the Remove quietly. "They got at Bunter in the King's Room, in the castle, a day or two ago, and that means that they have a confederate in the place. Lots of them in the castle knew last night that Bunter was going out riding this morning, and Smiler may have got the tip. Anyhow, I think we may as well have a look at that car."

"Let's!" agreed Nugent.

And the juniors wheeled their horses and cantered towards the halted car.

They noticed that the man standing by the car stared at them intently as they approached, and, as they drew nearer, they made out his hard, cold face and glinting eyes. They knew that face. It was the face of the Smiler—the crook who, for some utterly mysterious and unknown reason, was after Lord Reynham. The man at the wheel, they had no doubt, was his associate, the Ferret.

"By gum!" said Bob, with a deep breath. "That's the rascal, you fellows, and there's not much doubt what they're hanging about here for! They've got the tip that his jolly old lordship is coming out this morning."

Harry Wharton gripped his riding-whip.

"You fellows game?" he asked. "We've got a chance of collaring those rotters!"

"Come on!" said Bob.

And the Greyfriars fellows put their horses to the gallop.

The Smiler gave them a last hard look, and then suddenly jumped into the car. The buzz of the engine followed immediately.

"They're off!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Tally-ho!" roared Bob. "After them!"

The car shot away. It jolted and rocked and bumped on the rough track over the downs, but it put on quite a good speed. After it, with a thunder of hoofs, galloped the Greyfriars fellows.

They were four to two, but a tussle with the two crooks might have been a doubtful proposition. But it was plain that the Smiler and the Ferret were not in want of a tussle—at all events, now that they had seen that his lordship was not with the other fellows.

On an open road, horseflesh would not have been of much use in chase of a car. But on that rugged bridle-path over the downs it was a different matter. The car accelerated, and then it was seen to rock wildly, and the pursuing juniors more than half-expected it to crash. But it righted again, and ran on at a reduced speed; and, getting all they could out of their mounts, the four Greyfriars fellows kept pace, and even gained a little.

The ground fairly flew under the galloping hoofs.

In the excitement of the chase, the juniors hardly noticed the distance they were covering. But mile after mile flew by, and the sea loomed nearer and nearer.

Neither did they notice at the moment that a thick mist was rising from the sea and drifting inland. They galloped hard and fast, going all out, the wind stinging their faces.

Three or four times the hard-faced Smiler was seen to lean out, and stare back, with a dark and threatening scowl. Whether the juniors overtook the car or not, there was no doubt that they were disconcerting the plans laid by the kidnapping gang. And they looked like overtaking it for a time.

But suddenly, the car turned at right angles, and shot away at a terrific speed.

It had reached the road that ran along the top of the cliffs. On the smooth highway, the Ferret let it out—and it fairly walked away from the pursuers. The Greyfriars fellows, breathless, drew in their horses where the path joined the road, and stared after the car. It was vanishing in the far distance.

"N.G.!" gasped Bob. "Well, we gave them a run for their money, anyhow. They won't see anything of the jolly old porpoise this morning."

And the juniors wheeled their horses to ride back—and behind them, as they rode, the mist from the sea rolled thicker and thicker. It thickened round them in a fog while long miles yet lay between them and Reynham Castle.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Stranded!

BILLY BUNTER rolled out of the great portico at Reynham Castle, frowning.

James had completed his toilet at last—and his fat lordship was ready to ride. But it was clear that the other riders had not waited for his lordship: as, of course, they ought to have done, when Bunter had told them distinctly to do so.

Two grooms were walking horses on the drive—Bunter's and the captain's. Captain Reynham, a handsome figure in riding-clothes, stood talking to Sir Peter Lanchester: and the latter frowned at Bunter as he appeared.

Since Bunter had been a resident at the castle in Sussex, old Sir Peter had become better acquainted with him—which had had the result of lowering the fat Owl very considerably in his estimation. The old gentleman had, in fact, realised that the artful Owl had pulled his leg to a considerable extent.

But that knowledge had come to Sir Peter too late to be of any use to him. Having presented Bunter at the castle as Lord Reynham, Sir Peter had to stick it out, and hope for the best. But every now and then his lordship got the sharp edge of his guardian's tongue.

"William!" rapped Sir Peter.

Bunter blinked round at the old baronet, through his big spectacles. Sir Peter seemed annoyed—but Bunter was annoyed himself.

He was quite ready to give the old "bean" back as good as he gave! Perfectly well aware that Sir Peter could not part with him, now that he had announced him at the castle as Lord Reynham, Bunter was not going to stand any nonsense. Not if William George Bunter knew it!

"Well?" snapped Bunter.

"You have kept the horses standing more than half an hour!" said Sir Peter, severely.

To Sir Peter, that was a serious matter. To the fat Owl of Greyfriars, it was no more serious than keeping a bike standing.

"Have I?" said Bunter, breezily.

"That's all right: don't you worry! I say, have those rotters gone off without me?"

"Your friends have gone, some time ago!" rapped Sir Peter. "Captain Reynham has kindly waited for you."

Bunter blinked at the young Army man who gave him a nod and a smile. His fat lordship did not smile back.

Fathead as Bunter undoubtedly was, he was not such a fool as the captain, on his looks, naturally took him to be. He had his own opinion about that elegant young Army man.

When the captain made himself agreeable, Bunter regarded it as a "poor relation" greasing up to a rich relative—Bunter being, for the nonce, the captain's wealthy cousin William, Lord Reynham. And really, he had some cause: for at other times, with a wary eye behind his big spectacles, he had caught the captain fixing him with a far from friendly or affectionate eye.

Bunter knew, in fact, that Rupert Reynham regarded him, in his own mind, as a fat and offensive bounder.

"Oh, you've waited, have you?" grunted Bunter. "Well, I jolly well shouldn't go riding alone, I know that! I'm not going to be snaffled by those kidnapping rotters!"

"You may rely upon me, William, if there should be any danger!" said the captain, with a smile.

Short, from Bunter!

"Don't fancy I want protecting!" he yapped. "I can look after myself, I hope! Still, you can ride with me!"

"I am honoured!" said Rupert, with a sarcastic inflexion in his voice that he could not contrive to keep out of it.

He walked across to his horse, and took it from the groom. Sir Peter dropped his hand on a fat shoulder.

"I desire you to be more civil to my nephew, William!" he said, in a low voice. "I should be very sorry if Rupert took offence, and left the castle, instead of remaining here over Christmas."

"Rot!" said Bunter.

"Wha-a-t?" gasped Sir Peter Lanchester.

"I said rot!" answered Bunter, coolly. "He won't hike off in a hurry—you can trust him for that! He's in clover here—living on the fat of the land, and riding my horses! A ten-shilling hack would be nearer his mark, on his own!"

And Bunter rolled away to his steed, leaving Sir Peter Lanchester speechless.

With the aid of two grooms, Bunter was hoisted into the saddle. He had the stirrups altered, and then altered again—not because they needed it, but to impress on the menials that he was boss of the show. Then he gathered up the reins in a fat paw, took his riding-whip, and rode away down the avenue—looking as graceful as a sack of coke beside the elegant captain.

His lordship had given special instructions, that an extremely quiet and well-behaved "gee" should be selected for his lordly use. Those instructions, evidently had been carried out: for Bunter did not fall off his horse, all the way through the park to the gate on the downs. Moreover, he was careful not to venture on anything more than a gentle trot.

Bunter liked to tell the fellows in the Remove, at Greyfriars, about wild gallops on fiery steeds at home at that magnificent residence, Bunter Court. But when he was actually on a horse, he preferred slow motion.

Captain Reynham looked at him several times: unaware of the fact that Bunter, short-sighted as he was, caught the amused contempt in his looks.

Like so many short-sighted people,
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Bunter sensed things as much as he saw them: and though the captain's face, at ten feet off, was dim to his limited vision, he was perfectly aware of the varying expressions that passed over it.

He knew that the captain disliked him—which, Bunter admitted, was natural enough, for had he been really Lord Reynham, as Rupert believed, he would have been the fellow who stood between the impecunious Army man and a great title and a great estate.

Still, it was like his cheek, Bunter considered: and he did not like it. Contempt is said to penetrate even the shell of the tortoise: and even Billy Bunter was not so thick-skinned as a tortoise.

For which reason, Bunter, generally laid himself out to be disagreeable to that cheeky "poor relation"—and he succeeded so well, that Harry Wharton & Co. had wondered, a good many times, why the captain did not leave the castle.

The juniors, when they rode out of the park, had closed the gate after them. It had to be opened again for the two riders to pass out: and as a schoolboy riding with a man, it was up to Bunter to jump down and open it.

Bunter had two good reasons for not doing so, however. Swank was one of them: and the other, a doubt whether he could have got on his horse again, once he had got off.

"Get that gate open!" said Bunter cheerily.

Captain Reynham looked at him, fixedly, for a moment. Bunter spoke to him as he might have spoken to a groom. This was Bunter's masterly way of getting his own back for the young Army man's supercilious looks.

It was not surprising that Rupert Reynham's grip closed on his riding whip, hard, for a second. During that brief second, Lord Bunter had a narrow escape of a whop across his lordly shoulders!

Then the captain dismounted, and opened the gate, holding it for Bunter to ride through.

Bunter grinned as he passed him. He was, he flattered himself, keeping this cheeky poor relation in his proper place! If he did not like it, he could clear—Bunter would not have been sorry to see the last of him.

Rupert Reynham remounted and rode after Bunter. They trotted in silence over the frosty downs. Bunter blinked round several times, through his big spectacles, for Harry Wharton & Co. But the Co. were miles away, and he was not likely to see anything of them.

As the fat junior knew nothing of the ways about the castle, he left the guidance to Captain Reynham. Rupert led the way, into a bridle-path that crossed the almost trackless downs.

In the park he had been annoyed by Bunter's leisurely rate of progress; but now he seemed content to amble along at little more than a walk. His eyes which were very keen, swept the downs continually—perhaps, like Bunter, looking for the Greyfriars fellows.

A couple of miles from the castle, he scanned the ground, as he rode slowly along the bridle-path. His keen glances picked up the recent sign of motor-tyres—quite lost to Bunter's eyes. A puzzled expression came over his face—possibly he was wondering what a car had been doing there at all!

"I say—" said Bunter suddenly. "Looks to me like a fog coming on!"

The captain smiled. For the last half-hour, or more, he had been observing the thick mist rolling up from the sea, growing thicker and thicker. Looking

back, the tall turret of Reynham Castle was hidden in mist.

"I think we'd better be getting back!" said Bunter. "I can't see anything of the other fellows, and I don't want to be caught in the fog here, see?"

"Perhaps you are right, William!" said the captain.

"No perhaps about it!" yapped Bunter. "I'm right! Why, if I lost sight of you, I couldn't find my way back—I can't see the castle from here! Might wander off anywhere."

Captain Reynham gave him rather a strange look.

"Do you think so?" he asked.

"I don't think—I know! Let's get back," said Bunter. "Besides, we might be late for lunch!"

He wheeled his horse—carefully.

"Right!" said the captain cheerily. "The fact is, we're rather in danger of being caught in the fog, now you point it out, William. We had better put on a spot of speed, I think."

With a touch of the whip, the captain set his horse to the gallop.

Billy Bunter glared after him, and yelled:

"I say, hold on. I'm not going to race! Hold on! Stop! Do you hear me, blow you? Stop, I tell you!"

Perhaps, in the thunder of the hoofs, and the whistling of the wind, the captain did not hear. At all events, he did not heed. He rode on at a sharp gallop without looking back.

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Lord Bunter did not want to gallop. He knew—as doubtless Rupert knew—what was likely to happen, if he did. But the prospect of being left alone on the lonely downs, with the fog thickening about him, was terrifying.

Bunter made the venture. He galloped after Rupert.

After so much slow motion, on a cold and frosty morning, Bunter's horse was probably glad to stretch his limbs a little. He galloped on after the captain, already far in the distance. In a couple of minutes Bunter had lost the reins—in two more, he had lost the stirrups—his riding-whip flew from his fat hand and vanished as he clutched at the horse's neck—and after rocking onward, with squeaks of terror, for about another minute, Bunter rolled off.

Bump!

"Yaroooh!"

Bunter landed on Sussex, with a concussion that almost made that county jump. He roared as he hit Sussex. The horse, possibly glad to be relieved of his lordship's uncommon weight, dashed on, and left him there.

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Wow! Beast! Oh crikey!"

He sat and blinked after his vanishing horse. The captain was almost out of sight. In a few minutes more, he was quite out of sight—and Bunter's horse passed out of sight in its turn. And the hapless fat Owl, blinking round him over rugged, misty downs, utterly lonely, deserted and silent, tottered to his feet, and ejaculated dismally:

"Oh crikey!"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

In the Kidnapper's Hands!

"HELP!" roared Billy Bunter.

Bunter had been tramping for twenty minutes. It seemed to him like the same number of hours.

Now he halted, gasping for breath, and blinked round him through the thickening mist that clothed the dim, rolling downs.

He had seen nothing more of his horse. Probably the animal had gone

home, knowing, better than its rider did, the way home across the downs. Neither had he seen any more of Rupert Reynham. Apparently the captain had supposed that Bunter was riding after him. Anyhow, he had disappeared without looking back—and looking back, now, would have been useless, for visibility in the mist was shortened to a matter of yards.

Stranded on the dim downs, Bunter had started to walk back, in what he hoped was the right direction. But he was soon tired of walking, and he knew that the chances were many against the direction being right. As he had not the remotest idea where the castle lay, and could not guess north from south or east from west, he might have been heading for any point of the compass. Really, exertion was rather futile, in such circumstances.

But the idea of remaining where he was, was simply terrifying. He was lost on the downs—hopelessly lost!

In clear daylight, even Billy Bunter might have arrived somewhere—but the thickening mist wrapped him almost like wool.

It was the fault of those beasts for starting without him—not, of course, Bunter's own fault for not starting when the other fellows did. But the worst beast of all was that unutterable beast Rupert Reynham, who had brought him here and left him stranded.

Harry Wharton & Co. were somewhere on the downs—but that was little use to Bunter, as they might be miles away, and would have been invisible if twenty yards away. They were not likely to help.

But surely that unspeakable beast, Rupert, would miss him, and come back for him! That was really Bunter's only hope! The beast did not like him—agreeable fellow as he was—but he could not be brute enough to leave him lost on the misty downs.

Bunter, at first, dreaded to be late for lunch—then he realised that he was going to miss lunch—and then came the awful thought that he might still be wandering on the downs when the early December darkness fell!

In one direction lay Reynham Castle; in another, the town of Castlewood, in another, a village; in another, the road by the sea. But all these directions were equally unknown to Bunter—and he was miles from any of the places, anyhow. Unless that beast Rupert came back for him, his situation was very unenviable.

Walking about at random was not much use—but if the captain, or anyone else, was in search of him, calling for help might guide them to his lost lordship! As soon as he thought of this, Bunter began to roar.

"Help! Help! Help!"

He put plenty of beef into it, on his top note. His shouts echoed and re-echoed in the mist.

"Help! Help!"

He roared till his breath was expended. But, after a little rest, he resumed roaring. Far across the downs, rang his frantic yells.

"Help! This way! Help!"

Suddenly, to the fat junior's immense relief, there came an answering call. He could see no one; but from the distance, in the clinging mist, a call came back.

"Halloo!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter, and he put all the strength of his lungs into his next yell. "Help! Here! Help!"

"Halloo!" The answer sounded closer.

"Here!" roared Bunter. "Help!"

"Coming!" called back a voice quite close at hand.



Billy Bunter galloped on, after the captain. In a couple of minutes he had lost the reins—in two more, he had lost the stirrups. Next, his riding-whip flew from his fat hand as he clutched at the horse's neck, squeaking with terror. "Yoooh! Ooooh! Wooogh!"

It seemed to Bunter that he had heard that voice before; but it was not the captain's.

"Help!" roared Bunter again. "I say, mind you don't miss me! I can't see you! This way! I'm standing here!"

An overcoated figure loomed up in the mist.

Billy Bunter gasped with relief.

"This way!" he squeaked. "Don't miss me!"

To his surprise, there was a laugh.

"I'm not likely to miss you, my lord!" came the answer; and a stocky figure came towards Bunter at a run.

"Oh!" gasped the fat junior. Close at hand, he knew that stocky figure, and the hard face with its icy eyes. "Oh! Help! I say, keep off! Oh crikey!"

The Smiler, grinning sourly, grasped him by a fat shoulder. The fat Owl of Greyfriars blinked at him, his eyes almost popping through his spectacles in terror.

Too late, he realised whom his cries for help had guided to him. His fat knees knocked together.

In his terror of being lost on the downs, Bunter had forgotten the kidnapping gang. But even had he thought of them, he would not have imagined that the Smiler was anywhere at hand.

By what strange chance had the Smiler been on the downs, within hearing of his howls for help? It did not occur to him that it was not by chance, and that the kidnapper had been hunting for him, when he heard his cries in the mist.

Not that it mattered. He was in the kidnapper's grip now, and that grip fastened on his fat shoulder like a steel vice.

"You have lost your horse, my lord?" grinned the Smiler.

"Ow! Oh dear! Yes!" groaned Bunter. "I—I—I say—oh lor'!"

"It means rather a walk for your lordship, I fear! But for your meddling friends, I could have given your lordship a lift in a car!" said the Smiler. "You can thank them for having to walk!"

"I—I say, I—I don't want to go in a car, you know!" groaned Bunter.

"I—I say, I—I—I want to get back to the castle! Oh dear!"

The Smiler chuckled.

"I fear, my lord, that you have looked your last on your lordship's castle!" he answered. "Come with me!"

"I—I—I'd rather not—" gasped Bunter.

"Come!" snapped the Smiler.

"Oh crikey!"

Bunter had no choice in the matter. The grip on his fat shoulder jerked him into motion. He tottered along with the hard-faced rascal. What direction the man was taking he did not know except that it certainly was not that of Reynham Castle.

The Smiler released his fat shoulder. Bunter had no chance of dodging away—had he attempted to do so, the ruffian would have clutched him again before he had taken three steps.

Quite aware of that, Bunter did not think of making the attempt. He tottered on dismally by the kidnapper's side.

The mist, which had been thickening and thickening, now blanketed the downs in a billowing fog. Alarmed and terrified as he was to find himself in the hands of the crook, Bunter realised

that if he had got away from the man he would have been utterly and hopelessly lost and helpless. He soon observed that the Smiler himself seemed to be in a little doubt.

Every now and then the man stooped and examined the ground, as if to make sure that he was on a path. The fat Owl noticed, at last, that there were tracks of motor-tyres in the damp earth.

He realised that a car must have passed that way not very long ago. It was some sort of a path over the downs, but the path itself was difficult, if not impossible, to trace in the fog. But for the indentations of the car's wheels, even the Smiler might have been at a loss to pick his way through the blinding fog, as well as Bunter.

The Smiler was, in fact, following the track of the car in which he and his associate had fled from the Greyfriars riders a couple of hours ago. That car had been waiting for Bunter; and it was, as the Smiler said, thanks to the juniors that he had to walk. Had the kidnappers' schemes that morning gone according to plan, Lord Bunter would have been whisked away in that car before the fog descended on the downs.

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter, as he tottered and stumbled on.

The Smiler tramped on without a word. When Bunter lagged, he gave him a look with his cold, glinting eyes that caused the fat junior to hurry on again.

Where they were heading for Bunter could not guess. Perhaps a road, where there might be a car waiting; perhaps for the sea, where some vessel might be lying off the shore to

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take him aboard. In a state of dismal apprehension, the fat junior stumbled on by the side of the scowling Smiler.

Suddenly, from the bank of cloud ahead came a sound—the jingling of bridles and stirrups. Unseen, but quite close at hand, horsemen were ahead in the mist.

Bunter jumped.

Instantly he thought of the Remove fellows. Instantly, also, did the Smiler, and he swung round towards Bunter and clutched.

Bunter bounded like a fat kangaroo, and the clutching hand missed him by inches. Forgetting that he was tired, the fat junior fairly bolted onward, yelling as he went.

"Help! I say, you fellows, help! Oh, help!"

A moment more, and the Smiler had clutched him.

Bunter, struggling wildly in his grasp, yelled, and yelled, and yelled!

"Help! Help! Help!"

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

An Unexpected Meeting!

"**C**HIS," remarked Bob Cherry, "is a go!"

His comrades agreed that it was.

For some distance, after turning back from the sea-road, where they had lost the car, the four juniors had ridden at a canter—then at a slow trot—and then they had dropped into a walk. Now, for a long time, they had been proceeding at a walk, picking their way through the fog which blanketed the downs, almost as if they were playing blind man's buff.

Thicker and thicker the mist rolled round them, and it was impossible to see more than a yard or so before one's own nose.

In their hot chase of the car, they had forgotten all else; but they wished now that they had been a little more thoughtful. It was not a light matter to be caught in the fog on the lonely downs.

But for the chase that had led them over miles, they could have ridden back to the castle before the fog thickened. Now they had to feel their way.

Harry Wharton was walking, his reins looped over his arm, scanning the earth as he went, picking up the tracks of the car. The tyre-tracks were a sure guide back to the spot where they had first seen the car—which was only a couple of miles from the castle. After that, they had to trust to good fortune and to the instinct of the horses in finding their way back to their stables.

So far, however, the tyre-tracks had guided them; but it was slow work, and the captain of the Remove had to keep a sharp eye on the ground, and stoop every now and then to make sure that he was not missing the way. Behind him his three companions sat in their saddles, walking the horses at the slowest of walks.

Missing that track meant wandering off into the wilderness of the downs. But Harry Wharton was very careful not to miss it, and the tyre-marks were deep enough to be easily picked up by a keen eye.

He little dreamed, as he followed them, that the same track was guiding the Smiler—though in the opposite direction.

"This is a go, and no mistake!" said Bob. "The fact is, you fellows, we're a set of silly asses! We ought to have kept an eye on the weather!"

"The oughtfulness is terrific, my

esteemed Bob!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But the too-latefulness is also great!"

"We'll get in some time!" said Frank Nugent. "I wonder whether Bunter came out, after all?"

"Well, he'd be all right with the jolly old captain!" said Bob. "I believe Captain Reynham spent his boyhood hereabouts—he used to live at the castle as a kid, so he would know his way all right. If Bunter's with him, he won't be lost!"

"Anyhow, he'd turn back as soon as the fog came on," said Harry. "Bunter's all right! I only hope we are! We must have been a couple of hours crawling along like this already."

"Blow that car!" said Bob. "Blow the kidnappers! Blow the fog! Blow everything!"

"The blowfulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But we shall arrive late at the idiotic castle soonerfully or laterfully."

"Laterfully rather than soonerfully, I fancy!" grinned Bob. "This is a rotten end to a jolly ride. But what's the odds so long as you're 'appy! I say—Why—what—what—the thump—"

He broke off with a gasp of astonishment as a sudden wild yell came pealing through the fog.

Will readers please note
that the next issue of the
MAGNET will be on sale
THURSDAY,
December 23rd?

"Help! Help! Help!"

"What—" gasped Harry Wharton.

"I say, you fellows, help!"

"Bunter!" yelled Nugent.

"Help! Oh, help!"

Harry Wharton dropped the reins of his horse and rushed forward.

He could see nothing but fog; but the wild howls of the fat Owl were just in front of him. He crashed suddenly into two figures—Bunter struggling frantically in the grasp of the Smiler.

"Help! Yaroo! Oh, help!" shrieked Bunter.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Wharton.

He dodged a savage blow aimed at him, and grasped hold of the Smiler, shouting to his friends. Three riders loomed up in the fog, and Bob Cherry was out of the saddle in a twinkling, and springing to the aid of his chum.

Billy Bunter tore himself loose and tottered away, still squeaking for help.

The Smiler, grasping Wharton with savage hands, bore him back, and hurled him to the earth.

Then he leaped away, barely in time to dodge Bob Cherry's grasp. A moment more, and he was lost in the fog.

"I say, you fellows, help!" roared Bunter. "I say—"

Harry Wharton staggered to his feet. "He's gone!" gasped Bob. "Who was it?"

"The Smiler, I think!" gasped Harry. "That blighter we chased in the car a couple of hours ago. How on earth did he get hold of Bunter?"

"I say, you fellows, is—is—is he gone?" gasped Bunter.

"The gonefulness is terrific, my

esteemed fat Bunter!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"All right now, old fat man!" said Frank Nugent reassuringly. "But how the dickens—"

"Oh lor!" groaned Bunter. "That silly fool, Captain Reynham, left me, and I fell off my horse, and—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" howled Bunter. "I mean, I never fell off my horse—I got down to—to—I mean, I got down, see? Only the horse ran off—"

"But why did Captain Reynham leave you?" asked Wharton.

"I suppose the silly fool thought I was riding after him! He never looked back once! I was wandering about for hours and hours and hours!"

"All those hours, really?" asked Bob.

"Yes, hours and hours and hours and hours and hours!"

"It isn't three hours since we sat your lordship down on your lordship's floor with your lordship's valet and your lordship's boots!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! It seemed a jolly long time, anyhow!" groaned Bunter. "Then I was calling for help, and that beast heard me and came up—oh erikely!"

"He must have cut across on foot, from another direction, after getting away in the car!" said Bob. "But how the thump did he know where to pick up Bunter? Even if some blighter at the castle told him Bunter was going out riding this morning, he couldn't have known what direction he would take! How the thump did he know?"

"Anyhow, he got me!" groaned Bunter. "All your fault for not waiting for me, as you jolly well know I told you to! You needn't deny it—you know perfectly well that I told you to wait!"

"Guilty, my lord!" grinned Bob.

"And that beast going off and leaving me!" growled Bunter. "I'll jolly well tell him off when I see him again! I shouldn't wonder if he did it on purpose—he's cad enough! I say, you fellows, let's get in! That beast might come back with some more of the gang."

"They wouldn't find us very easily," said Harry. "Not much danger of that. You'd better get on my horse, Bunter."

"Lend me a hand!"

Several hands had to be lent to get Bunter in the saddle. Thankfully he squatted there, to rest his weary fat limbs. He blinked round uneasily in the fog as the party proceeded once more.

"I say, you fellows, can't you go faster?" yapped Bunter. "We're fearfully late for lunch already!"

"We've got to keep to these tyre tracks, fathead! They're the only guide."

"Oh! That's what that beast was doing!" Bunter chuckled. "I'll bet he never thought of you fellows doing the same! That's how we ran into you! He, he, he!"

The horses tramped on with exasperating slowness. Now that he was safe in the company of his pals, Billy Bunter's fat thoughts naturally turned to lunch. They turned to lunch with deep longing.

But there was no help for it. The juniors had to proceed at a crawling pace to keep to the track, and it was nearly another hour before they reached the spot where the car had first been seen.

There the trail of the tyres ended. The bridle-path, hardly to be discerned in the thick fog, ran on, but whether in the direction of the castle or not, the juniors did not know.

There was only one thing to be done

now—to leave the horses to their own guidance, and trust to them to find their way home. And as the horses kept together, taking the same direction of their own accord, the juniors were hopeful at long last of sighting Reynham Castle looming up through the fog.

Every now and again Billy Bunter grunted. Would he reach the castle in time for lunch?

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

"LOOKS a whopping place!"
"By gum—it does!"
"How the thump did Bunter ever barge in here?"
"Goodness knows! I—I suppose he's really here?"
Skinner, of the Remove, seemed

smitten with a doubt. His companion, Bolsover major, seemed more doubtful still. A taxi from Castlewood was grinding up the vast avenue at Reynham Castle, and the two Removites were looking out at the imposing facade of the old Sussex castle.

The fog, rolling up from the sea,

(Continued on next page.)

LEARN TO PLAY FOOTBALL!

OUR INTERNATIONAL COACH

TIME FOR STOPPAGES

I AM afraid some of you will be beginning to think that if football matches are stopped as often as this game we are playing together has been stopped, they are not going to be very thrilling affairs. I must hasten to tell you that proper games of football do not have so many stoppages in them. Or, rather, perhaps I should say that in a real game the stoppages are not quite so long.

As a matter of fact, it has been worked out that in a first-class football match, twenty of the ninety minutes' play is taken up by stoppages—for injuries, and for the ball going out of play. The players don't notice this, of course. To them, the hold-ups are all part of the game.

The point is, that in our match the stoppages are longer because I have to keep explaining things to you. Some of them take a long time, but you can take it for granted that I never stop the play unnecessarily. I have always something to tell you, so even if you wish we could get on with the game a bit faster, cheer up, this practice match is helping to make you into good footballers.

Just to show you how often the stoppages may come, even in a real game, here is another one. When our goalkeeper took the goal-kick, as he was doing, you remember, last week, he did as I told him, and kicked the ball to one of his own players. He chose the outside-left. But the outside-left hasn't quite got the hang of trapping a ball, and it went under his foot and over the touchline.

That means a throw-in.

The throw-in is taken by a player of the opposite side from that which kicked the ball out. Our goalkeeper was the last player to touch the ball, so the other side must throw it in.

The job is usually given to the wing half-backs. It doesn't matter really who takes a throw-in, but for some reason which I can't really explain, because I don't know, it is taken for granted that the wing-half is the player for the job. The linesman will tell him where the ball went over the line, and he must stand on that spot. A part of both his feet must remain on the ground all the time he is throwing. That means that he can raise his heels, but his toes must stay on the ground. He holds the ball with two hands,—taking it back over his head,

This week our special contributor tells you the correct way to take a "throw-in". Follow his instructions carefully.

and then throws it to one of his own players, keeping both hands on the ball until he finally leaves go. Do you see how I mean?

THE THROW-IN

THE action is the same as when you are doing a touch-toes exercise, raising both your arms above your head, and then bringing them down. Do that exercise with a ball in your hands, and you have got the proper throw-in. There are three things to remember. First of all, the feet on the ground rule. Secondly, the arms must be taken well back over the head; and, thirdly, the ball must be thrown with both hands. If you break any of these rules, and the referee sees you, you lose your chance, and the throw-in is taken by the other side.

Too many footballers think that the throw-in is unimportant, and so long as the ball gets back into play nothing else matters. That's where they are wrong. The throw-in can be very useful. One of the first players in first-class football to realise just how useful it could be was Sam Weaver, the former Newcastle man who now plays for Chelsea. He practised and practised at throwing-in until he got so good at it that he could throw from the touchline right into the middle of the field.

Imagine what this means when Weaver takes a throw-in near his opponents' goal. He can throw the ball right into the goalmouth. Although a goal cannot be scored direct from a throw-in, it gives the forwards a jolly good chance to score. Other players have learnt this trick since Weaver thought of it. Tom Gardner, of Aston Villa, and Jack Crayston, of Arsenal, are two which come to mind. Believe me, many goals have been scored from their throws.

SURPRISES ARE USEFUL

DON'T expect you to be able, just yet, to throw a ball from the touch-line right into the goalmouth; but I have told about these players to show you that first-class players think the throw-in is worth a good deal of thought and practice. And here's another little dodge in connection with the throw-in. It will sometimes pay for the fellow who is standing nearest the ball when it goes out to throw it in quickly, before the other players gather round.

I remember seeing Eric Brook, the Manchester City outside-left, do this in a match. He doesn't usually take the throw-in, of course, but on this occasion he picked the ball up quickly and threw it in to one of his colleagues, who caught the defence by surprise and went on to score a goal.

I think I see a mischievous sparkle in the eye of one wing-half who is reading this. He thinks he has worked out a good way of taking a throw-in. He imagines himself taking the throw-in in the proper way, but instead of throwing the ball to another player, he throws it to himself—in other words, he drops it at his own feet, so that he can have a free-kick at it. I like to see you fellows working out ideas for yourselves, but I am sorry to say that this chap will have to have another think, because he is not allowed to do that. The law says that he mustn't touch the ball again until it has been played by another player.

Incidentally, this goes for all free-kicks as well. A player who kicks off from the centre of the field, who takes a goal-kick, a corner-kick, a penalty-kick, or a free-kick, must not touch the ball a second time until it has been touched by another player.

Here's a bit of luck. Just to prove what I have been saying about the importance of the throw-in, look what has happened! The half-back of the other side took the throw-in, but the ball went to our inside-left. He wasn't marked, you see, because the player who usually marks him was taking the throw-in, and, foolishly, nobody had come to take the half-back's place. Therefore, our inside-left was able to get the ball, and he went right through to finish off with a nice low shot into the net. The goalkeeper tried hard, but he couldn't stop the ball, and we have scored a goal.

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across the downs, had not yet reached the castle, though wisps of it were drifting across the park. Battlemented walls and tall turrets glimmered in the wintry sunshine. Bolsover major and Skinner had a good view of the castle, and they were duly impressed—and a little uneasy.

Before break-up at Greyfriars School, Billy Bunter had told all who wanted to listen, and a good many who didn't, about the gorgeous Christmas holiday he was going to have at Reynham Castle. Few of the Remove fellows believed a word of it—being too much accustomed to Bunter's castles in the air to believe in his castle in Sussex.

But Skinner, having looked into the matter, and witnessed a meeting of the fat Owl with Sir Peter Lanchester, had satisfied himself that it was all right. He had confided his belief to Bolsover, and the two of them had pulled Bunter's fat leg to the extent of extracting an invitation from him to join him at the magnificent castle.

Since break-up, however, they had not heard from Bunter.

Possibly the fat Owl had forgotten them. Anyhow, he had not taken the trouble to write.

Still, he had asked them to come—and, after waiting in vain to hear from Bunter, they had come.

They had expended a good deal of tuck on Bunter to extract that invitation from him. Having thus expended a sprat to catch a whale, they did not want to lose the whale!

So here they were, on Christmas Eve, coming up the drive in a taxi from Castlewood—hoping for the best, but feeling more and more dubious, as the magnificence of the castle impressed them more and more.

Knowing nothing of the extraordinary part Bunter was playing there, they could not guess how, or why, the fat Owl of the Remove had contrived to barge into such an establishment.

The idea that he had, after all, pulled their leg, and was not there at all, was quite dismaying.

"You said you knew for certain, you ass!" said Bolsover major, with a glare at Skinner. "You told me you'd seen him and the old bean—"

"So I did!" snapped Skinner. "I saw him meet Sir Peter Lanchester, and I could see that he knew him all right. And the old bean came and fetched him away when we broke up—a lot of fellows saw him."

"Well, that looks all right," said Bolsover. "But Bunter's such a fearful spoofer—he might have wangled a lift in the old bean's car on break-up day—and never gone with him at all!"

"I don't think so!" Skinner shook his head. "I fancy it's all right—though I simply can't imagine how Bunter ever wangled himself into a place like this. But he must be there!"

"Well, we shall soon see, anyhow!" The taxi rolled on, and stopped at last at the great granite steps at the entrance of the castle.

Leaving their suitcases in the taxi, the two Removes ascended the steps to the great door.

A footman admitted them, and they entered a vast hall, adorned with figures in glistening armour. If Bunter were there, he was not visible. And the footman, to their dismay, did not know the name.

However, he called the butler, and the two uneasy visitors hoped for better news from the butler.

Jasmond, the portly butler of Reynham, swam towards them, after they had waited a few minutes. He eyed them rather curiously. They were not

the first callers at the castle who had inquired for that unknown person, Bunter. Harry Wharton had asked for Bunter, on his first arrival, not being then aware that the fat Owl had become Lord Reynham.

"Isn't Bunter here?" demanded Bolsover major gruffly.

"I do not know the name, sir," answered Jasmond. "No one of that name, certainly, is staying at the castle!"

"Not here?" breathed Skinner.

"No, sir!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Look here!" growled Bolsover major. "We've been asked here by a Greyfriars chap named Bunter, who told us he was staying here for Christmas. Sec? He came here with an old gentleman named Sir Peter Lanchester."

"There is some mistake, sir!" said Jasmond politely. "No one of the name of Bunter came here with the master!"

"He jolly well started in the car with him. I know that!" said Skinner.

"Indeed, sir!"

"Didn't anybody come here with Sir Peter?" asked Skinner.

"Only his ward, sir."

"His ward?"

"Lord Reynham, sir!"

"Not Bunter?"

"No, sir," said Jasmond, with a faint smile. "Only his lordship, sir."

"That fat frog was pulling our leg!" muttered Bolsover major. "We'd better get out of this, Skinner!"

"Is Sir Peter Lanchester at home?" asked Skinner.

"No, sir! The master has gone out to look for his lordship, who went riding this morning, and did not return when expected."

"You're quite sure that nobody named Bunter is staying here?"

"Quite, sir!"

"He hasn't been here at all?"

"No, sir!"

Percy Bolsover and Harold Skinner looked at one another, with feelings too deep for words.

They were unwilling to believe that the fat Owl of the Remove had pulled their leg to the extent of causing them to undertake a long journey, and present themselves at an establishment where they were not expected. But there seemed no doubt about it now.

If Bunter was not at the castle, and had never been there, and his name was unknown to the butler, it was hardly possible to doubt that the whole thing was spoofer.

"By gum, I'll make him sit up for it, next term!" breathed Bolsover major. "The fat rotter, making fools of fellows like this!"

Skinner set his lips hard. He thought of all those jam tarts, all those doughnuts that had been wasted on Bunter to extract that invitation from him.

A faint smile flickered over Jasmond's portly face. He showed the two unhappy fishers for invitations out with great politeness.

They went back to their taxi.

"Get back to the station!" grunted Bolsover to the driver. And the taxi buzzed away down the avenue to the gates.

"You silly ass, Skinner!" growled Bolsover, as they went.

"I jolly well thought—"

"You silly fathead!"

"By gum—wait till I see Bunter next term!" breathed Skinner.

The taxi rolled away down the road to Castlewood. Up that road the fog was now rolling in thick banks. The taxi-driver slowed down to a crawl. Visibility was only a couple of yards.

"Oh crumbs!" said Bolsover major, glaring out into the rolling fog. "This puts the tin lid on! We shall lose the train back!"

"And the next after it, at this rate!" groaned Skinner.

"That fat scoundrel—"

"That podgy blighter—"

"Oh, won't I give him jip next term!"

"Won't I burst him all over the Remove!"

"Blow him!"

"Bother him!"

The taxi crawled through the thickening fog.

Bolsover major and Skinner had one consolation—and one only—the prospect of dealing with Billy Bunter next term at Greyfriars. Judging by their remarks, Bunter was booked for a really fearful time next term!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Better Late Than Never!

SIR PETER LANCHESTER, in those same moments, was peering over the gate from the park, into the dim, swirling mist that enveloped the downs beyond.

Through the smoky mist came the sound of plodding hoofs, much to the relief of the baronet.

He had been rather alarmed when he was informed that his lordship's horse had been found by a keeper, coming back without its rider. That looked as if his lordship had had a fall—which, considering what sort of a horseman his lordship was, was not surprising. It was a great relief to Sir Peter to hear horsemen approaching from the foggy downs. He held open the gate for them to ride in.

"What!" ejaculated Sir Peter, as they came into view.

He stared at the party—Harry Wharton walking, Bunter on Wharton's horse, and the other three fellows following.

"Here we are again!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "The jolly old gee knew their way home all right! They've taken their time—but here we are!"

"I am glad to see you safe again, my boys!" exclaimed Sir Peter. "I was afraid you had ridden too far, and been lost in the fog."

"Exactly what happened, sir!" said Wharton. "But we left it to the horses, and they've brought us back all right."

"But where is my nephew?" asked Sir Peter. "You seem to have picked up William—his horse came back some time ago—but Captain Reynham was with him."

Snort from Bunter.

"Hasn't he got back?" he demanded.

"He has not returned yet, William!"

"He, he, he! I dare say he's lost in the fog, then!" Bunter chortled. "Serve him jolly well right!"

"William!"

"Oh, you needn't William me!" yapped Bunter. "That beast—"

"Who?"

"That beast!" hooted Bunter. "That beast cleared off, and left me to it, when I fell off my horse—I mean, when I dismounted, and that beastly kidnapper got me, and if these fellows hadn't found me, where should I be now?"

"Good 'gad!" ejaculated Sir Peter. "But—"

"Serve him jolly well right, if he's lost himself!" yapped Bunter. "I jolly well hope he has! I hope he'll be out all night, so yah!"

"Shut up, you fat ass!" breathed Bob. "Shan't!"

"Kindly tell me what has happened, Wharton!" said Sir Peter Lanchester, as the party moved on by the path through the park.

He listened to the tale of the morning's happenings.

"It is extraordinary!" he said. "William has had a narrow escape! It is unfortunate that Tomlinson was not on the spot—he might have—"

"Fat lot of good he would have been!" grunted Bunter. "You'd better sack that detective and get a better one!"

"That will do, William!" said Sir Peter, breathing hard.

Grunt from Bunter. "I'm fearfully hungry!" he snorted. "It's nearer tea-time than lunch-time, I know that! I'm glad that beast has missed his lunch, anyhow!"

"Captain Reynham is most likely searching for you on the downs!" said Sir Peter severely. "That must be why he has not returned."

"Lot he cares whether I'm lost!" grunted Bunter. "I believe he jolly well left me stranded on purpose!"

"Nonsense!" said Sir Peter sharply.

"Well, he must have heard me calling to him, and he cleared off, all the same—never looked back once!" snorted Bunter. "Just like he did with the car the other day—stranding me half-way to Castlewood, and making me walk! I jolly well shan't go out riding with him again, I can tell you. I'm fed-up with him leaving me spotted about for those kidnappers to get hold of!"

"You had better say no more, William!"

Grunt!

The weary party arrived at the castle at last.

Harry Wharton & Co. went up to change; but Billy Bunter did not bother about changing.

His lordship could do as his lordship jolly well liked, in his own castle, and his lordship jolly well did. In riding-breeches and muddy boots, his fat lordship made a bee-line for the dining-room—heedless of the lifting of Jasmind's eyebrows.

What Bunter wanted was grub—and he wanted it quick! And he had it quick—and piled into it without delay!

He was going strong when the other fellows came down, newly swept and garnished—more than ready for that very late lunch.

Sir Peter had lunched long ago; and he was very anxious and worried about his nephew. The December dusk was falling, thickening and darkening the fog that now wrapped the castle like a blanket, and the captain had not yet returned.

"By gum, if that chap's still out on the downs looking for Bunter——" said Bob Cherry uneasily.

"Rot!" said Bunter.

"Why hasn't he come in, then, fat-head?"

"I jolly well know he wouldn't look for me!" said Bunter. "He doesn't like me. He knew jolly well he would lose me, when he galloped off like that, all of a sudden!"

"That's rubbish!" said Bob. "As if a man would play a rotten trick like that on a schoolboy! Bosh!"

"The boshfulness is terrific!"

"Oh, is it?" snorted Bunter. "If he makes out that he was looking for me, when he comes in, he'll be telling whoppers, see? I know he jolly well cleared off, and left me to it—that's the sort of

cheeky cad he is! And I'll jolly well tell him so, too—a cheeky poor relation! Yah!"

"Oh, shut up, you fat ass!"

"Beast!"

Bunter had started first; but he was still going strong at the late lunch when the other fellows had finished.

The Greyfriars Ghost

Being ye True Storie of ye Haunted Class-room at Grey Friars Schoole, discovered and tolde by DICK PENFOLD.

The boy sat at the class-room desk
Whence all but he had fled;
The college, old and picturesque,
Was silent as the dead.

The school had broken-up and gone,
The Christmas Vac. begun,
Yet still that schoolboy lingered on,
The last and only one.

The day before the Christmas Vac.
He'd been detained to stay
Until the master should come back
And let him go away.

The master, busy in his den,
Forgot the hapless boy,
And all the other Greyfriars men
Were far too full of joy.

Throughout a long and sleepless night
He sat in silence grim,
And in the morning's wild delight
No fellow thought of him!

His eyes were fixed with longing gaze
Upon the open door,
But boys and masters went their ways
And silence fell once more.

"Oh, tell me, can I go now, sir?
Please, master, give the word!"
The master, then at Winchester,
His voice no longer heard.

"Oh, master, this is past a joke—
Oh, heed my frantic call!"
His voice rang wildly, and awoke
The echoes—that was all.

Day after day, though cold and numb,
He sat with sinking heart
Still waiting for his Beak to come
And tell him to depart.

Day after day in silence passed
Without his master's leave,
Until the village bells at last
Rang out for Christmas Eve.

"A Merry Christmas, everyone!"
He found the strength to say,
And then, his earthly labour done,
He gently passed away.

And when re-opening day came round,
They wondered where he'd gone,
Until inside that room they found
A dusty skeleton!

And now at Christmas this uncouth
Young spectre we behold—
The Ghostly figure of the youth
Who Did as He was Told!

(Other youths take warning!)

Leaving Billy Bunter still parking the foodstuffs in great quantities, the four juniors went back into the hall, where Sir Peter Lanchester was staring from a window into dusky fog.

They were a little worried themselves, not so much on the captain's account, as on Johnny Bull's. Johnny was booked

to arrive that day; but trains were a little uncertain on Christmas Eve; and at what time Johnny would land at Castlewood Station they did not know.

It was arranged for Johnny to ring up, when he did arrive, when a car would be dispatched for him at once. But now that a fog like a blanket lay on the whole vicinity, trains would be more uncertain than ever; and it was quite possible that Johnny might blow in very late.

The four juniors were very anxious to hear from Johnny; and it was a great relief when a footman came to inform Wharton that he was wanted on the telephone. He ran to the telephone-cabinet.

"Hallo!" came Johnny Bull's deep voice over the wires. "That you, Harry?"

"Yes, old chap! Jolly glad you've got through all right!"

"It's as thick as pea-soup here, and the trains are all at sixes and sevens! But I've got in—I'm speaking from the station! Don't let them send a car—it would take half an hour to crawl here through the fog. I'll pick up a taxi here."

"Right-ho!"

"They tell me it's about two miles! I shan't do it under the hour, in this pea-soup! See you later, old chap!"

"Right-ho!"

Johnny Bull, at the station, cut off, and Wharton went back to his friends. They were relieved about Johnny, now. But old Sir Peter was still anxious—peering from the windows in the hope of seeing Rupert Raynham. But whether the captain was searching for his lost lordship on the downs or not, he remained absent, and the old baronet watched in vain.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Voices in the Mist!

JOHNNY BULL looked out of the station entrance, into the old High Street of the Sussex town, rather grimly.

He was warmly wrapped against the cold, with a scarf tucked under his coat-collar; but it was chilly and damp and dismal. He could not see across the street in the fog; and he was wondering whether he would be able to get a taxi to take him to the castle. Not a vehicle was to be seen.

He debated in his mind whether he had better walk. It was a direct road of a little more than two miles, he had learned, and he could hardly miss his way; and he was likely to walk as fast as a car could venture to move in the blinding fog. He was thinking it over, when a gleam of headlights came dimly through the vapour, and a taxi stopped—and, to his astonishment, two Greyfriars fellows got out.

He blinked at Bolsover major and Skinner. They did not observe him standing there for the moment. Both of them seemed in fearfully bad tempers.

"Oh, that fat rotter, giving us a time like this!" said Skinner. "I believe

we've been a couple of hours crawling back here."

"Won't I smash him, when I see him again!" hissed Bolsover.

"Hallo, you fellows!" said Johnny Bull.

The two spun round and stared at him. Skinner bestowed on him a rather unpleasant grin.

"Oh! You here to visit Bunter at the jolly old castle?" he jeered.

"That's it!" said Johnny, with a nod.

"Well, you won't find him there; it's all spoof!" said Bolsover major. "He asked us as well as you, the fat scoundrel; and it's all gammon—we've been there, and that fat spoofer's not there at all!"

"Not!" exclaimed Johnny in astonishment.

"Never been there—they didn't even know his name!" said Bolsover major, and having paid the taxi-driver, he tramped into the station, snorting fog.

"But I say—what the dickens!" exclaimed the astonished Johnny. "Bunter must be there—I'm going to stay with him, with my friends—look here, Skinner, what the dickens do you mean?"

Skinner laughed.

His amiable nature found a little consolation in another fellow getting the same disappointment.

"So you let him take you in, too!" he said. "Well, it's all gammon—pure gammon! You've had your little trip for your pains—same as we have! We've been to Reynham Castle, and the butler had never even seen Bunter—he told us that nobody of that name was staying there, or had been there at all."

"But Wharton—" said Johnny, in bewilderment. "Wharton must know, and he said—"

"Ha, ha,!" chortled Skinner. "His Magnificence taken in, too! Well, he won't find Bunter at Reynham Castle, any more than we did! By gum, I'll punch the fat porpoise next term, though! Won't I boot him!"

"But—I say—"

"I've got to get a train!" said Skinner, and he tramped away after Bolsover major, leaving Johnny Bull staring in bewilderment and surprise.

What this meant was beyond Johnny's comprehension. Evidently Bolsover major and Skinner had been to the castle, had failed to find Bunter there, and had cleared off again—anxious to get a train home.

But whether Bunter was at the castle or not, it was certain that Harry Wharton & Co. were there; for Johnny had been on the phone to Wharton ten minutes earlier.

He stepped out to the taxi in which Skinner and Bolsover had arrived at the station.

"Think you could get to Reynham Castle through this?" he asked.

"You'd walk quicker, sir," said the taximan, evidently very unwilling to repeat the trip. "It's too thick for a car, sir! I've been over an hour doing two mile, and me 'cart in me mouth all the time. There ain't a car on the roads."

"Oh, all right!"

Johnny Bull started to walk, swinging his suitcase. Outside the lights of Castlewood, it was thick and dark on the road. But he had inquired the way carefully at the station, and he only had to keep to the main road—and he tramped away quite cheerfully.

About a mile out of the town, he had been told, the park wall of the Reynham estate commenced; and after that he had only to keep on along that wall, to reach the great gates. He had been tramping about twenty minutes, when

he glimpsed a high wall on his right, over-topped by ghostly, frosty, branches, dim in the clinging vapour. This, evidently, was the Reynham park wall; and he tramped along under it.

A glimmer of light came to his eyes at last. He looked in at a great gateway, where the gates stood wide open. The light came from the window of a lodge within.

Johnny Bull turned in at the gateway, and tramped up a vast avenue, lined with tall, leafless trees that loomed spectre-like.

He kept to the middle of the broad avenue—but every now and then found himself almost walking into the trees, on one side or the other, and once he bumped his nose on a frosty trunk.

"Blow!" murmured Johnny, rubbing his nose.

After that he trod on more slowly and cautiously. How long that avenue was, he did not know—but it seemed endless; and he began to wonder whether he would ever sight the lighted windows.

Suddenly from the dense, foggy darkness round him came the sound of a voice—so startling, in the silence, that Johnny stopped dead as he heard it.

Someone else was on the dim avenue, though he had heard no footstep and had not had a glimpse of anyone.

"You fool, Smiler, you fool!"

It was a low voice, in tones of intense anger and irritation.

Johnny Bull almost wondered whether he was dreaming.

The voice was quite strange to him; he had never heard it before. But the name, or rather the nickname, that it uttered, was not strange to him.

He knew that the Smiler was the name of one of the mysterious rascals who had attempted to kidnap Bunter before break-up at Greyfriars; and who, from what he had heard from his friends since, was still after Bunter at the castle in Sussex.

Johnny Bull stood quite still.

The speaker, and the man to whom he was speaking, were both hidden from him, in mist and darkness; but they were quite close at hand.

He had, in fact, almost walked into them—and might have done so, had not that sudden sound of a voice caused him to stop. They were not ten feet away—standing under one of the trees by the side of the avenue.

Johnny Bull had plenty of pluck; but his heart beat a little faster as he realised that it was the kidnapper, with some confederate, who was so close to him in the fog.

"You fool!" went on the passionate, angry voice. "Are you always going to fail? What is the use of this—failure after failure?"

"Not my fault, guv'nor!" came another voice. "That fat young covey seems to have all the luck! Hold on, guv'nor—did you hear something?"

"Don't be a fool! Do you think anyone would be out in this weather—I can hardly see my hand before my face!"

"I thought I heard—"

"Don't talk nonsense!"

Johnny Bull hardly breathed. He could see nothing, but he felt, and knew, that the Smiler was peering round suspiciously in the mist. Some faint sound of the junior's footsteps had reached him, probably before Johnny stopped.

"I thought I heard—" Johnny caught the muttering voice.

"The wind, you fool!"

"Well, this ain't the weather for a walk, that's a cert." The Smiler seemed to be satisfied. "Look here, guv'nor, it's no use ragging a man. Everything

was ready this morning—all ready for that fat bird to drop into the trap, if he had come along without his friends, as you reckoned you could fix it—"

"The fat fool saved me the trouble of fixing it. They started without him, as he was late, like the lazy, fat, slack-ing young rotter he is."

Johnny Bull grinned. Had he not known that they were speaking of William George Bunter, he would have guessed it now.

"That was how it was, was it?" said the Smiler. "Well, we never saw him, but the others came on us in a bunch, and we cleared off in the car—"

"I know all that. But when the fat fool was left alone on the downs, I got word to you where to find him—"

"And I did find him, guv'nor! I got him all right! But the fog had come down by then, and I had to pick my way, and I ran right into that bunch of young blighters, and—"

"I know you failed; I know you have always failed! Five years ago you failed, and old Lanchester parked him somewhere where he could never be found. Now that he has come out into the open again it is easy work—or should be. But you have only a tale of failure to tell."

"If them young coveys wasn't here with him—"

"Yes, yes; that has saved him—again and again that has saved him. There is a detective in the house watching over him, but he has given us no trouble. If those schoolboys were not here—"

"We'd have had him easy, but for that! Next time—"

Johnny Bull heard an angry, scoffing laugh.

"Next time! Always next time! I am tempted to throw up the whole game. Fortune is against me—failure after failure."

"You can't afford to do that, guv'nor. There's too big a thing at stake for that, and I fancy there's three of us would have something to say about that. We ain't in this game for our health, guv'nor."

"You dare to threaten me, you dog? You dare—"

"Keep cool, guv'nor! I tell you, next time—"

"Bah! I have waited here—how long?—for you to come and tell me that the fat fool was safe in your hands—that he was already out at sea. And this is the news I have waited for!"

"Not my fault, guv'nor. In this fog it wasn't easy for me to get here at all—"

"And all you have to tell me, is another failure—when all seemed certain at last! Bungling fools, all three of you! This will end with you and Ratty and Ferret in the prison cells—and perhaps myself after you! A fat, stupid, obtuse fool, and you cannot handle him!"

"If his friends wasn't with him—"

"They are with him, fool!"

"Couldn't they be got shut of, guv'nor? There's ways—"

"I have been thinking of that. It may be possible, but it is useless to discuss it longer. And I must get back to the house. I shall have to explain already. You had better go. I will get you on the phone when I want you."

Johnny Bull had not stirred—in dread of the two unseen rascals hearing him again if he moved. But as those words reached his ears he stepped back as softly as he could.

But, softly as he stepped, there was a sound, and he heard the quick, snarling voice of the Smiler.

"What's that? Who's that? I told you—There's somebody—"



Billy Bunter lighted up—puffing out smoke with a great air of enjoyment. "Dash it all, put on a smoke, you fellows!" he said. "Quelch hasn't got his eye on you now! Be men for once—like me!"

Johnny Bull heard a quick footstep, and he knew that a hand was groping. He dashed up the avenue at a run.

"Good gad! Who—?" It was the unknown man's voice, in startled tones. "Has someone—who—?"

A dim shadow loomed in the fog. A figure, hardly seen, collided with the junior as he ran. It was the "guy'nor"—whoever the "guy'nor" was—and he bumped into Johnny without seeing him.

Without even stopping to think, Johnny Bull hit out with his free hand, and felt his clenched knuckles crash.

There was a gasping cry as the man staggered, and Johnny Bull raced on.

In a few seconds the fog swallowed him, and whether the Smiler and his mysterious companion hunted for him or not, he never knew. He saw and heard nothing more of them.

Not till he bumped into a tree did he drop into a walk again, and at length, to his great relief, the lighted windows of the castle gleamed out into the December dark in front of him.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Johnny Bull!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Here he is!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Here you are, Johnny, old bean!"

Johnny Bull grinned cheerily as his friends greeted him in the brightly lighted hall of Reynham Castle. They were glad to see him, and he was very glad to get in. A footman took his suitcase, another his coat, another his hat and gloves. Johnny warmed his hands

at the crackling log fire, grinned at his friends, and looked round him.

"Some show!" he remarked. "Jolly glad to see you fellows again! Hallo! Is that Bunter? You're here, then, old fat man?"

"Eh? Of course I'm here!" said Bunter, blinking at him through his big spectacles. "Haven't I asked you here for the hols, fathead? Welcome to my castle!" added Bunter loftily.

"Wha-a-t?"

"Getting deaf? I said welcome to my castle!"

Johnny Bull blinked at him.

"Your castle?" he repeated. "Potty?"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Is that fat ass off his chump?" asked Johnny Bull, looking round at his friends in wonder. "Look here, you chaps, I'd like to know what all this means. You've told me in a letter that you're here, and that it's all right, but I'm blessed if I can make head or tail of it."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"No wonder," he said. "You're going to have a surprise, old bean, same as we had when we got here. Couldn't put it in a letter; it's a dead secret."

"The deadfulness of the esteemed secret is terrific!" grinned Hurreo Jamset Ram Singh.

"Who's the boss of this show?" asked Johnny. "I don't know what you fellows are talking about, but I suppose I'd better see the boss of the show as I'm here. Who is it?"

"Me!" said Bunter.

"Fathead!"

"Look here, you cheeky ass," hooted the fat Owl indignantly, "I jolly well tell you—"

"Chuck it, ass!" said Johnny Bull. "I've heard that Reynham Castle belongs to Lord Reynham. Is he around?"

"Yes, and no!" said Harry, laughing. "Well, that's lucid, at any rate!"

said Johnny, staring.

"Better speak to Sir Peter," said Harry. "He's really boss of the show, being Lord Reynham's guardian—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"That old bean who came to Greyfriars to see Quelch last week of the term," said Nugent. "You remember him? Here he comes!"

Sir Peter Lanchester had gone into the library. Now he appeared at the doorway, looking into the hall. There was a worried frown on the old gentleman's face. He was still worried about his nephew's absence. But he summoned up a kind and hospitable smile as Johnny Bull was presented to him and shook hands with the latest arrival at Reynham Castle.

"You are very welcome, my boy," he said. "William will explain to you how the matter stands, and I am sure I can rely on your discretion."

"Eh? Oh, yes!" stuttered Johnny, quite mystified.

"Come up to my rooms, old man," said Bunter. "I'll put you wise. He, he, he! I can jolly well tell you, I'm boss of the show here!"

"Rats!"

"Beast!"

"Bunter's king of the castle!" grinned Bob. "Every day I'm expecting to see him bursting all over his ancestral halls with importance!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

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(Continued from page 13.)

Johnny Bull, quite mystified, accompanied his friends up the stairs into the King's Room.

James was there, and Bunter rapped out an order. Bunter could never see his man without giving him an order.

"Robert!" rapped Bunter.

"Yes, my lord!" said the patient James.

"Put some logs on the fire, Archibald!"

"Yes, my lord!"

"Then you can clear, Frederick! Shut the door after you, Henry!"

Johnny Bull listened to this rather like a fellow in a dream. He found his voice, when James-Robert-Archibald-Frederick-Henry had retired, and closed the door after him.

"Am I dreaming this, you fellows?" he stuttered. "What was that chap my-lording that fat ass for?"

"This is where you hear the history of the jolly old mystery!" grinned Bob Cherry. "Bunter's Lord Reynham."

"Eh?"

"Positively for one occasion only!" chuckled Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" snorted Bunter. "Fat lot of good all of you-fellows trying to pass for a lord, anyhow! Old Peter knew what he was doing when he picked me for the part!"

"What the thump do you mean?" howled Johnny Bull. "Trying to pull my leg?"

"Honest, Injun!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Bunter's a giddy nobleman now! Up to last week he was only one of nature's noblemen—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Now he's the genuine article—for a time! A temporary lord! After the hols he will be plain Bunter again!"

"Very plain!" grinned Bob.

"The plainfulness is terrific!"

"But what—" howled the amazed Johnny.

"Listen, and I will a tale unfold!" chuckled Bob. "Old Peter's got a ward, a rather sickly kid, the real Lord Reynham, parked in a school somewhere under an assumed name, to keep him safe from kidnappers—"

"Who've been after him for years!" said Nugent, taking up the tale.

"Nobody knows why or wherefore!" went on Bob. "But that's how it stands. Somehow the Smiler's gang spotted that dodge, though they never spotted the school or the name—see? But they were hunting for 'em—"

"So old Peter got the bright idea of letting them think that the school was Greyfriars," said Harry.

"And the name Bunter!" grinned Bob.

"So the esteemed and absurd Bunter was brought here as a ridiculous lord!" chortled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Keeping Smiler & Co. off the right track, and on the wrong one!" explained Harry Wharton. "And Bunter plays the part like one to the manner born. Don't you, Bunter?"

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"I rather fancy so!" assented Bunter. "Easy enough to me, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The old bean's got a secretary, Tomlinson, who is really a detective, watching for the blighters to get after Bunter!" went on Harry. "Some day he will get them—perhaps!"

"The perhapsfulness is terrific!"

"Then the real lord will be able to show up—" said Nugent.

"As safe as houses!" said Bob Cherry. "Got it now, Johnny?"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"They've been after Bunter, thinking him the jolly old lord—I mean the jolly young lord—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Lots of times! And we've no doubt that they've got a spy in the house, from what's happened—the kidnapper's tried to bag him in this very room!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Johnny.

"Of course, it's a deep and deadly secret: even his lordship's cousin Rupert doesn't know!" said Harry. "Not a word—not a giddy syllable. We're as good as certain that there's a confederate in the household—"

"No doubt at all about that!" said Johnny Bull, with a grin. "And the confederate in the house is the man who is bossing the business; the other three just carry out his orders!"

"Eh?"

"What?"

The juniors stared blankly at Johnny.

"How the thump do you know, when you've only just set foot in the place?" demanded Bob Cherry.

Johnny Bull grinned, and related what had happened on the foggy avenue as he came.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Startling Suspicion!

"ANOTHER of them?"

There was a sarcastic inflexion in Captain Reynham's drawl. He was standing in the hall, a handsome and elegant figure in evening clothes, when the Greyfriars party came down, talking to Sir Peter. His glance turned on Johnny Bull, the latest addition to the Greyfriars party.

Perhaps he did not intend his remark to reach the ears of the schoolboys. But it did reach them, and while the Famous Five affected not to hear it, Billy Bunter gave the young Army man an inimical blink through his big spectacles.

The captain, evidently, had returned at last; for there he was, changed for dinner. He had, in fact, come in very soon after Johnny Bull's arrival, much to Sir Peter's relief, and explained that he had been looking for "William" on the downs—a statement which Sir Peter did not dream of doubting, though Billy Bunter certainly would have doubted it.

Bunter had a strong suspicion that that supercilious young man had stranded him on the downs on purpose that day, in which case it was improbable that he would have spent hours in hunting for him again.

"Another?" repeated the captain, as his uncle did not answer. "Is William bringing all Greyfriars here for Christmas?"

"William naturally desires to have some of his friends about him at Christmas-time, Rupert!" said Sir Peter. "They seem very nice boys—very nice boys indeed. I like them all!"

Rupert shrugged his elegant shoulders. Bob Cherry winked at his friends. All the juniors knew that Rupert Reynham did not like their

presence at the castle—though why, was rather a puzzle, for they could hardly see how it concerned him in any way. Certainly, he had no reason to like Lord Bunter; but the other fellows had given him no offence that they knew of.

But they had observed already that the captain was a moody, discontented man, with an irritable temper. They kept clear of him as much as possible, though at times he took the trouble to make himself agreeable, and at such times he could be very pleasant.

"Who's that sportsman?" asked Johnny Bull, in a low voice.

"My cousin Rupert!" grinned Bunter. "Uppish sort of cad—a poor relation, you know. Thinks no end of himself; but I jolly well know that he hasn't got a bean, and—"

"It's Captain Reynham," said Harry. "Old Peter's nephew—"

"That's how he's hanging on here," sneered Bunter. "I never asked him here, I know that."

The juniors grinned. Lord Bunter seemed to be taking himself very seriously in his lordship's role! Really, the fat Owl seemed to imagine, by this time, that it really was his castle!

The Greyfriars fellows crossed the hall, to where the old baronet and his nephew were standing by the fire. After discussing the matter, they had decided that Sir Peter had better be told of what Johnny Bull had seen and heard on the avenue as he came.

Captain Reynham moved off a little and lighted a cigarette as the juniors approached.

Johnny Bull looked at him curiously.

He had never seen Lord Reynham's cousin, but, hearing his voice, it seemed to strike his ear with a familiar note, as if he had heard it before.

"We've got something to tell you, sir—at least, Bull has!" said Harry Wharton. "He ran into those rotters, coming up the drive in the fog—"

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Sir Peter. "Please tell me, my boy."

Captain Reynham, who turned away, turned back quickly. His eyes fixed sharply on Johnny Bull.

He did not speak, but it was clear that he was keenly interested in what Bull had to say.

Johnny Bull told succinctly what had happened on the avenue. Old Sir Peter listened with the closest attention.

"You did not see either of them?" he asked.

"I couldn't, sir, in the fog," answered Johnny. "But the one who was called the Smiler must have been the kidnapper—and the other—"

"The other, his confederate, here!" said Sir Peter, knitting his brows.

"A pity you did not see him, my boy!" drawled the captain. "Haven't you any idea what he was like?"

"Only that he was tall," answered Johnny.

"Oh! You noticed that, foggy as it was, although you could not see him?" said Rupert.

Johnny Bull looked at him rather grimly. He did not like the captain's sarcastic tone.

"There was a sort of shadow in the fog, as he bumped into me," he answered quietly. "He was a good bit taller than I am, that's all. And I hit him; and I think my fist landed on his chest. I know he was a good many inches taller than I am. That's all!"

"It is little—but it is something," said Sir Peter, with a nod. "You saw, nobody on the drive, Rupert? From the time you came in you must have passed the spot very soon after this lad."

"Nobody!" said Captain Reynham.

"Not even a shadow in the fog." He laughed. "You are sure that you did not fancy this mysterious encounter, my lad?"

"Quite sure!" answered Johnny Bull, staring at him. "I'm not a fellow to fancy things, Captain Reynham. We don't fancy things in Yorkshire. Facts are good enough for us."

The captain shrugged his shoulders and turned away.

Johnny Bull's eyes followed his tall, elegant figure with a grim stare.

Sir Peter left the hall, the juniors guessing that he was going to pass on this latest piece of information to his private detective, Mr. Tomlinson.

"I say, you fellows," said Billy Bunter, "if Bull's sure about that blighter being tall—"

"Of course I'm sure!" rapped Johnny.

"Well, then, we ought to be able to spot him," declared the fat Owl. "If we go over the whole place, sorting out all the tall ones—"

Bob Cherry grinned. "There's forty or fifty people about the jolly old place—tall and short, and middle-size," he remarked. "Some sorting out."

"Well, whoever it was, must have been out of the house at the time," argued Bunter. "We can make Jasmond find out who was out at that time."

"By gum! Might be something in that," said Frank Nugent. "If it's one of Jasmond's army, he might know—"

"Make up a list of every tall chap in the place, and jolly well make him say where he was at the time—what?" said Bunter.

"Fathead! That list would include your jolly old Cousin Rupert," said Bob, laughing. "He's tall, and he was out at the time."

And the juniors laughed.

But Johnny Bull did not join in the laugh. He gave a little start, and drew in his breath sharply.

He turned from the group of juniors, and looked across the great hall at the captain, lounging and smoking his cigarette.

For a long moment Johnny's eyes remained fixed on that tall handsome figure—and his thoughts were racing.

It was impossible—impossible! But where had he heard the captain's voice before, when he had never seen the man until ten minutes ago?

The juniors chatted on till the gong went for dinner; but Johnny Bull did not join in the talk. Johnny was thinking, and strange and startling thoughts were in his mind.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Legend of Reynham Castle!

"SMOKE?"

"Yes, rather!" said Billy Bunter promptly.

He stretched out a fat hand towards the cigarette-case.

Four juniors said nothing. A faint grunt was audible from Johnny Bull—that was all.

It had been a jolly evening.

The Greyfriars party were gathered in the music-room. Sir Peter had joined them there, and, somewhat to their surprise, Captain Reynham.

Hitherto, the captain had displayed little taste for cheery boyish society. Now, however, he seemed to like it, and there was no doubt that he succeeded in making himself very agreeable. Even Billy Bunter thought that

he was not, after all, such a beast as he had seemed to be.

Rupert sat at the piano and played. The schoolboys enjoyed a "sing-song"—Christmas carols and school songs, especially the Greyfriars School song. And then Bob sorted out a volume of Gilbert and Sullivan. Even Billy Bunter contributed a fat squeak, though his musical efforts were a little marred by the fact that he had forgotten the words, and did not remember the tunes.

But it was quite a merry evening, and the captain made himself very useful at the piano, and sat with a paper cap on his head, evidently in the best of tempers. Sir Peter left them to themselves, after a time. And, as it was holiday-time, all the fellows stayed up a good deal past their usual bedtime.

But the captain rose from the piano at last, and stretched himself, and took out his cigarette-case. As if unthinkingly, he offered it to his companions—apparently forgetful of the fact that they were schoolboys.

Billy Bunter helped himself to a smoke at once. That was one of Billy Bunter's little ways: Bunter would always smoke a cigarette, if he could get the same for nothing. He was not ass enough to spend money on smokes, but he liked to be, as it were, an inexpensive man of the world.

"Got a match, Wharton?"

"Fathead!" answered Harry politely.

"Yab!" retorted Lord Bunter, forgetting for the moment that he was a peer of the realm, and answering like a common mortal—a very common one, in fact.

Harry Wharton looked rather curiously at the captain. Rupert had made himself very agreeable that evening; but it was difficult to know what to think of a man who offered cigarettes to schoolboys.

Bunter was the only member of the party who accepted a smoke.

Bunter found a match, and lighted up, puffing out smoke with a great air of enjoyment.

"Dash it all, put on a smoke, you fellows!" said the fat Owl. "Quelch hasn't got his eye on you now. No prefects about. He, he, he! Have a smoke, Bob, old chap! Be a man for once—like me!"

"A man—like you!" gasped Bob. "No, thanks!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Sorry," said the captain; "my mistake." He slipped the cigarette-case back into his pocket, and helped himself to a cigar. "I'm hardly used to juvenile society. Really, I quite forgot. Of course, you boys don't smoke."

"No," said Harry politely.

"The smokefulness is terrifically bad for the esteemed and ridiculous wind," explained Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh. "It has a spoilsful effect on a fellow's form for Soccer. Likewise, it produces retardfulness of the idiotic growth."

"Oh, exactly!" gasped the captain. "Quite! Perhaps you had better not finish that cigarette, Cousin William."

"I'll watch it," grinned Bunter.

"Christmas Eve," remarked the captain. "A famous date in the history of this ancient place. Probably you boys are unacquainted with the legend of the castle, except, of course, William."

"Eh?" said William.

William knew very little about Reynham Castle, except that the food there was remarkably good.

"Ghost story?" asked Bob, with interest. "Let's hear it before we go to bed. What's Christmas without a jolly old ghost?"

"If you'd like to hear—"

"Yes, rather!" said Nugent.

"The ratherfulness is terrific!"

"William, of course, knows the story," said the captain. "He must have heard it a good many times in his childhood here."

Harry Wharton & Co. made no rejoinder to that. The captain was not in the secret. He took "Lord Bunter" at face value, as it were, never dreaming of suspecting that the youth was not his Cousin William.

The juniors, of course, could tell him nothing, as they had promised the deepest, strictest secrecy to Sir Peter. But it made them feel a little awkward.

Captain Reynham believed—as Sir Peter had made all the castle believe—that the young lord had been placed at Greyfriars School under the name of Bunter, to protect him from kidnapping.

The astute old gentleman had allowed Smiler & Co. to discover that "fact," and Bunter's presence at the castle under his lordship's name, made it scarcely possible for them to doubt it.

Such a scheme, strange as it was, was justifiable, to protect a weak and sickly lad from dangerous enemies. But the juniors would have felt more comfortable if Sir Peter had let his nephew into the secret. He seemed, to them, to be carrying caution to excess.

"You remember the story, William?" asked Rupert.

"Oh, yes! Quite! What is it?" asked Bunter.

The captain laughed.

"You have forgotten it in your long absence from home," he remarked. "But if there is any truth in the legend, you might be reminded of it when you go to bed to-night."

"Eh? How's that?" asked Bunter.

"According to the legend, the stain of the murdered earl's blood is renewed on the floor of the King's Room on the anniversary of his death."

"Gorroogh!"

"We'll look for it when we go up," chuckled Bob Cherry. "I fancy it will want some looking for."

The juniors gathered round the fire to listen to the ghost story.

Billy Bunter finished his cigarette, and threw the stump in the fire.

Outside, the wintry wind was howling round the ancient chimney-pots, and snowflakes were dashing against the windows.

Captain Reynham sat with his half-smoked cigar in his hand, listening for a moment or two to the howl of the wind round the old turrets.

"It was such a night as this," he began. "A wild winter's night—a Christmas Eve many hundreds of years ago. The Lord Reynham of that time was said to be a very wicked nobleman. It was whispered that he had slain his cousin, the old earl, in the forest, and thus succeeded to the title. It was on the eve of Christmas that the old lord had been found, run through the body, under the ancient oaks of Reynham. And when the anniversary came—"

The captain paused, to take a pull at his cigar.

"That night the new lord of Reynham was feasting high in his ancient hall," he resumed. "The wine flowed freely, and all was merriment and roystering. But as midnight chimed, a sudden silence fell on the festive hall. A chill spread through the assembled guests, and the wicked lord was seen to pause with the wine cup half-raised to his lips, and then suddenly in the

midst of that deathly and eerie silence, was heard—

Snore!

The captain was interrupted by that cheery sound from the deep armchair in which Lord Bunter was sprawling.

"Wake up, you fat ass!" said Bob Cherry, shaking his fat lordship. "You're missing the ghost story!"

"Urrgh! I'm not asleep! I heard all you fellows were saying!" mumbled Bunter. "Lemme alone!"

"William is not interested," said the captain, with a smile. "But if you boys would like to hear the rest—"

"Please go on, sir! Never mind jolly old William!"

"In the midst of the deathly silence," resumed the captain, "was heard a strange and terrible cry from the wicked earl. He started to his feet, the wine from his goblet spilling over his ruff and trunk hose. His eyes were fixed in a dreadful stare on the door. All eyes turned in the same direction, and the great oak door was seen to swing slowly open, but none was seen to enter. The door swung shut, and all were conscious of a cold and chilly presence in the crowded hall; but nothing could be seen, unless Lord Reynham saw it. His eyes, starting from his pallid face, remained fixed, following, apparently, the motions of an unseen figure that was slowly approaching him—"

Snore!

Bunter was going it again.

"Suddenly, as if at the touch of an icy hand, the Lord of Reynham leaped to his feet and fled from the hall. As he fled up the stairs, he looked back, with ghastly fear in his face, and all knew, though none could see, that some strange shape followed him—"

Snore!

"The guests and the retainers stood petrified by fear and dread. Above, a crash was heard as the door of the King's Room closed, then the jarring of locks and bolts. The wicked earl had shut himself in the King's Room—"

Snore!

"With trembling footsteps, they followed up the stairs, and gathered in an affrighted crowd outside the door of the King's Room. From within was heard the clash of steel—clash on clash, as of two desperate enemies fighting to the death. It died away at last, and there was a groan! Then deep, deep silence, broken only by—"

Snore!

"Broken only by the wail of the winter wind round the snowy turrets. At length the retainers forced the door, and penetrated, trembling, into the King's Room. And by the light of torch and cresset they saw the wicked earl lying on the floor, run through the body, in a pool of—"

Snore!

"In a pool of blood, slowly spreading over the ancient oak, glistening in the light! But of his assailant and slayer nothing was to be seen. Doors were locked and barred; the fire burned in the ancient chimney; none had entered, none had left. Yet the wicked lord had been slain in fight; he lay dead in the pool of his blood, slain by a phantom hand."

Snore!

"From that day the phantom of the wicked earl has haunted the scene of his death," went on Rupert. "Every Christmas Eve the stain of blood is renewed on the oak, and every night from then till the New Year the spectre walks—and it is death to meet him!"

"Seen him?" grinned Bob.

"I have never put the matter to the test," said Rupert. "But others have"

done so, keeping watch in the King's Room on Christmas Eve. I have been told that such a watcher was found dead—that another fled from the room a raving maniac; but of my own knowledge, I can say nothing."

The captain's voice was very quiet and grave. The schoolboys looked at him curiously. It seemed impossible to them that the Army man could possibly attach the least belief to such a legend of his ancestors.

"Come with us, and let's look for the jolly old stain!" said Bob.

Rupert shook his head.

"It is absurd, of course, but I do not care to do so," he answered. "Really, I should not have told you the legend, but—"

"Oh, that's all right! We're not scared!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We'll certainly look for it ourselves, but we don't expect to have much luck!"

And Billy Bunter was heaved out of his chair and shaken into half-wakefulness, and the Famous Five marched him off to bed, after saying "Good-night!" to the captain.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

The Stain on the Oak!

"JAMES!"

Billy Bunter was sleepy—fearfully sleepy. Generally ready to go to sleep, the fat junior seemed readier than ever to-night. He was so sleepy that he forgot to call James "Frederick" or "Herbert."

"Yes, my lord!"

"Take my shoes off, James! I'm sleepy!"

"Yes, my lord!"

The Famous Five did not need, like Lord Bunter, the assistance of a valet to go to bed. And, unusually late as the hour was for them, they were not thinking immediately of bed.

Bunter had heard little of the ghost story, and was not in the least interested in ghostly bloodstains on ancient oak. Bunter was sleepy, and wanted to turn in. But the Famous Five were going to give the King's Room the once-over, looking for that ghostly stain.

Not, of course, that they dreamed for a moment of believing in spooks. But, as Bob Cherry remarked, it was only sporting to give the giddy ghost a chance of showing whether he was the genuine goods or not. Certainly, as they scanned the polished oak floor of the King's Room, they had not the faintest anticipation of discerning any stain that had not already been on the old time-blackened oak.

Billy Bunter turned into the big canopied bed—once, it was said, occupied by no less a person than King Henry the Eighth, who had visited the castle in ancient days. From that stout monarch the great room took its name, and his life-size portrait was on the wall, staring down from a huge metal frame.

Ranged round the canopied State bed were five other beds, which belonged to Harry Wharton & Co. That was Bunter's scheme for keeping safe from night attacks, and so far his lordly slumbers had not been troubled.

It was, indeed, a little difficult to see how the kidnappers were to get at his lordship, with the other fellows camped all round his bed; certainly it could not have been done without giving the alarm.

First, there had been two extra beds in that room, then four, and now there were five. As fast as his guests arrived, Lord Bunter gave orders for beds to be

prepared for them in his room. Fortunately, there was plenty of space, apartments in Reynham Castle being of immense size.

Bunter was snoring as soon as his head touched the pillow. He remained happily unconscious of the proceedings of the other fellows.

They moved about the King's Room, adjoining the spacious bed-room, and scanned the old hard oak floor. They smiled as they did so—at the absurdity of the idea of looking for ghostly bloodstains.

But Bob Cherry came to a sudden stop, with a startled ejaculation.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Found it?" grinned Nugent.

"Look!"

Bob pointed to the floor midway between the King's portrait on the wall and the communicating doorway in the bed-room.

A dark stain on the polished oak had caught his eye.

There were many stains on the old oak, trodden by countless feet through the centuries. But there was a strange freshness about that stain that startled the juniors as they looked at it.

"What the dickens—" muttered Bob.

"James!" called Harry Wharton.

"Sir!"

The valet appeared in the doorway between the rooms. He had finished with his lordship, and was about to go.

"I suppose you've heard the story about the wicked lord who was murdered in this room, James?" said Harry.

"Oh, yes, sir! It is very often told in the servants' hall at Christmas-time, sir," answered James.

"Then I dare say you know the exact spot where the bloodstain is supposed to be?" asked Harry.

"Oh, certainly, sir! Just where you young gentlemen are standing!" answered James.

"Oh!"

The juniors exchanged glances.

James glanced from face to face, and then looked at the oak floor. He gave a start, and his face paled.

"Good-night, gentlemen!" he said hurriedly. "Now that his lordship is in bed, I will go—"

"Hold on a minute!" said Harry quietly. "Look at that stain, James! Have you seen it there before?"

"No, sir!" faltered James.

"Do you mean that it is a new stain?"

"It was not there this morning, sir. I am sure of that. I was present when the maids were doing the room." James moved away towards the door while he was speaking, his eyes uneasily on the dark stain on the oak. "I—I—I don't quite understand it, sir! I—I will go, if there is nothing more, sir!"

And James went.

"Now what the thump," said Bob, in a low voice, "does this mean?"

"Goodness knows!"

Harry Wharton stooped, and rubbed the stained oak with his finger. He gave a slight shudder as, lifting the finger to the light, he saw a faint reddish stain on it. His heart beat a little uncomfortably.

"James can't have been playing tricks here, surely!" muttered Nugent. "He looked quite scared—you could see what he thought—"

"It's a trick of some kind," said Harry, "because it can't be anything else. The idea of a blood-stain renewing itself on the anniversary of a murder is—is—"

"Bunk!" said Johnny Bull.

"The"

(Continued on page 20.)

READY, YOU FELLOWS? Then off we go again with—

The GREYFRIARS GUIDE

A TOUR OF THE SCHOOL. Masters' Corridor.

(1)

The Masters' Studies here are situated,
They're studies full of gravity and gloom,
And here your breath is permanently baited,
So let us take a peep in every room.
The first is Prout's, with many curious features,
His Winchester repeater's seen at once,
With stuffed and mounted carcasses of creatures,
The relics of his bygone thrilling hunts.



"I SAW THREE SHIPS COME SAILING IN!"

A Verie Olde Carol, as warbled
by W. G. Bunter.

I hope my ship comes sailing in,
Comes sailing in, and brings some tin,
And if I get it, I shall grin—
That Christmas postal order!

I've been expecting it for years,
For years and years (excuse my tears!),
I'll shout with joy when it appears,
That Christmas postal order!

Perhaps some titled relative,
Some relative will surely give
The thing for which alone I live,
That Christmas postal order!

Alas, the postman's gone away,
He's gone away, and sad to say
He didn't hand to me to-day
That Christmas postal order!

Perhaps, at length, it will arrive,
It will arrive, if I'm alive,
By Christmas, 1985,
That missing postal order!

Why are the stars like star-gazers?
Because they have studded the sky
for ages.

(2)

In Quelchy's room a typewriter is noted,
And reams and reams of manuscripts
he's done,
That glorious work, to which his life's devoted,
"The History of Greyfriars, Volume One"!
And Wiggins has a heavy window curtain
To make a dark-room for his photographs,
Whatever the result, it's fairly certain
He'll be annoyed if anybody laughs.

(3)

Mossoo has lots of books in foreign lingo,
While Capper's study's very neat and prim,
And Hacker's foreign curios—by jingo!
Those swords and spears are typical of him!
And Larry Lascelles boasts of many a trophy,
With cups and caps and silver shields galore,
While Twigg's content with poetry and coffee;
It's very quaint—the Masters' Corridor!

THE GREYFRIARS ALPHABET

PATRICK GWYNNE,
The Irish Sixth Form Prefect.

G is for GWYNNE—an Irish coon,
And, faith, he's not a bad gossoon!
No, on the whole, he's not so bad,
And that is kind of me, bedad!
For here's a thing I'd have you know:
He gave me six a week ago!
Six whistling wallops on a spot
Where every pain feels extra hot!



And on the Christmas vac I take
A most uncomfortable ache!
Yet, notwithstanding this, I say
He's not so bad—the pesky jay!
He's second prefect, Wingate's chum,
And always smiling, never glum.
At sport he's grand and plays to win,
So here's a MERRY CHRISTMAS,
Gwynne!



A WEEKLY BUDGET OF FACT AND FUN

By
THE GREYFRIARS
RHYMESTER

XMAS GRINS

It seems a strange way of accepting a Christmas present to want to whop somebody. Luckily Loder doesn't know who sent him the cigars! (I bet he smokes one though, all the same.)

A famous London store is advertising "Fifty New Lines in Christmas Gifts." That's nothing—Quelchy's just given me five hundred!

One of this year's Christmas bargains is a model railway so true to life that the trains are always late.

Our local railway is offering "Reduced Fare for Christmas." As long as our kitchen staff don't copy 'em that's O.K. by me.

Quelchy's so fond of dishing out lines this Christmas that some of us are wondering whether he will go a bit further and leave us a few lines in his will!

PARTY PUZZLE

A Christmas traveller was heard whistling "Good King Wenceslas" to the tune of "Home, Sweet Home." What was his profession?

Solution at foot of column.

Fisher T. Fish doesn't trust anyone, not even Father Christmas. He is putting a padlock and chain on the stocking he will hang up on Christmas Eve.

Peter Todd says the weather is too cold to put your nose outside the door. Of course, in Toddy's case, when his nose is out most of him is out, so this may be true.

ANSWER TO PARTY PUZZLE

A magician! Nobody else could whistle words!

ANOTHER JOLLY JAUNT WITH OUR JOVIAL GUIDE NEXT THURSDAY!

"The bunkfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh. But his dark eyes dwelt on the stain with a gleam of uneasiness in them.

"But what silly ass can have played such a trick?" said Bob. "Why, we should never have looked for the beastly thing at all, if Rupert Reynham hadn't happened to tell us the ghost story this evening! We'd never heard of the jolly old wicked lord till an hour ago."

"And we certainly shouldn't have noticed it on the dark oak if we hadn't specially looked for it!" said Harry.

"That's a cert! If anybody played this trick, he must have played it for nothing—he couldn't have known that we were going to hear about the beastly thing."

"Blessed if I can make it out," muttered Nugent.

"If the fellow who put it there fancied that we should see it, it might be a trick to scare us!" said Harry slowly. "One of the kidnapping gang is a member of this household—and from what Johnny heard, it seems that that one is their leader. He can't like us here protecting our prize porpoise—in fact, Johnny heard him say so. If he did this—"

"That's it, of course!" said Nugent, relieved. "Why, of course! It's a rotten trick to put the wind up Bunter's bodyguard. I dare say he thinks we knew all about the ghost story—Lord Reynham would naturally know, and the old porpoise is Lord Reynham now—"

"Well, he won't frighten us very easily, if that's the case!" said Harry. "I suppose the rascal, whoever he is, could have sneaked in here and done this. It's a trick, at any rate."

"Let's get to bed," said Bob. "We shall be fancying next that we hear the jolly old wicked lord groaning."

Groan!

The five juniors started violently, and stared round them. The sound that reached their ears was a low, faint groan coming from whence they could not guess.

"Did you hear—"

Harry Wharton ran to the door, opened it, and looked out into the bedroom—with a suspicion that Bunter might be playing a trick. But his fat lordship was in the canopied bed, fast asleep, and snoring.

Harry Wharton set his lips.

"You fellows all heard that?" he said. "There's no doubt about it now—some blighter has set out to give us a scare. By gum! I wish he would show up in reach of a fellow's knuckles!"

"Better see that all the doors are safe before we turn in," said Bob. "Bunter generally sees to that—but he's gone off to sleep to-night, and forgotten it."

The Famous Five made a careful round, looking to all the outer doors. There were three doors on the corridor; from the King's Room, the bed-room, and the dressing-room. Each one of them was carefully locked and bolted.

The locks on the doors were heavy, old-fashioned, and very strong; but Lord Bunter had on his first day in the castle, ordered bolts to be put on, and Lord Bunter's orders had been carried out.

The juniors were rather glad of it now. Locks might be picked; but bolts were a different proposition. When they went to bed, they did so in the absolute certainty that no one could enter without waking them.

But, late as the hour was, they did not fall asleep so easily as usual.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,558.

That strange story of the ghostly fight in the King's Room ran in their minds; and, though they were sure that a trick had been played, the bloodstain on the oak, and that ghostly groan were uncanny, and a little unnerving. It was long after the chimes of midnight that they slept at last.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Spectre of Reynham Castle!

HARRY WHARTON awoke suddenly.

He had been dreaming.

In his dreams was pictured the strange tale he had heard of the spectre of the castle. He seemed to see the hall door opening to an unseen hand, as the captain had related, and the wicked earl, starting up with spilling wine-cup, gazing at the dread figure that no other eyes could see. In the visions of slumber he followed the desperate man in his flight to the King's Room, and heard the crash of locks and bars—the clash of steel—the dying groan. He awoke with a start and a shiver, and stared into the darkness about him.

Was he dreaming still?

He sat up, staring in the gloom. There had been a fire in the room, but it had long ago died out, and all was dark.

But a red gleam of glowing logs met his eyes, glimmering through the dark. It came from the ancient hearth in the King's Room adjoining.

He gave a start and a shiver.

All the outer doors of the rooms had been locked and bolted. The communicating door between the King's Room and the bed-room had been closed, but not fastened. There was no occasion to fasten an inner door, when no one could possibly obtain admittance to any of the rooms.

But that door, which had been closed, was now partly open. Through the gap came the glimmer of the fire in the King's Room.

Harry Wharton gazed at it fixedly.

The door could not have opened of its own volition. Yet it was partly open—and, as he gazed, he saw that it was slowly opening wider.

The darkness was deep. But the firelight in the adjoining room, glimmering through the aperture, showed it growing wider and wider.

Wharton heard a gasp from the darkness. It came from one of the other beds.

He whispered, a faint, husky whisper.

"Is that you, Frank?"

"Yes! Did you hear?" breathed Nugent's voice.

"I woke—"

"Something woke me," whispered Nugent. "I—I think it was a—a groan! I—I'm sure I heard—"

"So did I!" came a whisper from Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton, his heart beating hard, peered round in the gloom. In the faint glimmer that came from the next room, he could dimly make out his comrades—all of them sitting up in bed, their eyes fixed on the slowly opening door.

Bunter did not stir. His deep snore went on uninterrupted. But the Famous Five were all wide awake.

"Can you see?" came a startled whisper from Bob. "That door—"

"The wind!" muttered Johnny Bull. "It was latched, and there's no wind—the windows are shut—"

"Then what—"

The whispers died away. The five

schoolboys sat and stared as if fascinated at the door—slowly, slowly pushing open.

Wider and wider the space grew; clearer the red glimmer from the crackling logs in the King's Room.

It was strangely, eerily, like the ghost story they had heard—and what, in the name of all that was horribly mysterious, could it mean? No one was in the King's Room—no one could be there, unless he could pass through solid walls or solid doors, locked and bolted. Yet that door was opening to an unseen hand.

Spellbound they watched with throbbing hearts.

The door stood wide open at last, and the doorway was no longer vacant. The juniors could not believe what they saw. Yet they saw it.

A figure in the ruff and doublet and trunk hose of Tudor days, but all a spectral whiteness, stood there.

The face was in shadow, as it looked towards them; but they could make out that it was a ghastly, lifeless whiteness, with two eyes that gleamed and glittered as if from a dead mask of white.

The blood seemed like ice in their veins as they gazed.

It was strange, ghastly, unbelievable—but they had to believe what their eyes saw. Backed by the ruddy glimmer of the logs, the figure stood there—silent, spectral, blood-curdling.

Unable to stir, hardly able to breathe, the horrified schoolboys watched petrified.

It seemed to them that the gleaming, glittering eyes passed from face to face, watching them, scanning them. For a long minute, that seemed an hour to the juniors, the spectral figure stood, their amazed eyes glued to it.

The fire in the King's Room, behind the figure, blazed up; the sudden flame throwing into relief every detail of the ghostly form.

Then it died down again, and for a moment there was darkness.

Petrified, the blood seeming to congeal in their hearts, they watched the dark doorway, the spectral figure growing dim and disappearing.

The firelight blazed up again.

The doorway was empty.

Like a bodiless phantom the spectre had vanished during those few moments of darkness.

They could see into the King's Room; the fire blazed up, showing empty space. They did not stir. The horror of what they had seen froze them.

A long, long minute passed. Then at last Harry Wharton made a movement. With set teeth, he slipped from his bed.

"Harry—" whispered Nugent.

"It's a trick!" muttered Wharton. "I tell you it must be a trick! I'm going in there—"

"Don't!" muttered Frank. "Don't!"

"I tell you it's a trick!"

"It—it must be!" stammered Bob. "But—but—but how did anyone get in? How could anyone get in?"

"I'm going to see!"

Wharton grasped a stick from his bedside and stepped towards the doorway.

In a moment his comrades were out of bed and following him. Every nerve in their bodies shrank from the horror of what they had seen—but they were not letting him go alone.

They reached the doorway and gazed into the King's Room. The fire died down—all was dim shadow.

Wharton reached to a switch and flashed on the electric light.

Sudden illumination flooded the great room. It showed the King's Room as they had left it—empty; it gleamed on the walls, on the polished furniture, the

King's portrait looking down from its great metal frame—but nothing more. There was no sign of the spectre.

"Come on!" muttered Harry.

He stepped through the doorway. His friends followed him. In silence, with beating hearts, they searched the room.

No one was there. They examined doors and windows. The door on the corridor was locked and bolted, as they had left it; the windows were fastened.

They gathered again in a bewildered group. No human being could have entered the King's Room by door or window. Was it, then, a supernatural vision that they had seen?

"What——" muttered Nugent. His face was white.

Harry Wharton stared round at the walls. Reynham Castle was an ancient building, and the thought of secret passages and secret doors came into his mind.

But it came only to be dismissed. The walls of the King's Room were of oak over solid stone blocks. But that ancient oak, black with age, had been papered over and covered with a cheerful tint.

Oak panels might have moved to a secret spring, but papered walls would have shown a break.

The captain of the Remove passed slowly round the room, scanning and examining every wall, and his friends, as they guessed his thought, followed him.

But there was no sign of a break in the wallpaper to be detected—there was no secret panel in the wall.

Solid walls, bolted doors, fastened windows at a great height from the ground, surrounded them. Yet they knew what they had seen.

In spite of reason, in spite of common sense, they seemed to be driven to the belief that the spectre of Reynham Castle had appeared to their eyes, haunting the scene where the wicked earl had been slain in that ghostly combat long years ago.

In silence they returned to the bedroom. Bunter, undisturbed, was still snoring. They looked at him. The ghostly groan that had awakened them had not awakened Bunter.

The chums of the Remove were deeply shaken, but had Bunter's eyes seen what they had seen there was no doubt that the fat junior would have been paralysed with terror, and they were glad that he had slept through it.

They said nothing; even Johnny Bull, hardest-headed member of the Co., had nothing to say. They returned to their beds—but not to sleep. The light was left on—but sleep was impossible. Pale and weary, they were glad, at last, when the dim dawn of Christmas Day glimmered in at the windows.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Bump for Bunter!

"MERRY CHRISTMAS!" chirped Billy Bunter.

He blinked at the juniors in the other beds.

It was ten o'clock.

Billy Bunter, sitting up in bed to breakfast, was merry and bright. The Famous Five were neither.

Generally the juniors were up and out long before his lazy lordship thought of turning out in the morning. They never had the least inclination to follow Bunter's example of slacking in the holidays.

Bunter had had, as a rule, to be satisfied with James and a couple of footmen remaining with him after the juniors had gone down, his bodyguard abso-

lutely refusing to stay until his fat lordship rolled out of bed at ten or eleven.

This morning, however, they were still in bed at ten o'clock. They had dropped off to sleep after dawn, after hours of dismal wakefulness.

"I say, you fellows, you're jolly slack this morning!" said Bunter, blinking round at them. "I had to get out of bed to let James in. I called you, Wharton, and you didn't answer. What's the matter with you all?"

"We were up in the night!" said Harry curtly.

"Eh?" A well-laden fork stopped half-way to Bunter's capacious mouth. "I say, I never woke up! What's happened! The kidnappers——"

"No!"

"Oh, all right, then! I say, you look a peaky lot!" Bunter grinned. "That chap Reynham was telling us a ghost story last night, wasn't he? Been seeing ghosts? He, he, he!"

What would have happened, had Bunter awakened and seen the spectre of the castle, the juniors knew well enough. It was doubtful whether all the attractions of playing the part of a nobleman would have kept him at the castle, had he seen that awful apparition.

But he had not awakened and he had not seen it, and that made all the difference. In broad daylight Bunter feared no phantoms.

The Famous Five, turning out of bed, looked at one another. Frosty sunlight gleamed in at the windows. The fog of the day before had rolled away and Christmas morning came fresh and bright. In the clear, fresh morning their strange and terrible experience of the night seemed like some ghastly dream.

Yet it had been real!

One fellow might have dreamed, or fancied, that fearful vision—five fellows could not have done so. Whether it was a trick that they could not understand, or a vision from another world, they had seen the spectral figure in the doorway of the King's Room.

With the return of daylight, belief, or half-belief, in the supernatural seemed absurd. And yet——

"Let's get out!" said Bob. Out-of-doors, in the fresh air, was Bob's cure for all worries and troubles.

"But I say, you fellows, what's happened?" asked the fat Owl. "Did you dream that you saw a ghost, or what?"

"No, fathead!"

"Well, you're looking fearfully peaky!" grinned Bunter. "I can see that you've had a scare! He, he, he!"

The juniors compressed their lips. They had no doubt that their faces betrayed the strain they had been through.

"You fat ass!" growled Johnny Bull. "I wish we'd woke you up now, and you'd have seen it, too."

"Then you did see something?" grinned Bunter.

"Yes, fathead!"

"Well, what was it?" asked Bunter. "Tell me! I say, you fellows, why didn't you call me? I'd have snuffed the ghost. He, he, he! It would take a bit more than a spook to frighten me! He, he, he!"

"You podgy, pernicious porpoise!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "If you'd seen it you'd have woke the whole castle with your howls."

"He, he, he! Tell me about it," grinned Bunter, with his mouth full of kidneys and bacon. "What was it frightened you?"

"We weren't frightened, fathead!"

"You look as if you were!" chuckled

Bunter. "You're as white as a sheet, Nugent, old chap."

"Ass!"

"You're all of a tremble, Wharton!"

"Fathead!"

"Somebody's been larking with you, I can see that! I say, you fellows, I was so sleepy last night I forgot to lock the doors. I suppose somebody came in and gave you a scare!"

"We locked and bolted all the doors, idiot!"

"Then how did you get a scare?" asked Bunter. "Think a ghost came down the chimney! He, he, he!"

"Oh, shut up, you cackling ass!" growled Johnny Bull. "Look here, you fellows, it gave us a turn, and no wonder; but it's all gammon—a rotten trick of some sort! There ain't such a thing as a ghost!"

"Of course not!" chortled Bunter. "I dare say you saw a shadow or something. What was it like? Gurrerrrrgh! Urrrrrgh! Wurrgh!" Chortling, with his capacious mouth full of kidneys and bacon, caused trouble. Bunter choked and gurgled. "Ooogh! Grooogh! Wooogh! Bother you—making a fellow laugh when his mouth's full! Grooogh!" Bunter cleared his fat neck, and chortled again.

"I say, you fellows, cough it up!" he urged. "Do you really fancy you saw that ghost that Reynham was telling us about?"

"Yes, we saw it, fathead!" snapped Harry. "Now dry up!"

"He, he, he!"

"We saw it," said Johnny Bull, glaring at the gurgling fat Owl, "and it was some sort of gammon. Now shut up!"

"He, he, he! Wake me up when the ghost walks again!" chuckled Bunter. "I'm fearfully keen on ghosts! He, he, he!"

"Well, according to the tale, it will walk again—every night from Christmas Eve to the New Year!" said Bob. "And we'll jolly well wake you up next time, you fat, gurgling gargoyle."

"Oh, do!" grinned Bunter. "I'll protect you! You won't find me looking peaky in the morning, after seeing a ghost! I'll jolly well get it with a bolster. Why didn't you shy a pillow at it?"

"Shut up, you ass!"

"He, he, he! I say, you fellows, do you call this plucky?" asked Bunter. "Look at me going through all sorts of dangers here, without turning a hair—and you fellows conk out like that, because you see a shadow or something! This will make them laugh when I tell them in the Remove studies next term! He, he, he!"

The Famous Five glared at the chortling fat Owl. But glares had no effect whatever on Lord Bunter. Bunter had the advantage now; and when Bunter had an advantage, he was the fellow to use it.

"You needn't scowl at a fellow because he's got pluck and you haven't," grinned Bunter. "If you'd woke me up, I'd have shied a pillow at it! Next time you see something awful and horrible, chuck a pillow at it!"

"That's a tip!" said Bob Cherry.

He stepped to his bed, and picked up the pillow therefrom. As he swung it in the air, the fat lord of Reynham Castle blinked at him in alarm.

"Here, I say, wharrer you up to?" gasped Lord Bunter.

"Chucking a pillow at something horrible!" answered Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say—yarooooooh!" roared Bunter, as the pillow flew, and crashed.

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It caught Lord Bunter under his fat chin, and spun him out of bed.

There was a heavy bump on the floor, and a crash and a clatter as Bunter's well-laden tray landed on Bunter. Bacon and eggs, kidneys and tomatoes, jam and marmalade, toast and grape-fruit, fell over Bunter like leaves in Vallombrosa of old.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter. "Beast! Wow! Beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Oh crikey! Wow!"

Billy Bunter sat up amid the wreck of his breakfast, like Marius in the ruins of Carthage. He sat up and roared.

"Ow! Beast! Wow! I'll jolly well have you turned out of my castle! Yaroooh! Wow! That kidney's gone down my back—urrgh—I'm all jammy—groogh—ow! You beast—wow! Ow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oooooooooogh!"

Billy Bunter did not chortle any more. For the next quarter of an hour, his remarks were chiefly "Ow!" and "Wow!" and "Beast!"—and he was not feeling in the least inclined to chortle.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Christmas Night!

"LEAVE the light on!"

"What?"

"That's all—leave it on!"

Christmas Day had passed pleasantly enough at Reynham Castle, but the Greyfriars fellows were looking forward to Christmas Night with mixed feelings.

So, it appeared, was Bunter—when the night came.

During the day, the fat lord of Reynham had made quite a number of playful remarks about fellows who were frightened by ghosts. Bunter had been, in fact, fearfully amused on that subject. But when he rolled up to bed, his amusement seemed to be gone, and he was observed to blink round him a little uneasily.

Bunter was sleepy. He was, in fact, yawning his fat head off when the juniors went up to bed. There was a whiff of cigarette smoke about Bunter. His last proceeding, before going up, had been to smoke one of the captain's cigarettes—not, certainly, because he wanted to, but just to show what an independent man of the world he was.

Sleepy as he was, he was not too sleepy to remember the ghost story. And the fact that the spectre was, according to the legend, due to reappear every night till the New Year, seemed to haunt the fat junior's mind. Dark, wintry night, it appeared, made the ghost story less amusing to his fat lordship.

"You bloated blitherer, what do you want the light left on for?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"Well, you fellows might be frightened again!" explained Bunter. "Better leave it on! You haven't got my nerve, you know!"

"The nervefulness of his esteemed lordship does not seem to be terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I'm only thinking of you fellows, of course," said Bunter. "I don't want to be disturbed in the night by a lot of duffers getting into a blue funk! Just you leave that light on!"

And Bunter dropped his fat head on to the pillow, and snored.

Doors were locked and bolted, as on the previous night; but the Famous Five were quite aware that locks and bolts would not keep out the spectral visitant.

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"Might as well leave the light on!" said Frank Nugent. "The fact is, I should like it left on, as well as that fat ass!"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"Might as well!" he agreed.

Johnny Bull looked round at his comrades. There was a deeply thoughtful expression on Johnny's face.

"Better turn it off!" he said.

"Bunter will make a fearful row, if he wakes up and finds himself in the dark," said Frank, "and if he saw that spook he would go into a fit."

"Blow Bunter!" Johnny Bull sank his voice to a whisper. "Just turn in as usual, I'll turn off the lights. I've got a reason."

The four looked at him. In the strange circumstances, they would have felt more comfortable, with the fires banked up high in both rooms, and all the electric lights left on. But they nodded assent.

There was no objection from Bunter—he was already fast asleep and snoring. Four of the juniors turned in, and Johnny Bull was left to turn off the lights.

None of them was likely to sleep. The more they thought about that ghostly visitation, the more convinced they felt that it was some sort of eerie trickery, though they could not explain it. But trickery or not, there was little doubt that the ghost would walk again.

Whether it was some ghastly trick to frighten them away from the castle, or whether it was the phantom of the wicked old earl, the spectre was due to reappear. And four members of the Co. would have been glad to have the light on.

But Johnny Bull, after turning off the lights and seeing that the fires were too low to illumine either room, did not go to bed.

Harry Wharton started, as he felt a tap on his shoulder.

"What—" he began.

"Quiet!" whispered the voice of Johnny Bull. "That jolly old ghost who can walk through solid walls may be able to hear through them! See?"

"But what—"

"Get out and dress," whispered Johnny. "We're sitting this one out, old bean. I'm going into the next room—now it's dark—to watch—"

"Oh!" gasped Wharton.

"If that ghost walks again, I've got a pretty thick stick, and I'll see whether he's solid enough to bang it on!" came Johnny's whisper. "You fellows stay here—and if he shows up in the doorway, I'll get him from behind! See?"

"Oh!" repeated Harry.

"After last night, he fancies he's got us scared stiff. The fact is, we were scared—no good denying that. But we're not going to be spoofed twice in the same way. If the ghost walks again to-night, I'm getting him."

Johnny's whisper was quiet and steady. The practical, hard-headed Yorkshire junior had thought the matter out, and resolved on his line of action. He did not believe that the ghostly visitation was supernatural; he believed that it was a trick, and he was going to act on his belief.

Wharton shivered a little. He had plenty of courage, and plenty of nerve, but the thought of that ghastly vision in the dark was unnerving.

"Look here, you're not going alone!" he whispered. "I'll come—"

"Two's a crowd—one's enough! We've got to be jolly careful they don't spot anything. The ghost wouldn't walk if he knew!"

"But—"

"Leave it to me. You keep close to

a switch, and be ready to turn on the light. Tell the other fellows."

"Oh, all right!"

Johnny Bull glided noiselessly away in the darkness.

Wharton, his heart beating, crept out of bed, and in a few minutes he had whispered Johnny's plan to Bob Nugent and Hurree Singh.

The three juniors turned out at once, and they dressed quietly in the dark. Bunter snored on undisturbed. In dense darkness, the four waited. They heard no sound from Johnny Bull.

Johnny had opened the door of the King's Room, and, leaving it wide open, crept into the adjoining room. There was not even a glimmer from the fire—he had taken care of that.

In what way the mysterious visitant obtained entrance to the King's Room he did not know, and could not guess; but he did not doubt that there was a way in—there had to be, unless the spectre was a visitor from another world. And by that way, it was more possible that observation could be kept on the room.

In that case, a mere glimmer of light would have been enough to warn the trickster. If Johnny had been seen on the watch, the real spectre might have walked, but certainly a trickster would hardly have made the venture.

The sturdy junior made his way noiselessly in the dark apartment. He had mapped out what he was going to do. Two big armchairs had been left standing with the high backs near together. Between those high chair-backs Johnny Bull crouched, on his knees, with a stick grasped in his hand.

All was silent and still.

Long, long minutes passed—the time seemed endless. Every minute seemed an hour in the darkness and the silence of midnight. It was eerie, creepy, waiting there, in deep silence, unable to see his hand before his face—waiting for a ghostly form to loom in the gloom.

But Johnny had his nerves well in hand.

The winter wind wailed round the ancient turrets. From the bed-room came Bunter's unceasing snore. There was no other sound—as dreary, endless minute followed minute.

And then at last there came, suddenly, a faint, faint sound in the silence.

Johnny Bull felt the blood rush to his heart.

He could see nothing, but he knew that he was no longer alone in the King's Room in Reynham Castle.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Laying the Ghost!

JOHNNY BULL did not stir.

He waited.

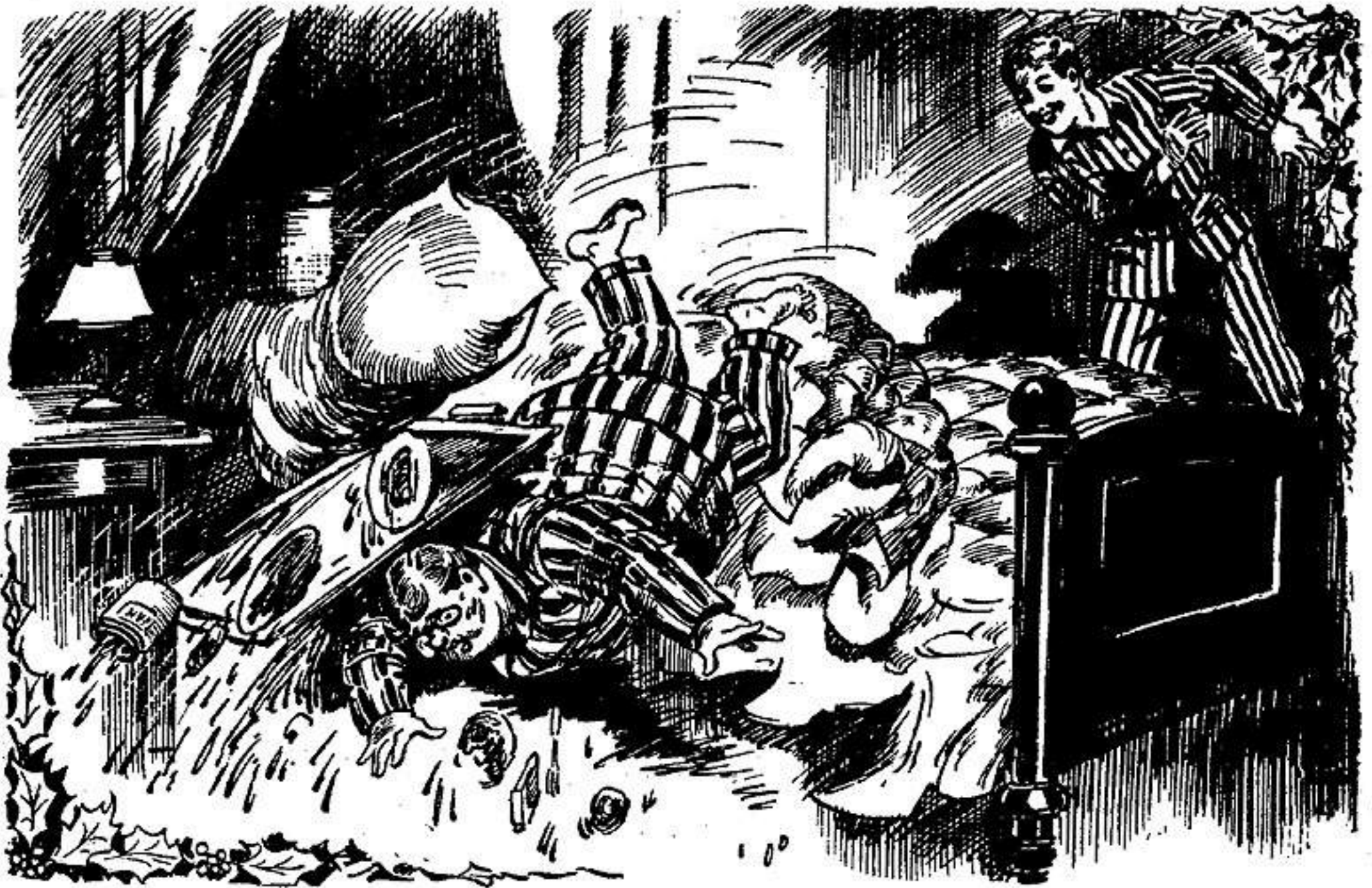
His heart was thumping. In the blackness, in the eerie silence of the haunted room, something like a superstitious thrill ran through him.

In that room, with bolted doors and fastened windows and solid walls, there was some strange presence. Earthly or unearthly, it was strange, thrilling. But he kept cool and waited and listened.

Only blackness met his eyes.

But his ears were on the alert. Again a faint sound came to him. Then there was a faint red glow in the darkness.

Johnny Bull's face set grimly. He knew what that meant. Whoever was



"I say—yareoooooooooh!" roared Billy Bunter, as the pillow flew, catching him under his fat chin and spinning him out of bed. There was a heavy bump on the floor, and a crash and a clatter as Bunter's well-laden tray landed on his fat person.

in the room was stirring the embers of the fire, softly and cautiously. The reason hardly needed guessing. Some sort of light was necessary to make the spectre visible—proof enough that it was no phantom.

The red gleam from the stirred embers grew brighter. A dim glow spread through the room.

Something white and spectral glimmered in the gloom.

Johnny Bull lifted his head, silently, cautiously, and peered at it. In the dim red glow he could see the open doorway from the King's Room to the bed-room. In that doorway stood a figure—the spectral figure in doublet and hose and ruff—white as the driven snow.

Four juniors in the bed-room were facing it—but Johnny Bull, from the King's Room, saw it from behind.

Silently he rose to his feet.

He stepped swiftly out of cover behind the ghostly figure in the doorway, a thick stick gripped in his hand. That stick was uplifted as he stepped behind the ghostly form that stared into the bed-room.

It came down with a crashing blow.

But it did not pass through a bodyless phantom. It crashed on something solid—and there was a loud, startled, savage cry as the spectral figure lurched over and crashed.

At the same instant there came a sudden flood of illumination, as the electric light was switched on in the bed-room.

"Look!" yelled Bob Cherry.

Just within the doorway sprawled the phantom figure on its hands and knees. Johnny Bull's blow had caught it across the shoulders, hurling it over. The juniors gazed at it as it was

revealed in the sudden blaze of bright light.

Only for a moment the spectral figure sprawled. Then it bounded to its feet, gasping, and spun back to the doorway.

Grimly and ruthlessly, Johnny Bull lashed at it again with the stick, and the blow landed on the spectre's head.

The strange figure staggered back, with a yell of rage and fury.

Harry Wharton & Co. were springing on it the next moment.

There was no hint of the supernatural now—the cheat was revealed. It was a solid and living body that had caught the crashing blows from Johnny's stick—and in a moment the four juniors were grasping it, and they found it solid enough.

"Bag him!" gasped Bob.

Four pairs of hands grasped the spectre of Reynham Castle. Johnny Bull's were added the next moment.

The white-clad figure struggled madly. It was evidently a very powerful man who was in the grasp of the Famous Five, and he fought desperately for his freedom.

But, powerful as he was, he was no match for five determined fellows. Grasped on all sides, he was dragged to the floor.

Bob Cherry's knee was planted on his chest. Nugent and Hurree Singh had hold of his arms. Wharton's arm gripped his neck—Johnny had him by the doublet. He wrenched and heaved and struggled; but he had no chance.

Still, for several long minutes the struggle went on. The strange intruder of the night did not yield until he was breathless and almost exhausted. But the juniors did not let go for a

moment, and he lay helpless in their grasp at last.

"Got him!" panted Bob.

"We've got the rotter!" said Harry Wharton breathlessly. "Get hold of something to tie his paws. He's as strong as a horse! Bunter! Bunter! Turn out, you fat duffer!"

Only a snore answered from Bunter.

It seemed strange enough that the noise of the struggle had not awakened even a hefty sleeper like Bunter. But he did not wake. Deaf to the sounds around him, deaf to Wharton's shouting voice, the fat lord of Reynham Castle snored on.

"Wake up, fathead!" bawled Bob Cherry.

Snore!

"By gum! That fat ass can sleep!" gasped Bob. "Hold the brute while I get something to fix him!"

Bob ran to the nearest bed, grabbed a sheet, and wrenched it into strips. The spectral visitant was still struggling; but he was held fast, and in a minute or less strips of sheet were bound and knotted round his wrists.

Then he was allowed to rise to his feet.

He stood gasping and panting in the midst of the juniors. His eyes were blazing with fury from the dead whiteness of his face.

That face was unknown to the juniors—but Wharton, as he scanned it, burst into a laugh. It was a close-fitting white mask that covered the face from forehead to chin, giving it its ghastly aspect; and it was through eyeholes that the fierce eyes glittered and gleamed.

The captain of the Remove grasped the mask and peeled it off. Then the

light shone on a hard-featured face that all the juniors knew.

"The Smiler!" yelled Bob.

"The kidnapper!" gasped Nugent.

The Smiler spat with rage. Strange enough, the dark, evil face of the crook looked over the Tudor ruff round his neck. It was the Smiler who had played the part of the spectre of Reynham Castle!

"And now," said Johnny Bull, "we'll see how this beauty got in! He won't get out again the same way in a hurry!"

Bunter snored on, as the Famous Five led their enraged prisoner through the doorway into the King's Room. Harry Wharton switched on the electric light there, and they looked round the room with eager eyes. It was now certain that there was a secret way into the room—the presence of the kidnapper was a proof of it.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" yelled Bob. "Look!"

He pointed to the portrait of King Henry VIII. The juniors stared at it. One side of the big metal frame jutted from the wall.

The tall picture-frame was a door, opening on hidden hinges. The intruder had left it a few inches ajar for his retreat.

"Oh, my hat!" said Wharton.

He ran to the picture, grasped the thick metal edge, and pulled it wider open. Beyond was a dark cavity; and he had a glimpse of a narrow spiral stair leading downwards through the massive thickness of the ancient wall.

"By gum!" ejaculated Bob. "That's it, is it? That's how they got at the jolly old porpoise the other day!"

"And that's the way he was going, if they got hold of him," said Harry. "There must be an outlet at the other end, or this rascal couldn't have got in. If the fat ass had been here alone—"

"They'd have had him all right!"

"No doubt about that!"

"Now we'd better call old Peter, and see this rotter fixed up for the police to call for him!" said Bob. "Your game's up now, Mr. Smiler—no more kidnapping stunts for you!"

The Smiler stood scowling and gritting his teeth, as the juniors proceeded to give the alarm. His game was up—the ghost had been laid; and the spectre of Reynham Castle had walked for the last time!

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Mysterious!

SIR PETER LANCHESTER blinked, in amazement. His startled eyes seemed almost to pop from his face.

Loud ringing of bells, and calling voices startled the whole household. A crowd gathered in the corridor outside the King's Room.

Sir Peter entered, in his dressing-gown, a thick malacca in his hand—after him came Mr. Tomlinson, the detective, and Captain Reynham. Jasmond hovered in the doorway, half-dressed—behind him a startled crowd of menservants. Almost all the castle had been roused.

"What—what—what—" stuttered Sir Peter.

He stared at the Smiler, in his Tudor costume—considerably ruffled and rumpled by his struggle with the juniors. He stared at the picture standing open like a door from the wall. He seemed hardly able to believe his eyes. Indeed, he hardly could.

Mr. Tomlinson was equally astonished. Neither did he seem wholly pleased.

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The detective was there to watch over his lordship and snaffle any kidnapper who came after him. So far, he had done no snaffling. But the Greyfriars fellows evidently had.

Captain Reynham was a little pale, seeming more startled than any other of the startled crowd.

The juniors did not give him any special attention—excepting Johnny Bull. Johnny had not forgotten the familiar note in the captain's voice, which reminded him of the voice he had heard in the fog on Christmas Eve.

Johnny Bull's eyes were on the captain; and he saw Rupert Reynham's startled glance fix on the prisoner; and the steady look that the Smiler gave him in return.

Only for a second, however, did the captain look at the captured man. Then he walked across the room to the King's picture, and stood looking into the cavity behind it—his back to the others in the room.

"What—what—" Sir Peter seemed hardly able to speak. "What—what—what has happened here?"

"The ghost walked—and we laid him, sir!" said Bob Cherry, grinning. "Meet the spectre of Reynham Castle!"

"But what—what—" stammered the old baronet. "How—what—" he pulled himself together. "Who is this man?"

"The Smiler!" chuckled Bob.

"The kidnapper!" gasped Sir Peter.

"That very identical bean! We've tied him up to keep him out of mischief—but a pair of handcuffs would come in useful."

Mr. Tomlinson seemed to wake from his amazement. He stepped towards the Smiler, and there was a clink of metal.

The kidnapper's eyes gleamed as the handcuffs were snapped on his wrists. Johnny Bull noted, grimly, that his glance shot round to the captain for an instant. But Rupert Reynham was still standing with his back to the rest. Johnny would have liked to see his face at that moment—but only his back was to be seen.

"Tell me—" gasped Sir Peter.

The juniors related what had happened in the night.

Sir Peter listened in amazement, but with great satisfaction dawning in his face.

This was the success of his deep-laid scheme. He had planned that Bunter, playing the part of the young lord, should draw the kidnapping gang into the trap. True, he had planned that his detective should be on hand when the attempt was made, and lay the rascal by the heels. That part of his scheme had not worked. But the Greyfriars juniors had played the part Mr. Tomlinson had been intended to play. Here was the kidnapper—a prisoner!

"Amazing!" said Sir Peter. "I had no knowledge of a secret door into this room—none whatever! Did you know anything of it, Jasmond?"

"Nothing!" gasped the butler.

"There is a legend that an ancient lord of Reynham was slain in this apartment, and that the murderer escaped, though the doors were locked and barred," said Sir Peter. "Evidently that secret door was known in the old days—and someone has discovered the secret since to make this use of it. You knew nothing of this, Rupert?"

Captain Reynham turned round from the secret doorway. If he had had a shock, as Johnny Bull strongly suspected, he had recovered—and his manner was as cool and nonchalant as usual. "Quite a surprise to me," he drawled. "Who would have thought it?"

"Someone, certainly, must have made

the discovery, and passed on the knowledge to this rascal!" said Sir Peter. "It is proof, if one were needed, that he has a confederate in this household. Only some inmate of the castle could possibly have made such a discovery."

"Really, it almost looks like it!" said the captain with a nod. "Perhaps the good man will tell us how he came by the knowledge!" He fixed his eyes on the Smiler's scowling face. "Now your game is up, my good fellow—you may as well make a clean breast of it!" he went on. "How did you find out about this secret door into Lord Reynham's room?"

"Answer!" rapped the baronet.

"Find out!" snarled the Smiler.

"If you have a confederate in this household," said the captain, sternly, "you may as well name him. It may make things easier for you."

The Smiler looked at him, a strange gleam in his eyes.

"I ain't saying anything!" he grunted.

"Well, we have you safe enough, at all events," said Captain Reynham. "I suggest, uncle, that this man should be safely locked up for the night, and the police informed. They can get here early in the morning to take charge of him. I will myself sit up till dawn and keep guard over him."

"Mr. Tomlinson will take charge of the man, Rupert!" said Sir Peter.

"Now that my cousin William's enemy has been taken, I am rather unwilling to lose sight of him, until he has been handed over to the police," said Captain Reynham. "If Mr. Tomlinson takes charge of him, I will share his watch—we cannot make too sure of him."

"Very well, if you wish, Rupert."

Johnny Bull drew a deep breath.

He had been wondering whether Captain Reynham would make any suggestion of that kind. Now he had made it.

But he said nothing.

"Where is William?" asked Sir Peter, glancing round. "Surely William has not remained asleep during all this disturbance?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"He's a pretty good sleeper, sir!" he answered. "He hasn't woke up!"

Sir Peter Lanchester smiled.

"Well, well, if that is the case, there is no need to disturb him," he said. "Mr. Tomlinson—Rupert—take that man away!"

The Smiler was led out of the room, walking with a scowling face between the captain and the detective.

Sir Peter crossed over to the secret door and examined it with much surprise and interest.

"You never knew anything about that, sir?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Nothing!" said Sir Peter. "It's existence might have been guessed, from the old legend of the castle, however. To-morrow those recesses shall be explored—Mr. Tomlinson may find some clue that might be useful to him."

The juniors smiled. They had already made up their minds that they were going to explore the secret passage behind the wall of the King's Room, on the morrow.

"There is a bolt on the inner side," said Sir Peter, scanning it. "Recently oiled, as you see. There appears to be no other fastening." He pushed the heavy picture frame into its place, it closed without a sound. "Perhaps you had better place some heavy article of furniture against it, for the rest of the night—it cannot be fastened on this side. My dear boys, I do not quite know how to thank you for the service you have rendered."

Sir Peter beamed at the juniors.

"I admit," he added, "that I was a— a little disconcerted, when William proposed to bring his Greyfriars friends here—in the circumstances—but it has turned out very fortunately. Very fortunately indeed. We now have the leader of the gang in our hands—and I have little doubt that once he is in the hands of the police, his accomplices will be found, and my ward secured from danger at last. I thank you, my boys—I thank you most heartily for this great service."

And Sir Peter left the juniors to themselves.

He was feeling very pleased with them: and they were feeling very

"Well, if Bunter had woke up, he would have been scared more than any of us. He would very likely have cleared out of the castle—at least, he would have changed his rooms, and they'd have had no more chance of getting at him by the secret passage."

"I suppose so! But—"

"So it didn't suit them for him to wake up!" said Johnny.

"I suppose they banked on the fat ass being a heavy sleeper," said Bob.

"They'd know that much about him."

"They couldn't have banked on us not waking him up. They had to be certain that he slept through it."

"How could they be, fathead?"

"They had to be, or the whole game

result of the shaking. He showed no signs of waking up.

"Good heavens!" breathed Harry.

"Look here, we've got to make sure about this!" said Nugent. "Roll him out of bed! That will wake even Bunter, if—"

"It won't—this time!" said Johnny Bull calmly.

Johnny was right. It did not. For five minutes the juniors tried to wake Bunter—and failed. He was in a deep, and evidently drugged, sleep, from which it was impossible to awaken him. They left him at last, and as his fat head rested on the pillow again, he snored.

GROANS for CHRISTMAS!

THE MOANING MONK. (Ghost to Greyfriars School, by appointment): "Christmas is a snare and a delusion. I'm a hard-working ghost, anxious to earn my living—or non-living—by haunting as many people as the Ghosts' Trade Union permits. Yet what happens? Just as I'm ready to put in a good night's haunt, the boys break up for Christmas, and I'm reduced to haunting Master Fish, who spends his holidays at the school."

"Mind you, I haunt Master Fish very thoroughly. Indeed, I keep his hair permanently on end during the Christmas vac. But it is a waste of talent."

It is small satisfaction to me to drive Master Fish nightly up the nearest chimney when I might be spreading dismay and terror through an entire school. I feel that my moans are of really first-class quality. Let me give you a sample moan—there's no charge—" (But I left hurriedly at this point.)

THE RED EARL. (Ghost of Maulverer Towers): "Speak not to me of Christmas, thou scurvy malapert. I could a tale unfold whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul, were I not infringing the copyright of Hamlet's ghost—the varlet! Ha, ha! So that scurvy Monk would groan at driving one pestilent numbskull up the chimney! What would he say to a job like mine?"

"Grammercy, sir, I tell thee this. He should try haunting a lord who could sleep peacefully through the veriest

Our Special Reporter has the fearful job of finding out what ghosts think of the Festive Season.

earthquake. Time after time, beshrew me, have I roared myself hoarse by the rogue's bed. I have haunted him so terribly that, odd's my life, I've frightened myself and fled in terror. And not an eyelid, sir, has the fool batted. He might have been sleeping in a hammock beneath the whispering trees for all the notice he took of me. Beshrew me, it's wearing me to a shade!"

OUTSIZED OSWALD. (The awe-inspiring spectre of Bunter Court): "I say, you fellows, Christmas is awful. It's the worst time of the year. It's all very well for these Moaning Monks and Red Earls to grouse, but they don't know what hardship means."

"I first became a ghost one Christmas when I thought I had room for just one more mince pie. I crammed it in and burst on the spot. Well, as soon as I was a ghost, I started haunting the kitchen. Most Bunters do that without waiting to become ghosts."

"The agony is fearful. You see, old fellow, ghosts can't eat, and to see all those turkeys, puddings and pies simply asking to be wolfed is more than flesh

and blood can bear—or ghosts, either. I have to watch Billy and the others shovelling the stuff away, and I can't get so much as a mouthful. I'm sure it will be the death of me."

"By the way, old fellow, did you say you have five bob you don't want? I'm expecting a ghostly postal order in the morning. Don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you—**BEAST!**"

AWFUL ALGERNON. (The blood-curdling phantom of Popper Court): "Don't talk to me of Christmas, sir. Dashed impudence. I know you, boy—I saw you pulling down one of Sir Hilton Popper's 'Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted' boards. Don't blame you, either. Last Christmas, after I'd haunted him, he put a 'Ghosts Will Be Prosecuted' board on his bed-room door."

"Gad, sir, I'm fed up with haunting Sir Hilton at Christmas-time. He believes in looking on the wine when it's red—looks pretty hard, too. Consequence is, he takes things like me as a matter of course. The room being full of spotted eagles, he doesn't notice a mere ghost. Good mind to resign, sir, and haunt a temperance hotel—only I'd have to sign the pledge, and that's a thing no Popper would ever do!"

And if Sir Hilton Popper sees this, the next ghost to be interviewed will be Terrible Tom Brown, the Phantom Reporter, slain by a Bad Baronet!

pleased with themselves, as they went back to the bed-room where Bunter was still snoring.

"By gum! He can sleep!" said Bob, grinning at the fat Owl in the canopied bed. "Fancy even Bunter not waking up with all that row going on."

Johnny Bull stood by the fat Owl's bedside and looked hard and keenly at Bunter's sleeping face. Then he looked at his friends.

"Bunter didn't wake up last night," he said quietly, "and he's not woke up to-night. If he had woke up it would have spoiled the game of those rotters."

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Look at it!" said Johnny, in the same quiet tone. "That ghost business was meant to scare us away and leave Bunter unprotected. It can't have had any other object."

"That's so. but—"

was no good," answered Johnny Bull stolidly. "So they made sure of it. Bunter's been drugged!"

"Drugged?" gasped Bob.

"He was drugged last night, and he was drugged again to-night," said Johnny. "It won't hurt him. He woke up all right this morning, and he will wake up all right to-morrow morning. They're kidnappers, not murderers. But you couldn't wake him now, at any price."

The Co. looked at Johnny, with startled faces. Then Bob Cherry stepped to the canopied bed, grasped the sleeping Owl by the shoulder, and shook him.

Bunter's eyes did not open.

Shake, shake, shake!

"Gurrrrrgh!"

The fat junior's snore changed to a stertorous grunt. But that was the only

"By gum!" said Bob. "This is awfully thick! He's drugged!"

"The drugfulness is terrific!"

"But who—" said Nugent.

"The leader of the gang—the man in the castle—the man I heard talking to the Smiler in the fog!" said Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton looked steadily at the Yorkshire junior.

"I don't quite make this out!" he said slowly. "It seems to me, Johnny, that you know something you haven't told us."

"I think I do," assented Johnny, "but I've got to be sure. I think there will be proof in the morning, and then I'll jaw fast enough."

"How do you mean?"

"If the Smiler is gone in the morning I shall be sure!"

"Fathead! How could he get away,

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with the handcuffs on him, and Tomlinson and Captain Reynham watching him?"

"Well, we shall know in the morning!" said Johnny Bull enigmatically. "If the Smiler is still here, safe for the police to take him away, I've made a mistake, and the least said the soonest mended. If he's gone, I shall know where to put my finger on the scoundrel who is after Lord Reynham, and I'll jaw as much as you like. Now I'm going to bed."

And Johnny Bull went to bed, and his puzzled and perplexed comrades followed his example.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Gone!

BOXING DAY dawned frosty and bright.

Harry Wharton & Co. were up early that morning, regardless of the fact that they had missed a great deal of sleep the previous night.

Billy Bunter was still fast asleep when they went down, but James and a footman were left in attendance, as usual, to watch over his fat lordship till it pleased him to wake.

Neither Sir Peter nor the captain was to be seen when the Famous Five went down. The portly Jasmond presided over breakfast, in the breakfast-room overlooking the snowy terrace.

"They haven't come for that kidnapping sportsman yet, Jasmond?" asked Bob Cherry.

"No, sir. I understand that Sir Peter intends to telephone to the police station at Castlewood as soon as he comes down," answered the butler. "The master is not down yet."

"Man still safe—what?" asked Bob, with a wink at the Co.

Johnny Bull's extraordinary suspicion that the prisoner might be gone in the morning rather amused Bob.

"Eh? Yes. I presume so, sir!" answered Jasmond. "He was placed in the gun-room, and Mr. Tomlinson, I understand, remained the whole night with him, and is still there."

"And Captain Reynham, too?"

"No, sir; I think Captain Reynham went to bed, after all; his breakfast has been taken up to his room," answered Jasmond.

Four members of the Co. smiled. Rupert Reynham had seemed very keen to keep a watchful eye on the captured kidnapper; but it seemed that he had soon got fed-up with it, and left it to Tomlinson.

But Johnny did not smile. He looked very thoughtful.

Having finished breakfast, the Famous Five went out into the hall.

Harry Wharton glanced at Johnny Bull's thoughtful face with a faint smile.

"Now——" he said.

"What about going and waking him up?" asked Johnny.

"Bunter? Why?"

"No; not Bunter."

"Who, then?" asked Harry, staring.

"Tomlinson!"

"Are you trying to be funny, or what?" asked Bob Cherry. "Do you fancy that a detective went to sleep, with a dangerous prisoner to guard?"

"Yes."

"Then you're a silly ass!" said Bob. "Look here, what is it you've got in your fat head, Johnny? You're too jolly mysterious."

"The mysteriousness is truly terrific!" said Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh, turning his dark eyes in wonder on the Yorkshire junior.

"Look here, Johnny——" began Harry.

"I told you," said Johnny stolidly, "that if that sportsman got away I should have something to tell you. Let's go and see."

"Tomlinson is there. Jasmond said so."

"What's the good of that, if he's asleep?"

"But he isn't, fathead, and can't be."

"Why not?" asked Johnny. "Bunter was made to sleep pretty sound last night. Why not Tomlinson?"

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry, startled.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's the old bean!" murmured Bob, as Sir Peter Lanchester came down the staircase.

The old baronet greeted the juniors with a kind and cheery smile. He was evidently in great spirits that morning. The capture of the kidnapper had been an immense relief to him. He beamed on the Greyfriars chums.

"I am now about to ring up the police station," he said. "You boys will be required to make a statement when the police arrive for that scoundrel. Please do not be too far away."

"Hadn't you better give him a look-in, sir, before you phone?" asked Johnny Bull. "If he happened to have got away——"

Sir Peter laughed.

"That is very unlikely," he said. "My nephew tells me that he remained with him till three in the morning, and when he went to bed Mr. Tomlinson remained on the watch. He is still with him, my boy."

"Johnny thinks he may have bolted in the night, sir!" said Bob, grinning.

"Impossible!" said Sir Peter. "However, I will certainly go and make sure that he is safe."

The old gentleman walked away to the gun-room, and Johnny Bull followed him. The other fellows followed Johnny, smiling a little. The idea that a handcuffed man, watched by a detective, could have escaped, seemed to them too absurd to be entertained.

Sir Peter opened the door of the gun-room and stepped in.

The next moment the cheery smile was wiped from his ruddy face, as if by a duster. He uttered almost a roar of surprise and rage.

"Gone!"

"What?" gasped Harry Wharton.

The Famous Five fairly leaped into the room after the old baronet. The gun-room had one occupant. That was Mr. Tomlinson, sprawling in a deep armchair, fast asleep.

A window was open—snowflakes drifting in on the wind. That told the way the Smiler had gone. But of the Smiler there was no sign.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Johnny Bull Surprises the Co.!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. walked under the leafless, frost-rimed branches in the park.

Light snowflakes whirled on the wind, and fell around them. Johnny Bull walked in silence, and his friends waited for him to speak. What Johnny had to say, he meant to say out of reach of possible listening ears.

They had left Sir Peter in the gun-room—shaking the startled Mr. Tomlinson into wakefulness. The old baronet had been very angry and excited, which was not surprising, and the detective absolutely overwhelmed with confusion and dismay. If he had, as Johnny had hinted, been drugged, like Bunter, the effect had worn off. He awakened when Sir Peter shook him. The juniors, unwilling to witness his humiliation, left at once—not envying the hapless detective what he was going to hear from Sir Peter.

Four members of the Co. were puzzled and perplexed. What Johnny Bull knew, they could not guess; but it was clear that he knew something. They were eager to hear what it was.

"Cough it up, old bean!" said Harry, as they entered the frosty park. "Nobody here to listen, if that's what you're thinking of."

"Just that!" said Johnny. He glanced round, scanning the snow among the frosty trunks, and seemed satisfied. "All right! I've found out who's the nigger in the wood pile—the man behind this kidnapping business. Now I know who he is, I know why, too! I couldn't be sure till——"

"Till you found that the Smiler had got away," said Harry. "Yes, you said so. But I don't see——"

"Blessed if I do, either!" said Bob. "If poor old Tomlinson was drugged, as Bunter seems to have been, he doesn't know it—and I'm dashed if I can see how he was got at! Captain Reynham was with him, too, up to three o'clock, from what old Peter says. So it must have been after that. But how?"

"Before that!" said Johnny.

"Fathead! Think somebody got at Tomlinson while the captain was sitting with him in the gun-room?"

"Yes!"

"Well, that beats it!" said Bob. "You're dreaming, old man! Think the captain would have left him going off to sleep?" He laughed. "Do you really think that a drug could have been shoved at Tomlinson without his knowing, and under Captain Reynham's eyes?"

"He may have smoked a cigarette with the captain," said Johnny Bull calmly. "There was a cigarette-end in the ashtray at his elbow."

"I dare say he did—why shouldn't he?" said Bob. "What the thumping dickens are you driving at, Johnny Bull? Can't you keep to the subject?"

"Keeping to it, old bean," answered Johnny.

"Seems to me you're talking out of the back of your neck," said Bob rather crossly. "Tomlinson went off to sleep—but it's practically impossible for him to be got at with a drug. I'm blessed if I understand how Bunter was got at, either, if you come to that. We eat and drink the same as he does, though not so much—and they've never got at us!"

"That beats me," said Harry slowly. "If they could drug Bunter, why couldn't they play the same game on us? Then they needn't have played that ghost business to scare us away—they simply had to put us to sleep, and walk Bunter off under our noses by the secret passage."

"The tricky blighter couldn't get at us as he did at Bunter!" answered Johnny Bull.

"Why not?"

"We don't smoke!"

That reply caused Johnny's companions to come to a sudden halt, stand round him, and stare at him. If Johnny had suddenly turned into a griffin, they could not have stared at him harder.

There was a long moment of silence. The captain of the Remove broke it.

"What do you mean?"

"What I say!" answered Johnny Bull. "We don't smoke! If we did, we should have been served with drugged cigarettes, sent to sleep, and Bunter would have been walked off."

"Drugged cigarettes?" gasped Nugent.

"Yes. As we declined the jolly old smokes, the only thing was to take advantage of Bunter being a silly ass, let him smoke one, and send him to sleep, and spring the ghost business on us."

"It was Captain Reynham who gave Bunter a cigarette," said Harry Wharton, in a low, tense voice.

"I know!"

"You don't mean—you can't mean that—"

"I do!"

"Johnny!" gasped Nugent.

"Potty?" inquired Bob Cherry.

Johnny Bull smiled faintly. He had astonished his friends—or, rather, he had astounded them. They looked at him as if they fancied that he was wandering in his mind.

"Unless you're potty, old man, you've spotted something," said Harry, at last. "Cough it all up, for goodness' sake."

"You remember the evening I came, what happened in the fog on the drive. Talking in the hall, Bob mentioned that Captain Reynham was a tall man, and had been out at the time—"

"That was a joke, you fathead!" exclaimed Bob. "Just a joke, because it would put the captain on Bunter's list, if—"

"I know! But it made me think of something," said Johnny. "The captain's voice seemed familiar to me, as if I'd heard it before—though I'd never seen him. That remark of yours, Bob, put it in my mind where and when I'd heard it."

"Not—" breathed Nugent.

"Talking to the Smiler in the fog!" said Johnny, with a nod. "He was the sportsman who bumped into me, and who I knocked over."

"You—you think—"

"I know—now!" said Johnny stolidly. "Up in Yorkshire we don't jaw till we know a thing for certain. I had to be sure before I jawed—a thing like this is too jolly serious for idle chatter."

"I should think so!" breathed Harry.

"Hearing a voice once, and in the fog, too," said Bob, "you couldn't be sure—you couldn't possibly—"

"Haven't I said so? I banked it in the back of my mind, meaning to make sure before I opened my mouth too wide."

"Are you telling us that you've made sure that Captain Reynham, nephew of our host here, is a dastardly villain in league with kidnappers?" breathed Wharton.

"Yes!"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob. "I fancy old Peter would want a lot of proof before he swallowed that! Dream again, old man!"

"Let us hear the esteemed rest, my excellent Johnny!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "There is some morefulness to come."

"Lots!" said Johnny Bull. "I wasn't sure, as I said, only wary! I had my eye on the captain. That was all. It might have been a similar voice I heard

in the fog. Still, there was something to go on. From what he said, he was clearly one of the household—he was tall—and he was out of the house at the time—all these details apply to Rupert Reynham, as well as the man in the fog. But—it seemed fearfully thick—"

"It did—and does!" said Bob.

"If I'd been sure, I should have known why he gave Bunter cigarettes. I simply thought, like you fellows, that he was rather a blackguardly, careless ass to offer cigarettes to schoolboys. But when we found out last night that the fat ass was drugged, I guessed. I knew he was drugged before we looked at him—the row we had made scrapping with that brute would have awakened Rip van Winkle. I knew he was drugged—and knew why."

"Yes, but—"

"He would have preferred to give us the dose—but we weren't taking any. So Bunter was sent to sleep, while they put up the spectre game to frighten us. It was in that cigarette. He couldn't get at the food—how could he? Dozens of servants about—and a man in his position trying to mess about with the grub! The cigarette did it."

"It's only suspicion—"

"Is it?" said Johnny. "When they came to the King's Room last night, I waited for the captain to suggest that he should take charge of the Smiler—his pal. He did!"

"Oh!"

"Old Peter put it up to Tomlinson, and Rupert had to stand for it. But it didn't worry him a lot," added Johnny sarcastically. "He sat up with Tomlinson in the gun-room, and they smoked a cigarette in company. He left him at three, to be safely off the scene when the Smiler cleared—knowing that Tomlinson would be fast asleep. I fancy he came back later, and helped his pal to get clear of the handcuffs, before he dropped from the window, too. Tomlinson was fast asleep then, of course."

"Oh!"

"I knew, or as good as knew, that the Smiler would be gone this morning," said Johnny. "I left it at that, for proof. I knew that if he were gone, the captain must have shut Tomlinson's eyes somehow. Easy enough to offer him a cigarette—same as Bunter. Tomlinson did smoke a cigarette—one of the captain's—"

"I noticed the fag-end in the ash-tray at his elbow," said Harry slowly. "But you can't tell that it was one of the captain's."

"I can," said Johnny calmly. "I looked at it. It was the same brand as the one he gave Bunter."

"Oh!"

"Now," said Johnny quietly, "I've told you. Now run over in your minds the times Bunter has been in danger here. What was the captain doing at the time? From what you've told me, they nearly had him on Christmas Eve morning, out riding on the downs. Who left him alone there?"

"Captain Reynham," said Harry, in a low voice.

"You've mentioned that last week they nearly had him on the Castlewood road—after a car broke down, and you had to walk. Whose car was it?"

"Captain Reynham's," repeated Harry.

"Who told us the ghost story the night the ghost walked for the first time?"

"Captain Reynham."

"He's the man!" said Johnny. "The man in the fog told the Smiler there might be a way of getting rid of Bunter's friends. The same night, the

captain spun us the ghost story—and then the ghost walked. If we'd helped ourselves to his smokes, it would have saved him a lot of trouble. Lucky we're not jolly old men of the world like Bunter!"

"But—" gasped Bob. "If—if—if—you're right—my dear chap, he's young Lord Reynham's own cousin—his only near relation."

"That's why!"

"Eh?"

"He will step into the whole bag of tricks if anything happens to Lord Reynham!"

"Oh!" gasped Bob.

"It beat me," went on Johnny, "why crooks who tried to kidnap a kid of eleven should keep up the game years on end—it couldn't be for ransom! They wouldn't and couldn't stick to it for years for a reason like that. But the next man on the list for the earldom had a good reason for sticking to it. I'll bet you Tomlinson has thought of that. Any detective would. He hasn't said so to old Peter—he couldn't—but I'll bet that he advised leaving the captain out of the secret—letting him believe, like all the rest, that Bunter was the real lord."

"But—" Harry Wharton gasped. "Johnny, old man, do you know what you're saying? Kidnapping wouldn't do the trick. The next heir couldn't step in, unless Lord Reynham was dead!"

"I know that. But he isn't villain enough for that!" said Johnny Bull. "He's a discontented, hard-up son of a younger son; but he's not an awful villain. I think very likely he doesn't think himself a villain at all. Our beautiful laws give landed property to the eldest son—it's law, but it's no good calling it fair play, because it isn't! I imagine that a lot of younger sons feel anything but brotherly when their eldest brother walks off with all the boodle, and leaves them without a bean."

"Well, yes; but—"

"There's a big property, and it all goes to young Lord Reynham. Rupert gets next to nothing. I fancy he's brooded over it till he's worked it out in his own mind that, if the law won't give him his share of the family loot, he's going to help himself, if he can! That means that he's a reckless, discontented, unscrupulous adventurer! But knocking his cousin on the head would be a horse of another colour! So he banked on kidnapping—and if young Lord Reynham ever falls into the hands of that gang, he will disappear—and never be heard of again!"

"But—"

"After a time, death would be legally presumed, if the chap never showed up again, of course. Or they might fix up evidence of something of the kind—spoof evidence—which would be good enough if the young lord was never seen again. And you can bet that they've a safe place ready to park him in if they get him. When they had hold of Bunter, thinking he was the young lord, they let out that he was to be taken across the sea!"

The juniors stood silent, heedless of the snowflakes falling round them. Johnny had given them a shock.

It was a new idea to their minds; but now that it was there, a crowd of little circumstances cropped up in their minds that gave more and more colour to it.

There was a long silence.

Johnny Bull broke it.

"That's the lot!" he said. "I couldn't speak out till I was sure—I'm sure now. The captain put that gang
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after young Reynham when he was a little kid—and when he was abroad, himself, clear of suspicion of anything that happened. Old Peter beat them by parking the kid at a school somewhere under an assumed name. They spotted that trick—lately. It's only lately that Captain Reynham came home—and he found that much out. Lucky for the poor kid that he never found out more—or they'd be after the real lord instead of that fat ass Bunter. What do you fellows think about it?"

"Blessed if I know what to think!" said Harry.

"Same here!" said Bob.

"The samefulness is terrific!"

"Leave it at that," said Johnny.

"No good saying anything, anyhow. All we can do, so far, is to carry on—watching over Lord Bunter. But we know whom to watch now—and if we can catch him on the hop, old Peter's ward will be safe from him. That's what we want. Leave it at that!"

The juniors walked back in silence to the castle.

Johnny Bull had no doubt—but his friends, though they, too, had little doubt, could not quite make up their minds to it. In fact, they hardly knew what to think—but they had, at all events, plenty of food for thought!

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Bunter Knows!

"**I** SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter was down when the juniors came in. He seemed to be waiting for them. He frowned at them impatiently over his big spectacles.

"I wish you fellows wouldn't go marching off when I want to speak to you!" said Bunter irritably.

"Did you want to speak to us?" asked Bob mildly. "If we'd only known!"

"You wouldn't have gone out, I suppose?"

"Wrong! We shouldn't have come in!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Cherry! Look here, you fellows. I've jolly well found something out—I fancy I've spotted the man!" said Bunter, sinking his voice to a mysterious whisper. "The confederate of those rotters in the castle, you know!"

"What?"

The Famous Five stared at Bunter, startled.

Bunter nodded.

"They've been telling me about what happened last night," he explained. "I think you fellows might have woke me up. But never mind that. You got that villain, the Smiler, and he got away again. I suppose you've heard?"

"Sort of," agreed Bob.

"Well, that settles it!" said Bunter. "His confederate here helped him to get away, of course—and I jolly well know who it was, too! Think I'd better tell old Peter?"

The Famous Five gazed at Bunter.

Johnny Bull had, or believed that he had, spotted the man; and his chums had little doubt that he was right. But they certainly had never dreamed of Bunter spotting the man. They gazed at him—and Mr. Tomlinson, looking out of the doorway of the smoke-room, gazed at him, too.

Bunter, as he stood facing the surprised five in the hall, had his back to the door of the smoke-room, and did not observe Sir Peter's detective looking out.

Mr. Tomlinson had a view of the back of Bunter's fat head. He stared at it, evidently surprised by the fat Owl's words.

"You see, the awful rotter's pulling old Peter's leg!" went on Bunter. "Taking his pay, you know, and pulling his leg all the time!"

"Oh!" ejaculated Harry.

And he smiled! Bunter evidently had been thinking it out, and was satisfied that he had made a discovery.

But from his words, it was clear that his discovery was not the same as Johnny Bull's.

The fat Owl's suspicions were fixed upon some person who was taking Sir Peter's pay—evidently someone employed in the castle.

Of what they knew, or believed that they knew, the Famous Five had resolved to say nothing. They had no proof to offer; and obviously Sir Peter Lanchester would have required the clearest and strongest proof to convince him that his nephew was the secret plotter against the young lord. It was a case where the least said was the soonest mended—until actual proof transpired.

So, in the circumstances, it was rather a relief to find that Billy Bunter had not come to the same conclusion. Evidently he hadn't.

"Who's the jolly old sportsman, then?" asked Bob Cherry, with a grin.

"I should have thought you fellows would have guessed!" grinned Bunter.

"But, of course, you haven't my brains! Clear enough to me! That man Smiler was snaffled last night—well, who was left to guard him in the gun-room?"

"Mr. Tomlinson and Captain Reynham! But what—"

"Well, the captain went off to bed, and left Tomlinson alone with him," said Bunter. "Old Peter believes that Tomlinson went off to sleep—"

"So he did!"

"He, he, he! Old Peter's been ragging him for going to sleep and letting the man get away!" grinned Bunter. "Of course, he never really went to sleep."

"What?"

"Spoof, of course!" said Bunter.

"He's the man!"

"He—he—he's the man!" gasped Harry Wharton.

Bunter grinned and nodded. Behind him, quite an extraordinary expression was coming over the face of Mr. Tomlinson. As the Famous Five were facing him, they could see him, though Bunter couldn't—having, of course, no eyes in the back of his fat head!

Mr. Tomlinson's look was quite alarming!

"Tomlinson's the man!" said Bunter. "Shut up, you ass!" gasped Nugent.

"Tomlinson—"

"Shan't!" said Bunter.

"I tell you, Tomlinson—"

"He's the man—taking old Peter's pay, you know, and accomplices—I mean, confederating—with the kidnappers all the time," said Bunter. "Letting that man Smiler go is proof of it! You fellows would never have guessed that."

"No fear!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Look out, you fat ass—oh crumbs—look out!"

"Eh? Look out for what?" asked Bunter. "Wharrior you mean? Now, what I want to ask you fellows is, do you think I'd better go to old Peter, and say—whoop! Yarooooop! Whoop! Who's that? What—yaroooooop!"

Billy Bunter roared as a sudden grasp was laid on him from behind.

Mr. Tomlinson, with a face red with wrath, had made a jump out of the doorway of the smoke-room!

Bunter's remarks seemed to have annoyed the detective. Perhaps that was not surprising.

Mr. Tomlinson had never treated Bunter with the respect due to a noble lord; perhaps because he knew that he wasn't one! But now he treated him less respectfully than ever.

He grabbed Bunter with his left hand and spun him across a chair. His right hand rose, and descended in a series of terrific smacks on his lordship's lordly trousers.

Smack, smack, smack, smack!

"Yarooooop!" roared Bunter. "I say, you fellows—yoo—hooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Smack, smack, smack!

"Yow-ow-ow-ow! Help! I say—yarooooop!" yelled Bunter. "Leggo, you beast! Yow-ow! Oh crikey!"

Smack, smack, smack!

"Whooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Two or three startled servants came running into the hall; and Mr. Tomlinson, releasing Bunter, stalked back into the smoke-room. Bunter was left yelling.

"Ow! Wow! I say, you fellows—yarooooop!" roared Lord Bunter. "I'll have him sacked—I'll have him booted out of my castle—I'll—yoo-hoo-hooooop!"

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

"Beasts! I say—wow! Wow! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was quite a roar in the stately hall of Reynham Castle. Harry Wharton & Co. roared with laughter. Billy Bunter roared—not with laughter! But he roared the loudest! Indeed, just then, the Bull of Bashan, famed for his roaring, had nothing on Lord Bunter—not a thing!

THE END.

(The final story in this splendid Christmas series is better than ever, chums. It's entitled: "LORD BUNTER'S BODYGUARD!" Watch out for it next THURSDAY!)

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BIRCHEMALL AT BAY!

Another Rollicking Instalment of Dicky Nugent's Great Xmas Serial;
"THE MYSTERY OF JOLLY LODGE!"

III.

Mrs. Duff, the cook at Jolly Lodge, stood in the doorway of her kitchen, with her arms akimbo. She dropped a curtsey, then lifted up her voice.

"Beg parding, but would anyone like to stir the pooding for luck?" she bawled up the stairs in her rich and fruity voice.

As if in answer to her invitation, there was a deafening clatter of footprints down the stairs. It was accompanied by frenzied yells and wringing war-woops.

Mrs. Duff was not aware that it was the Rajah of Bhang, chasing Doctor Birchermall in the belief that he had taken his diamond tie-pin. At the sound of the clattering footprints she beamed all over her fair, though fatty features.

"Lawks-a-mussy! What a rush, they're in, to be sure!" she cried. "They must be looking forward—"

Then the cook broke off with a shriek.

Evidently, Doctor Birchermall at all events was not looking forward, for he came galloping round from the stairs as if he saw nothing in his path.

Biff! Thud! Wallop!
"Ow-ow-ow! Save us!"
"Yarooooo! Help!"

When she invited the guests of Jolly Lodge down to stir the pooding, Mrs. Duff had been looking forward to a good mix-up; but she got a bigger mix-up than she had expected when the Head biffed her backwards into the kitchen and brought down a projecting tray-load of washing-up from the dresser at the same time!

Cups and saucers, plates and dishes crashed down on to the pair, as they collapsed on the floor. There was the very dickens of a din for a few seconds. And then there came a different kind of din, as the Rajah of Bhang reached the doorway and uttered a piercing war-cry. The dusky Oriental flurried his wife and performed a dance of triumph when he saw that he had Doctor Birchermall at his mercy.

"Har, har!" he cried. "Now you give back my so-bewtiful tie-pin!"

"Help! Perlice!" roared the Head. "Keepimoff! Yooooop!"

Doctor Birchermall jumped to his feet with a wild howl, and leaped across the kitchen like a kangaroo, as the rajah hopped into the kitchen. As for Mrs. Duff, she gave one shriek, then went off into a faint.

Fortunately, General Jolly arrived in time to prevent his eggasted guest from doing any dammdage.

"Jentlemen! Jentlemen! What on earth are you doing of?" he cried, his refined voice rising to a note of shocked surprize. "Rajah, I must request you to hand me that nife at once!"

"But my so-bewtiful diamond tie-pin—"

"Tiepin or no tiepin, I allow no man to flurrish a nife like yours in Jolly Lodge—on Christmas Day above all days! Eggseuse me, rajah, for being blunt—but that nife looks a lot too sharp!"

Such cutting words, coming from a gentleman of General Jolly's stamp, projooiced an emmejate effect even on the irate rajah. He came to a stop and boughed.

"Thowsand pardons, my dear general!" he cried. "I forget myself in my terrifick anxiousness!"

He handed over the nife without further argement. And Doctor Birchermall leaned back against the kitchen table, breathing sighs of relief and mopping his fevered brow, while the cook came out of her feint again.

Jack Jolly & Co. hawled her to her feet.

"Feeling all right, cook?" asked Jolly, as they deposited her in a chair.

"Right as ninepence, thankee kindly, Master Jack, so long as no furrin jentlemen go gallivantin' about with their daggers in my kitchen!" answered Mrs. Duff. "Now, what about all givin' the pooding mixture a stir for luck?"

"A good idea, by gad!" cried General Jolly, who was anxious to pore oil on troubled waters. "Will you go first, rajah?"

"To please you, general, I do it—but I think more of diamond tiepin than Christmas pooding!" sighed the rajah.

With these words he seized a wooden spoon which was lying on the table and dipped it into the pooding mixture.

He found his task a somewhat meenial one. To go in for a dig at pooding-mixture seemed infra dig to him, and after a couple of meer jabs at it he passed the spoon to General Jolly, who stirred it with military zest.

Jack Jolly & Co. then took it in turns to have a stir, and after them came Doctor Birchermall.

The Head almost caused a disaster. He was too nervuss of the rajah to pay much attention to the pooding, and the first mistake he made was to dip his beard into the mixture. Only when he started stirring vigorously and got his face tunguss tangled up round his spoon did he realise what he had done, and by that time his beard had received a tugging that almost wrenched it from its roots.

"I refuse!" he cried. "I never took that tiepin, I tell you, and I

"Woooooop!" shrieked Doctor Birchermall.

He almost carried the pooding mixture away with him as he jumped back. Luckily, however, Mrs. Duff saw the danger, and with a litening-like movement detached it from the Head's whiskers in the nick of time.

"Bravvo, cook!" larfed Jack Jolly. And there was a cheer from the rest of the Co.

"And now to return to the subject of the tiepin!" said General Jolly, as they quitted the kitchen and tramped up the stairs again. "The tiepin must be found by hook or by crook!"

"Perhaps it has been found by

refuse to be searched like a low, common—ow-ow! Lemme alone!"

The Head's protests ended in a feendish howl as the rajah, his patience eggshasted, made a gat-like spring. Doctor Birchermall was bowled over like a ninepin, and the rajah, with a look of grim determination on his dial, prosceded to sit on his chest to keep him cawn while he made his search.

The next moment it was the rajah's turn to yell. As he sat on the Head's beard he felt this anattermy pierced by something sharp and pointed, and the rajah leaped up as though he had been electrified, clutching madly at the seat of his trowsis.

He eggstracted the instrument that had stabbed him and egg-samined it closely, and then a shout escaped his lips.

"The pin of my tiepin! BUT THE DIAMOND IS MISSIN!"

IV.

Every eye was turned on the Head.

The rajah's announcement had come like a bombshell!

That Doctor Birchermall was several sorts of a raskal, most of them would have been inclined to agree, but nobody apart from the Rajah of Bhang had seriously considered him capable of theering.

Yet what else were they to think now?

The Head was the only man who was known to have gone to the rajah's bed-room during the nite.

The fact that he had gone at General Jolly's rekwest in the guise of Father Christmas did not prove him innersent. He had been the only known caller on the rajah, right enuff, and now the pin of the missing article had been found consealed in his whiskers—minus the diamond!

Small wonder that the crowd in the rajah's bed-room gazed at Doctor Birchermall with something akin to horror in their eyes.

"Gad, sir!" cried General Jolly, uneezily. "What have you to say about this?"

"Only that I am innersent!" was the Head's wringing reply. "I never snoaked that sparkler—er, as the vulgar mite put it, I repudiate the insinuation that I misappropiated that article of jewelry! Someone must have put the pin in my whiskers to put you off the scent!"

"A likely story!" skuffed the rajah. "Where you put the diamond, har? Tell quickly, before I send for perlice!"

The culler faded from the Head's face.

"P-p-perlice!" he stuttered. "Surely you are not going to send

for the perlice? Let's wait and get our Christmas dinner over first!"

But the rajah had made up his mind, and he hurried down the stairs to the tellyfone in the hall.

Doctor Birchermall waited only long enuff to hear him start speaking to the perlice-station.

From that moment his manner underwent a startling change. Instead of cowering and cringing and wining and fawning, he started sticking up for himself in no uncertain way.

"Very well, then, rajah!" he said, between his tightly clenched false teeth. "Send for the splits! Do your worst! I shall fight them to the last ditch! 'Defiance' not 'Defence' is my motter from now on!"

There was a gasp from his lisseners.

"Grate gad! Do you mean that you will resist arrest?" asked General Jolly.

The Head grinned and nodded.

"Yes, rather! I'll resist till the bitter end—and I bet I shall give 'em a run for their munny, too! Stand aside!"

Instinctively they parted to make way for him. There was a yell from the rajah, who had just replaced the receiver of the tellyfone.

"Stop him! You not let him go!"

But Jack Jolly & Co. had no intention of standing in the Head's way. Inwardly they rather admired him for putting up a fight, and in any case they could see some fun coming out of this before the morning was out. They jumped aside and Doctor Birchermall galloped past them.

A moment later, the Rajah of Bhang followed him at the dubble.

The two vanished out of the front door, and General Jolly led the way after them. The general was frowning fiercely.

"Egad! A nice how-do-you-do this is for Christmas Day!" he said, tugging at his mistosh as they went out on the porch. "I wonder what Birchermall intends to do?"

General Jolly soon learned. As he led the way into the snowclad grounds of Jolly Lodge, he heard the Head's voice raised in a chortle of triumph.

"Hip-hip-hip-hooray! I'm the king of the castle! Let 'em arrest me now if they can!"

"What the merry dickens!" ejaculated Frank Fearless.

The general and the St. Sam's juniors broke into a run.

On the other side of a clump of trees, an amazing site met their eyes. There sat Doctor Birchermall on the roof of a summer-house, gathering up handfuls of snow and making them into snowballs! The newcomers were just in time to see

him herl a snowball with deadly aim at the Rajah of Bhang, hitting the rajah on the boko!

Plop!

"Yaroooooo!"

"Plenty more where that one came from!" yelled the Head, cheerfully. "Now bring the perlice to arrest me if they can! Yah!"

Doctor Birchermall was at bay with a vengenz—and how he was going to be dislodged from his perch looked like providing a pretty problem for Christmas Day at Jolly Lodge!

(Don't miss the grand finish of this yarn next week!)

SPOOKS, SPECTRES OR SPIRITS!

Hoskins Revels In 'Em, BUT—

Hoskins has another claim to fame besides his prowess on the piano.

He's a specialist in spooks, spectres and spirits!

When asked by a "Greyfriars Herald" representative in Hobson's ancestral home, where he is staying over Christmas, whether he ever felt nervous during his ghost-hunting stunts, the music-maker of the Shell laughed heartily.



"Me nervous of ghosts? Not likely! I've seen too much of 'em to feel nervous of 'em!"

Hoskins ran his fingers reflectively through his lank locks and chuckled reminiscently. "I could tell you tales of my experiences with spooks and spirits that would make your hair stand up on end!" he said.

Buying a present for your pater is a problem that bristles with difficulty—therefore brush up your knowledge of the art right now!

If you buy him a scarf, it will have to be a cheap one; and that's bound to be "spotted."

If you bust your bank balance and buy him a hat, it's certain to go to his head. So you see, you have to use a little bit of savvy when you're purchasing a present for the pop.

But don't lose heart, chaps. There's always one way out of the difficulty.

Buy something for your young brother, and give that to your pater!

I'll wager ten to one in doughnuts you're on a winner.

If there's one thing that every old fogey loves doing on Christmas morning, it's kneeling on the floor, fixing up train-lines, arranging toy soldiers and winding up model aeroplanes. To bring joy to an old 'un's heart, give him an excuse for doing these juvenile tricks.

Everybody knows that's true. Well, then, why give to mere kids the presents that the old fossils are longing for? Go the whole hog and give 'em the presents direct!

I'm chancing it this year, anyway.

I'm presenting my pater with a toy fort, some tin soldiers and a kite.

He'll be simply delighted!

"I saw a headless figure stalking down a corridor in Stewart's house, and a shrouded phantom at Rayner's place, and a ghastly object that moaned and clanked chains, as it glided across the moonlit hall at Robinson's."

"And were you equally brave each time?" asked our representative.

Hoskins nodded eagerly. "Oh, absolutely! Ghosts have no terrors for me—none whatever! Why, if I saw a ghost now, I'd—"

What Hoskins was about to say he would do will never be known.

But what he did do on the appearance of a ghost was made quite clear to our representative the next instant.

Hoskins had stopped speaking because a ghost had appeared! It loomed up out of the shadows of the library where the interview had been taking place—a white, spectral shape!

Hoskins took one good look at it, let out a howl of terror, and then just flew out of the library.

Hoskins may revel in the company of spooks, spectres and spirits, as he boasts. But if his reaction at Hobson's place is anything to go on, he believes in revelling in their company for a period not exceeding one split second!

Discussing the matter afterwards with the ghost, the "Greyfriars Herald" representative was assured that Hoskins was always the same. The ghost declared emphatically that any of Hoskins' other ghosts would say the same.

The ghost, by the way, was Hobson and his ghostly predecessors were Robinson, Rayner, Stewart and Dabney.

We always thought there must be something besides his piano-punching that made Hoskins so popular as a Christmas visitor!