

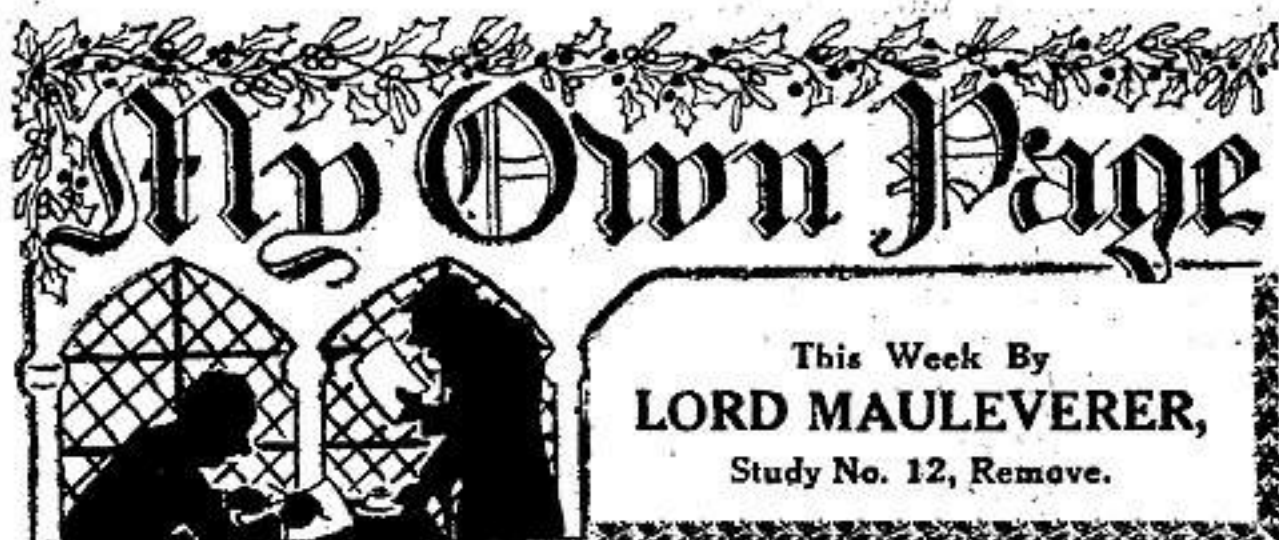
Grand Christmas Week Number!

The Magnet^{2D}

Billy Bunter's
Own Paper



**DOIN' THE
LAMBETH WALK, OI!**



HELP!
I've just reckoned out that writing this page is equal to 286 lines. That's too much like work, begad! I've a dashed-good mind to write the page like this, and get it over quickly, but I suppose I'll have to stick it out.

Gentlemen, chaps, and fellows, it is jolly old Christmas Week! (Loud cheers!) May a fellow take this opportunity of wishing you all

A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS, with loads of everything you like best. In the words of the poet Keats—or was it Tennyson?:

May Christmas cheer be yours this year,
May all your days be merry,
With heaps of fun to everyone
From Biggleswade to Bury!

Now I come to think of it, I fancy it wasn't either of 'em. I have an idea it was written by the poet Mauleverer.

I intend to have a pretty good Christmas, thanks to Bunter—who's somewhere else, probably with Wharton's lot. The first essential towards a Merry Christmas is—NO BUNTER! Once you've arranged that—the most difficult part of the job—the rest is child's play.

He tried to hook on to me for the vac, saying it was ages since he had a square meal. So I stood him four tarts in the tuckshop. Of course, he grumbled. Said you couldn't make a square meal of four tarts. But he was wrong, begad, and I'll prove it:

T A R T
A A
R R
T A R T

It's such a fearful fag to keep kicking Bunter, but what else can a fellow do? The only thing he understands is a boot. So I'm glad my party is unbuntered—to coin a new word—this Christmas, and I send my sincere sympathy to Wharton.

THE RED EARL.

Ghosts are in season now, and we have a prize specimen at Mauleverer Towers. There's no doubt he's in residence, because he's been seen scores of times. Practically everyone in the place knows somebody who's seen him. They haven't exactly seen him themselves, but jolly old So-and-so saw him distinctly, and So-and-so is a chap you can rely on. You know the yarn!

My guardian, Sir Reginald Brooke, believes in the Red Earl. Sounds queer, but it's a fact. Moreover, the famous author Mauleverer has a sneaking sort of belief in the old phantom. If you knew Mauleverer Towers, you'd understand why. It's a spooky sort of place. There's an underground torture-chamber still in existence, and as for secret passages—I've given up trying to count 'em.

When I'm at Greyfriars—or anywhere else, for that matter—I don't really believe in the existence of any merry old ghosts. But as soon as I set foot over the ancestral doormat, I get a feeling that maybe they're possible. After a couple of days at the Towers, I quite expect to meet his Red Lordship round every corner.

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After all, what does the poet Browning say—or was it Wordsworth?:

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy,
begad!

The ghost is that of the Fifth Earl Mauleverer, who seems to have been a



TEST YOUR EYESIGHT.

Bunter's face looks a bit egg-shaped, but it isn't. It's a dead circle, as you can see by the ring outside. Can you mark with a pencil the exact centre of his map? Compasses are barred!

Bit of a Rip! He was red-haired, and as his sword drank a good deal of blood from all and sundry, they called him the Red Earl. There's a portrait of him in the gallery, and the best I can say of it is that I hope for his sake it wasn't a good likeness.

Apparently, he made good use of our torture-chamber, and many a scurvy knave hath he stretched upon ye rack. The limit



came when he carved up a couple of pursuivants (medieval cops), sent by Henry IVth to arrest him. The outraged Henry sent along a couple of platoons of soldiery, and there was an extremely gory battle, which ended in the death of the Red Earl and everyone else in the Towers. And since that hour, his grisly phantom stalks silently along the corridors, making passes at people with a sabre. In other words, he's dead, but he won't lie down!

There is also a yarn that the Red Earl's treasure is hidden somewhere in the Towers. The doubloons, of course, were all free-will gifts from guests in the torture-chamber, and the legend says there is a curse on the treasure which prevents anyone of the hated Mauleverer line from finding it. The curse has worked pretty smoothly up to date.

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS.

In Hampshire, where I live, the villagers still carry on some of the jolly old customs which ought to have died years ago. WASSAIL is often held in the farmhouses. Wassail is made of sweet apples, old ale, and spice, and is served boiling hot to the Carol singers.

At the Towers we still keep the traditional ceremony of the YULE LOG. A dead tree in the park is usually selected, and all the guests take turn in wielding the hatchet. Then a wreath of ivy is strung round the giant log and we drag it to the house with ropes, cheering all the way. Also, on Christmas Eve, we ring the Postern Bell—a very old bell over the Postern Gate—and everyone in the house drinks the Christmas toast in a glass of wine (or ginger-pop, according to age). The toast is:

May he that hath no cloak be clad,
And eke ye hungry man be fed,
And on ye Day good fare be had,
And on ye Night good sleep in bed.

AND SO TO BED.

Well, I must be pretty near the end of my 286 lines, begad. I'm feeling fearfully tired.

To wind up with, here's a little carol—by the poet Mauleverer.

I heard the waits on Christmas Eve,
They nearly made me weep!
Confound the waits on Christmas Eve,
I want to go to sleep.

I heard the bells on Christmas Day,
Ring out so loud and deep;
And blow the bells on Christmas Day!
I want to go to sleep.

I heard the ghost on Christmas Night
Along the passage creep!
Oh, hang the ghost on Christmas Night,
I want to go to sleep.

And so to bed—I want to go to sleep!

WERE YOU RIGHT?

The pupil of Bunter's right eye is the centre-spot, though it seems it should be much lower. This is an optical illusion, due to his black cap.

Lord (Herbert) Mauleverer.

"Mauly," as he is affectionately known, is the blue-blooded aristocrat of the Remove. He comes of an historic family, with ancestors reaching back to the Flood. His home, Mauleverer Towers, is one of the show-places of Hampshire. Yet Mauly is a very unassuming fellow. His manners are perfect, and he has the simple faith in other people which stamps the caste of Vere-de-Vere. He is incurably lazy; it is his most striking characteristic. But those that know Mauly best, know that somehow he seems to get things done. His brains are second to none in the Form. Though he seldom offers a suggestion unless asked, it is real wisdom when it comes. He makes himself comfortable in Study No. 12, with a big armchair and a sofa and a mound of cushions, and he would rather doze away his half-holiday in front of the study fire than chase a muddy footer in the fresh air. He is very wealthy, and though he has rather a taste for dressy clothes, his attire is never "loud" or vulgar.

(Cartoon By HAROLD SKINNER.)

THE BOXING NIGHT BALL! Wharton Lodge is filled with the merry chatter of happy voices, young people are dancing to the strains of music, and everybody is merry and bright—with the exception of Billy Bunter, who has gate-crashed into the party!

A BAFFLING QUEST!



By
FRANK RICHARDS

"Don't give the alarm, if you value your life," said the Arab, gripping Bunter's fat arm. "If you draw attention here, I shall have to run for it. But I shall leave you dead!"

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Queer!

"I wasn't the turkey!" said Billy Bunter feebly.

"Not the turkey?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"No! You see, I never had much——"

"Eh?"

"Hardly a couple of pounds, if that——"

"Oh!"

"And it wasn't the Christmas pudding! That was good—fine! I could have eaten more. Only, as you fellows know, I don't eat a lot——"

"Oh, crikey!"

"Besides, I only had seven helpings of it——"

"Is that all?" asked Bob Cherry, with deep sympathy. "Then it can't be that! A spot like that wouldn't hurt a mouse."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, I wish you wouldn't cackle when a fellow's ill," said Billy Bunter, with feeble, plaintive reproach. "I can't quite make out what's the matter—but I feel awfully queer! It can't have been the mince pies, can it? I only had eleven—or was it twelve?"

"Or twenty?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Or thirty?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Couldn't have been the mince pies," said Billy Bunter, shaking his fat head feebly. "I've never had better mince pies, even at Bunter Court! I—I wonder if it was the grapes? But I only had one bunch——"

Billy Bunter blinked, sadly and sorrowfully, at the Famous Five of Greyfriars, through his big spectacles. They tried not to smile.

Christmas Day had been as merry as Christmas ought to be; but Christmas Night seemed to have banished Bunter's merriment.

Splendid Yarn of Thrilling Christmas Adventure, featuring HARRY WHARTON & CO., the Cheery Chums of GREYFRIARS.

He felt queer! He looked queer! Indeed, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh declared that his queerfulness was terrific.

What was the matter with him, Bunter could not make out. Harry Wharton & Co., however, fancied that they could guess!

A fellow who had surrounded a couple of pounds of turkey, seven helpings of Christmas pudding, eleven mince pies, and a bunch of grapes, could really hardly expect to feel in the pink!

In the way of parking the foodstuffs, an ostrich had nothing on Bunter. Even a hardy ostrich might have jibbed at the fat Owl's Christmas dinner.

And Bunter had not finished the list yet!

"The nuts, perhaps!" he exclaimed.

"The nuts?" repeated Harry Wharton. "Did you have parking-space for nuts, along with the rest?"

"I only had a few—only all there were on the dish——"

"Oh!"

"More likely the oranges!" said Bunter thoughtfully. "Yes, perhaps it was the oranges! But dash it all, six or seven oranges ought not to have hurt a chap. What do you fellows think?"

Billy Bunter, sitting on the edge of his bed in his room at Wharton Lodge, gazed inquiringly at the chums of the Greyfriars Remove.

Ever since dinner, Bunter had been motionless in an

σηκινθεδιτχοπποσιτεθεστιλενφριαρδαλελαν

The Mysterious Message in Greek

armchair—which was not unusual; and silent, which was very unusual. Now the Famous Five had kindly and helpfully assisted him up to bed. Now he sat on the bed, pale and worn, and holding an inquest, as it were, into the cause of the strange and uneasy commotion that seemed to be going on in his extensive interior.

It was a matter of deep and earnest concern to William George Bunter; though the other fellows were taking it with much less seriousness.

"Think it was the oranges?" asked Bunter. "Or the apples?"

"Apples, too!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "How many apples—I mean, how many dozen?"

"Only half a dozen!" said Bunter, with dignity. "I'm not very keen on apples—I mean, when there's plenty of other things going. I say, you fellows, can it have been the candied fruits?"

"Can it?" gasped Bob. "I wonder?"

"It was something," said Billy Bunter with conviction. "I feel queer! I've eaten something that disagrees with me! I'm sure of that! But what was it?"

"Echo answers what!" said Bob Cherry.

"Esteemed echo answers that the whatfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Think it was the sweets, Bunter?" asked Johnny Bull. "You must have eaten a pound of sweets, at least!"

"Perhaps some of the items are disagreeing with the others?" suggested Harry Wharton. "The turkey mayn't be on the best of terms with the Christmas pudding—"

"Or the mince pies may be scrapping with the nuts or the apples?" suggested Nugent. "Or perhaps they've fallen out with the grapes?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cackle!" said Bunter, with feeble bitterness. "It's like you fellows to cackle when a chap's fearfully ill. I shall be sorry, at this rate, that I accepted your pressing invitation for Christmas, Wharton. Ooooooh!"

Bunter gave a moan, and rocked on the bed.

"Turn in and go to sleep, old fat man!" said Harry Wharton.

"I couldn't sleep a wink!" moaned Bunter. "I say, you fellows, which of you is going to sit up with me?"

"Wha-a-t?"

"One of you, or all of you?" asked Bunter.

"Oh, my hat!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were sympathetic. They realised that Billy Bunter, after his uncommon exertions that day, could not be feeling his best. But they were disinclined to sit up with the invalid.

Bed-time was rather later than usual that night, anyhow. They were all sleepy. They were willing to linger a while, and comfort the fat Owl of the Remove, so far as comfort was possible; and listen to his tale of woe! But they were not prepared to make a night of it!

"I shan't go to bed," said Bunter. "I'll just lie down a bit! One of you fellows sit by the bed, in case I want anything—I won't keep you all up! I never was selfish, I hope."

"Oh!"

"Not you, Cherry—you're too noisy, and you can't keep still—a fellow couldn't sleep a wink with you in the room—"

"What does that matter, if you're not going to sleep a wink, old porpoise?" asked Bob.

"Well, I might nod off! Mind, I'm not going to have you sitting up, Cherry,—I couldn't stand it!"

"Same here!" grinned Bob.

"Perhaps you, Bull—"

"No perhaps about it!" granted Johnny Bull. "I'm going to bed! Good-night, you fellows!"

And Johnny Bull went; the first of the merry meeting to depart. Johnny's view was that if Billy Bunter spent Christmas Day, from early morn to dewy eve, in parking the feedstuffs, he could take what was coming to him, and be blowed!

"Well, after all, Bull's a lout, just like Cherry!" remarked Bunter. "I think I'd rather you sat up, Nugent."

"Good-night, Bunter!" said Nugent.

"Eh?—I said—I'd like you to sit up—"

"And I said good-night!"

And Frank Nugent departed after Johnny Bull. Three juniors still remained with Billy Bunter; his company was diminishing, one by one, like the ten little niggers in the nursery song. He blinked at the three.

"If you're going to sit up, Wharton—"

"You've made me sit up a good bit, old fat man, since you've been here," answered Harry Wharton. "Enough's as good as a feast! Good-night!"

"Beast!"

Two fellows now remained with Bunter. Both of them seemed to be edging doorward.

"I say, Inky!" Billy Bunter blinked at Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "I say, I dare say you'll do! Don't turn off the light, you know—I don't want your black phiz making me jump, in the dark. Keep the light on, and—I say, don't walk off while a fellow's talking to you, Inky!"

Unheeding, the nabob of Bhanipur walked off.

"Well, of all the selfish rotters!" said Bunter, in utter disgust. "I shall have to put up with you, Cherry—"

"You won't!" grinned Bob. "Good-night, old fat man!"

"Don't go!" yelled Bunter.

Bob went!

"Beast! I say, Cherry—I say, I'm fearfully ill—I say, old chap—Yah! Rotter! Beast!"

Billy Bunter's door closed. Deserted by all his pals, after all he had done for them, the Fat Owl was left to wrestle, on his own, with the rebellious turkey, the mutinous Christmas pudding, the insubordinate mince pies, and the innumerable other comestibles, which all seemed to be on the very worst of terms with one another.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

The Face At The Window!

CREAK!

Billy Bunter started.

It was past midnight.

The whole household at Wharton Lodge was buried in slumber—with the strange, single, solitary exception of Billy Bunter.

Seldom or never did Billy Bunter hear the chimes at midnight. Seldom did his eyes remain open a minute after his head had been laid on the pillow. Very, very seldom, if ever, did William George Bunter woo slumber in vain.

But on this particular night he wooed it and wooed it in vain, and an hour after midnight slumber's chain had not yet bound him.

He had laid his fat person down, but it was in vain that he shut his eyes; they opened again. Every time he

sought repose the turkey stirred, or the Christmas pudding jibbed, or the mince pies wrangled with the oranges or the apples or the nuts.

Yuletide fare in such quantities had, like Macbeth, murdered sleep. Sleepless, Bunter mumbled and moaned and blinked at the light and reflected on the selfishness of human nature. Five fellows in the rooms up and down that passage were sound asleep, enjoying the healthy sleep of youth; not one was willing to keep awake all night, sitting by Bunter and listening to his moans and mumbles.

But when he heard that creak from the window Billy Bunter was rather glad, after all, that he had not gone to sleep.

He sat up in bed and fixed his little round eyes and big round spectacles on that window.

It was covered by thick curtains. Bunter was no fresh-air fiend. His window was jammed tight at night and fastened, and the curtains drawn across to exclude the possibility of a spot of fresh air sneaking in.

Creak!

Bunter's fat heart quaked. It was not the wind, it was not a natural creak of the old oak; it was a stirring at the window—and the instant thought shot into his fat mind of burglars.

Outside Wharton Lodge the snow was falling in the thick winter darkness. It was no night for burglars, unless very hardy ones. Bunter's window was over fifteen feet from the ground—unapproachable from outside, he would have supposed, without a ladder.

No burglar could possibly have carried a fifteen-foot ladder about with him. Really it seemed impossible that there could be a midnight intruder at that window.

But there was—though Bunter had never noticed it—a rain-pipe clamped on the wall near the end of the window-sill.

Certainly anyone looking at that rain-pipe would have said that it was impossible to climb; or for the climber, if he could do it, to hold on with one hand and swing himself to the window-sill with the other. Only an active sailorman accustomed to perilous rigging on windjammers could have performed such a feat—and to the most nimble and active sailorman it would have been far from easy.

But, possible or impossible, there was no doubt that Bunter heard a creak at the window, repeated and repeated again.

He sat as if frozen.

The light was full on. It was amazing for a burglar, if he came, to pick out the only room in which there was a light. If it was a burglar, it really looked as if that burglar was acquainted with Bunter's manners and customs, and knew that he could be relied upon to be fast asleep at midnight.

On the unexpected outcome of the Christmas fare keeping the fat Owl dismally awake no burglar, of course, could have reckoned.

Creak, creak!

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

The curtains on the window stirred in the winter wind. He knew that the window was open now. Some desperate climber had gained the window-sill, was kneeling there in the snow, and had forced the window from outside.

In terror Bunter watched the curtains, to see them part, and to behold the dread figure appearing between them.

He grasped his pillow.

It was lucky that he was awake; it

was lucky that the light had been left on. Even the scared fat Owl realised that a sudden whizzing missile would and must dislodge the burglarious visitor on the window-sill and send him spinning off it; it could not fail to do so.

Had Bunter been asleep, as was only to be expected at that hour of the night, the midnight marauder's task would have been easy—after he had once gained the window-sill.

He would only have had to step in through the open window.

But with Bunter wide awake, clutching his pillow, watching through his big spectacles, and in such a state of funk that it imbued him with a sort of desperate courage, the matter was different.

Bunter swung that pillow up and back over his head, ready—and waited and watched, with thumping heart.

It was only a short distance from the bed to the window—so short that even the fat Owl could hardly fail to hit the target.

Bunter was ready for the enemy, but as the curtains parted his fat heart failed him; he sat motionless, his grasp on the pillow relaxing.

The parting of the curtains revealed the open window, a glimpse of the black night and the falling snow, and a figure kneeling on the snowy sill, his head inside.

It was a somewhat pale face with sleek cheeks and clear-cut features that met Bunter's terrified eyes—a face he knew.

For it was the face of James Soames, once a manservant, once a South Sea freebooter, once a kidnapper—the face of the crook and sea-lawyer who had been on Billy Bunter's track ever since Greyfriars School had broken up for the Christmas holidays.

That did it.

Had it been a common-or-garden burglar, so to speak, of the ordinary Bill Sikes variety, Bunter might have shut his eyes and pretended to be asleep and let him carry on just as he liked as the safest way of dealing with him, quite abandoning the idea of knocking him backwards with a whizzing pillow.

But the cold, sleek face of James Soames was more terrifying to Bunter than any bearded, rugged, beetle-browed countenance of a Bill Sikes.

Sheer funk gave Bunter the spot of resolution he needed; his fat grip closed convulsively on the pillow.

The steely eyes of the crook gleamed across and round the room, and fastened on Bunter with a stare of astonishment.

Evidently Soames was surprised and startled to see him awake. Probably, knowing Bunter as he did, it had not even crossed his mind at all that Bunter might possibly be awake at one in the morning.

But the crook had time for only that one astonished glance, then the pillow was whizzing and crashing.

Crash!

The man on the sill had no time to leap into the room, no time even to dodge his head. Before he knew that the pillow was coming it came—and it crashed fairly into his face, hurling him backwards off the window-sill.

He disappeared very suddenly.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Ow! Oh crikey! Oooogh!"

There was a sound of a heavy bump under the window, far below, and an enraged cry.

Fifteen feet was a good drop, and only the thick snow on the ground could have saved James Soames from broken bones. Even in the snow he must have had a heavy crash, and could hardly

have escaped damage. Pain and rage were mingled in the yell that floated in at the window on the winter wind.

Billy Bunter did not stay to listen.

Immediately the figure on the window-sill went Bunter went. He was off the bed with a bound and leaping

Round the Dule Log!

Some pencil puzzles. Write 'em down on a piece of paper and pass it round. Your pals must find out what they mean.

1. GOOD ADVICE.—"If the **B**

empty, put : if the **B.** putting :

2. SEEN IN THE JUNGLE.—**O**

BED

3. BUNTER'S PLIGHT.—**T c d.**

4. BEHIND THE CHAPEL.—**Fault,**
pal, row, pal, fault.

Now some queer queries. Think before you answer.

5. A road 50 miles long. How many milestones are there?

6. A piece of cloth 50 yards long. If you cut it into 1-yard pieces, how many cuts will you make?

7. A garden path 50 yards long. If you plant bushes 1 yard apart along the whole length, how many bushes will you need?

(As you see, that's the same question in three different forms. Are the answers the same?)

8. Two fathers and two sons went into a cafe and each had a shillings-worth of tea. How much was the whole bill?

9. Five years ago, Albert was four times older than his brother Bill, but now he's only three times as old. How old is he?

Now a few riddles while someone else is getting the tea.

Can February March? No, but April May!

Why did the tap run? Because it saw the kitchen sink.

Why did the ox-hide (oxide)? Because the acid (ass hid)!

What's the difference between me and a duck's chest? One's hard up and the other's soft down!

Why did the penny stamp? Because the threepenny-bit.

Why did the owl howl? Because the spider spied 'er.

Why does a tin whistle? Because a tin can!

Why did the pillar-box? Because the letter let 'er.

Why did the duck duck? Because the fowl fouled.

The answers to the puzzles will be found, after a long search, elsewhere.

A Merry Christmas, everyone!

PETER TODD.

to the door. He tore the door open and rushed into the passage.

"I say, you fellows, help!" yelled Bunter.

He forgot that he was fearfully ill; he forgot the turkey, the Christmas pudding, the mince pies, the grapes,

and the nuts, and the whole list. He fairly whizzed down the passage, yelling, and bolted into the nearest room—which was Bob Cherry's.

"Ow! Yow! Wow! Help!" yelled Bunter. And he charged across to the bed and clutched wildly at the sleeper therein. "Wow! Yow! Help!"

That Soames, after that bump from a height of fifteen feet, was not likely to climb the rain-pipe again—nor likely to carry on anyhow after the alarm was given—did not occur to Bunter's fat mind. He grabbed at Bob Cherry and yelled and yelled and yelled.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Night Alarm!

BOB CHERRY yelled, too.

He awoke very suddenly.

He had been in a sound sleep, but fat paws clutching at him brought him quickly out of the land of dreams. In the dark Bunter could not see what he clutched—he just clutched. One fat paw got Bob's nose, another got his hair, and both were tugged frantically. Frantic tugging at his nose and hair would have awakened Rip Van Winkle on the spot.

"Oh! Ah! Ow! Wooh! What—oh crumbs! Whooop!" came a startled yell from Bob Cherry as he jumped into wide wakefulness.

"Ow! I say, wake up—he's here—I say, he's after me—yaroooh! I say, gerrup—I say, are you awake? Ow!" yelled Bunter.

"Leggo!" shrieked Bob.

"I say—"

Crack!

Bob Cherry, naturally, started up in those startling circumstances. Bunter might really have expected him to do so—if he had thought—but Bunter was not thinking; he was clutching and yelling.

Bob's head, as he started up, came into violent contact with a fat chin, and there was a crack like that of a rifle.

"Oh!" roared Bob.

"Ow!" yelled Bunter.

He staggered back from the bed. He left off clutching at Bob's head and clutched at his chin instead. That fat chin had a pain in it!

"Oh! Ow! Oh!" spluttered Bob, rubbing the top of his head, which also had a pain in it. "Blow you, I've banged my head on something—wow!"

"Ow! My chin! Wow! You've busted my jaw!" groaned Bunter. "Oh crikey! You've knocked all my teeth out! Ow! Every tooth in my head! Oooogh!"

"You mad owl—"

"You silly idiot—"

"You bothering, blithering porpoise, what are you up to?" yelled Bob. "What have you come here for? You wait till I get hold of my bolster!"

"Ow! My chin! Wow! My jaw! Ow! Wow!" moaned Bunter.

Bob sat up and groped for his bolster, grasped it, and swiped. It was dark: but Bunter's moans guided his aim. The bolster landed, and there was a sound of a heavy bump.

"Oh!" roared Bunter as he landed.

"Yoo-hoop! Beast!"

"Don't go!" gasped Bob. "Wait a minute—I've got a few more for you! Just wait a tick till I get out."

He scrambled out of bed, bolster in hand.

Why Bunter had come there, in the middle of the night and awakened him by grabbing at his features, Bob did not know—unless it was the turkey troubling the fat Owl, or the mince pies

worrying him. Neither did he care! All he cared about, at the moment, was bolstering Bunter!

Swipe, swipe!

"Yaroooh!"

Swipe!

"Oh crikey!" yelled Bunter. "Beast! Stop it! Leave off! Yaroooh!"

Bunter scrambled up and dodged, and the next swipe of the bolster missed him.

Bob rushed to the switch and turned it on.

Light flooded the room; and, spotting the fat Owl again, he charged at him with the bolster uplifted.

Bunter dodged wildly round the bed.

"Keep off!" he roared. "You mad ass! I came here to—yarooop!"

Bunter bounded as the bolster caught him. He fairly flew round the bed.

"Will you stop it?" he shrieked. "I tell you there's a burglar! I say, you beast, Soames got in at my window, and—Yoo-hooop!"

"What?" gasped Bob.

"Soames!" yelled Bunter. "That awful villain—you know he's been after me all these hols, and now he's after me again—"

"Rot! It's the turkey!" said Bob. "After all that turkey, you might see anything in the middle of the night! I wonder you haven't seen the ghost of the turkey."

"I tell you it was Soames—"

"And I tell you I'm going to bolster you back to your room! And the sooner you get there, the less bolster you'll get!"

"I say—whooooop!" roared Bunter as the bolster landed. "I tell you—whoo-hoop! Oh crikey!"

It was really impossible to argue with the bolster. Bunter scuttled for the door, with a swiping bolster behind him urging him on.

Four doors on the passage had opened now. The soundest sleep could hardly have continued with Bunter's dulcet voice going on its top note. Harry Wharton switched on the passage light; and four astonished faces stared at Billy Bunter, as the swiping bolster drove him headlong out of Bob's room.

"What on earth's up?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Bunter is!" gasped Bob. "That cargo of grub has given him nightmare and he came to tell me about it! I'm seeing him home!"

Swipe, swipe!

"I say, you fellows, stop it!" shrieked Bunter. "I say—Whoop!"

Swipe!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I won't go back to my room," roared Bunter. "Soames is there—"

"You fat chump!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "How could Soames get there? It's the Christmas pudding!"

"Tain't!" yelled Bunter. "He's got in at the window—"

"Has he got wings?" asked Nugent.

"The wingfulness must be terrific!" grinned Hurree Singh.

"I tell you—" raved Bunter. "I tell you I buzzed my pillow at him and knocked him off the window-sill—but very likely he's got back—"

"Oh, let's go and see!" said Harry.

"Chuck it, Bob, old man—Bunter will wake the house at this rate. Let's look."

"All rot!" said Bob. "But let's—and if there's nothing the matter, we'll jolly well scrag Bunter."

"Beast!"

The Famous Five hurried to Bunter's room.

Bunter lingered in the passage. He did not want to see Soames—if Soames was there!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! The window's open!" exclaimed Bob.

He ran across to the open window.

"Oh, my hat!" said Johnny Bull. "Bunter never left it open! Bunter would perish if he got a spot of fresh air!"

The Famous Five gathered at the window—shivering in the bitter wind that blew in, drifting flakes of snow.

It was pretty certain that Bunter had not left his window open without noticing it, for the wind blew the curtains out like sails. And the snow, on the sill outside, was disturbed—it was easy to see where it had been scraped and dislodged by a man who had knelt there.

"By gum!" said Bob. "Somebody's been here—"

He leaned out, disregarding the falling flakes, and stared into the darkness. But in the black winter night nothing was to be seen, save the dim glimmer of snow thick on the ground.

"I say, you fellows! Has he gone?" came a squeak from the passage.

"The gonefulness is terrific!"

"How on earth could he have got to this window-sill?" exclaimed Nugent. "There's nothing but a rainpipe, a yard away—"

"Must have been Soames, I think," said Harry. "He has been a sailor in his time—I remember that he could climb like a monkey. But who'd have thought—"

"Must have risked his neck on that pipe—"

"Well, there was the snow to fall in—if Bunter knocked him off the sill, the snow must have saved him—he's not there now."

"I say, you fellows—"

"He's gone, fathead!" said Harry Wharton. "It's all right." He closed and fastened the window. "You can go to bed—"

Yell from Bunter!

"Think I'm going to bed with that villain hanging about? All you fellows will have to stay with me till morning. I say, you'd better call Colonel Wharton and the butler to sit up, too, and call up the police on the phone, and—"

"And call out the military?" asked Bob Cherry. "What about the Air Force, too? And a few tanks?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "If you think I'm going to be kidnapped and murdered, and shot, and knocked on the head, just to please you, you're jolly well mistaken, see? I ain't!"

"Oh, come along to my room!" said Harry. "We'll carry your bedclothes and you can camp on the settee."

"Better wake the house, I think! I'll go along to the staircase and yell—"

"I'll give you something to yell for, if you do!"

"Beast!"

That there had been a midnight visitor, Soames or not, the juniors knew; but they knew that it was extremely unlikely that he would call again! Bunter did not feel satisfied on that point; but he consented to camp in Wharton's room, where he locked the door and pushed an arm-chair against it for additional security.

That spot of excitement had had at least one beneficial effect. It seemed to have shaken down the turkey, the mince pies, the Christmas pudding, and the rest. Bunter found that he could, at last, sleep; and he notified the fact by turning on a deep snore, which made slumber less easy for his unfortunate room-mate. Billy Bunter passed the remainder of Christmas night in un-

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disturbed repose—Harry Wharton did not.

Fortunately, nobody mattered but Bunter!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Fishy's Find!

"I'll say it's fierce!"

Fisher T. Fish, of the Greyfriars Remove, made that remark.

He made it to empty space.

During the hols, most of Fishy's remarks had to be made to space! He was the only Greyfriars man left at the old school over the holidays.

On the morning of Boxing Day, Fisher T. Fish was walking in the old quadrangle, not in a happy mood.

The snow had ceased to fall, but the quad was like a carpet of unbroken white. Roofs and chimneys glimmered white in the rays of the wintry sun. It was quite a pretty picture—if Fishy had cared for pretty pictures. He didn't!

With his hands in his pockets and a frown on his thin sharp face, Fisher T. Fish ambled in the quad, and grouched.

Fishy's home was in New York, or Noo Yark as he called it, much too far off for Fishy to go home for the holidays!

There were other fellows from far distances, like Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, whose home was in India, and little Wun Lung, the Chinese, whose home was even farther away. But fellows carried them off for the hols. No fellow ever seemed keen on carrying off Fisher T. Fish.

Fishy was not really good company.

He had only two topics of conversation—first and foremost, money; second, the immense superiority of the United States over every other country on earth.

These topics palled on Remove fellows during the term, and nobody seemed to want to hear more of them during the hols.

Even Lord Mauleverer, the kindest-hearted fellow ever, felt that Fisher T. Fish, in the hols, was a thing no fellow could stand.

Several times during the hols, Harry Wharton had been on the point of giving Fishy a ring on the telephone. But, so far, he had never quite reached the point.

It was fierce, as Fishy declared to empty space! It was sure tough! Even Mrs. Kebble, who looked after Fish dutifully, did not enjoy his company. Even Gosling, the old porter, would go into his lodge when he saw Fishy coming. Even Mrs. Mible, at the school shop, was very brief.

It was all the fiercer and tougher, because Fishy was a great talker, and during his enforced solitude immense quantities of conversation were bottled up in him to such an extent that he was almost in danger of exploding.

Fishy had hardly been able to mention money for a week. Not for a week or more had he pointed out to a single guy what a rotten, pesky, one-horse country it was compared with the Yew-nited States! It was undoubtedly fierce!

"Say!" Fisher T. Fish spotted Gosling looking out at the gates on the snowy road. "Say, bo!"

He scudded across to Gosling.

Gosling, as a conversationalist, was not brilliant. But it was a case of any port in a storm! Besides, what Fishy chiefly wanted was a listener. It was his own voice that he wanted to hear!

"Mornin', sir!" grunted Gosling, with an eye on the door of his lodge.

He wished that he hadn't emerged to look at the weather.

"Find it a bit dull with all the guys away?" said Fishy.

"No," answered Gosling, staring.

Sad to relate, Gosling preferred Greyfriars not in term time. Cheery boyish voices were not music to his ancient ears. Snowballs catching his old hat afforded him no amusement whatever. Gosling had only one fault to find with the school holidays—that they were not long enough!

"I guess it's slow!" said Fishy. "But I reckon you're used to things being slow in this old one-horse country. Look at your railroads! Slow ain't the word! Petrified—what? Look at—Say, don't you hurry off, old-timer!"

Gosling went into his lodge.

Things might be slow in such a one-horse country, but old Gosling was not slow as he escaped from Fishy's bright conversation. He was quite rapid.

"Say, big boy!" called Fishy to the back of Gosling's head.

Gosling's door closed.

"Pesky old goob!" grunted Fisher T. Fish, and he ambled off to seek another victim.

Mrs. Mible was looking out of the doorway of the school shop. But the sight of Fisher T. Fish in the offing caused her to step back and disappear.

Fishy never by any chance wanted to buy anything. Food was provided, and to buy anything to eat when food was provided did not look like business to Fisher T. Fish.

Fishy, balked of his prey, sheered off again from a shut door. He wandered in the quad, disconsolate. He was not very keen on out-of-doors, but he was fed up with indoors.

He had not even a book to read! There were immense numbers of volumes in many languages at his disposal, but not the sort he wanted. There was not a single volume on financial subjects to be found within the walls of Greyfriars School.

Fishy had been tempted—strongly tempted—to buy a financial newspaper for the sake of a little pleasant reading on a congenial subject.

But financial newspapers cost two-pence each, which was like a lion in the path! Fishy resisted that temptation.

Mrs. Kebble, the House dame, looked out of her window. Fishy out across. Twice already that morning he had caught Mrs. Kebble and talked—on the first occasion for five minutes, on the second for seven minutes, both non-stop.

Perhaps Mrs. Kebble had had enough even, perhaps, a little too much! Without appearing to see Fishy coming, she closed her window.

Fisher T. Fish sheered off again dimly. This was sure fierce!

He shoved his hands in his coat pockets and wandered, kicking the snow about for want of any other occupation.

Suddenly, as he kicked the snow, a small object flew from the toe of his boot.

It glimmered in the wintry sunshine as it flew and fell again.

Fisher T. Fish pounced on it at once.

He could see what it was—a metal cigarette-case, apparently silver. He picked it up, brushed off the frost, and stared at it.

"Wake snakes!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess that fat boob Bunter sure dropped this around before he went!"

Fisher T. Fish had seen that cigarette-case before.

During the last days of the term most of the Remove fellows had seen that

silver cigarette-case in the possession of Billy Bunter.

It was a flat, oblong case, rather worn and scratched. Where Bunter had obtained it, nobody knew, unless he had picked it up somewhere and retained it on the principle that findings were keepings.

Certainly he had told fellows that it was a Christmas present from his Uncle William, but he had also told other fellows that it was a birthday present from his Uncle George—and still other fellows that he had given five guineas for it at Chunkley's in Courtfield!

Fisher T. Fish had seen it more than once—Bunter being rather pleased to show off his silver cigarette-case among the fellows—though he had been very wary not to let Mr. Quelch spot it!

Fishy knew it again, and having found it in the snow in the quadrangle, he could only conclude that Bunter must have dropped it there and failed to find it before he left for the holidays.

He opened the case. It was full of cigarettes, and Fishy noted the brand—"Virginia Bud."

"Smithy's smokes!" he remarked, with a grin.

Fisher T. Fish was aware that Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, patronised Virginia Bud in the way of smokes. He saw at once that Bunter must have filled his case from the Bounder's supply.

"Jest like that fat lobo-wolf cinching a guy's smokes!" grinned Fisher T. Fish. "But what the great horned toad is this here?"

With great surprise and interest, the American junior scanned the interior of the silver cigarette-case. Cut in the metal inside, as if scratched deep with a sharp knife, were letters—Greek letters.

Fisher T. Fish promptly turned out the cigarettes, which revealed still more Greek letters. He stared at them in astonishment.

It was not an engraved inscription; the letters had been irregularly cut with a knife. And it was apparently only one word—at all events there were no spaces between the letters—though a word containing forty-one letters must have been rather unusual, even in Greek.

"Some guy's name!" said Fisher T. Fish. "And that fat goob made out that it was a Christmas present from his pesky uncle! I'll say this here belonged to some foreign guy who dropped it around and that pesky pincher picked it up! I'll tell a man!"

Fisher T. Fish slipped the case into his pocket and ambled on.

He was thinking now. Bunter, evidently, had lost that cigarette-case, and doubtless would be glad to hear that it had been found. Fishy wondered where Bunter was. He might be anywhere in holiday time except at his family residence. Wharton's place, most likely. Wharton was often the happy victim when Lord Mauleverer dodged successfully.

A ring on the telephone would cost nothing—to Fishy, at least! A guy might offer to run across and return that cigarette-case! Such an obliging guy might be asked to stay. It would be a very welcome change from the school with all the fellows away!

On the other hand, Fishy would then have to pay his railway fare to Bunter's present quarters, wherever they were! That thought gave him a distinct pain!

It was rather a dilemma. Fisher T. Fishy's transatlantic brow was deeply
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corrugated with thought as he jerked about the snowy quad on his bony legs.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

The Mystery Of The Silver Case!

COLONEL WHARTON frowned. That wintry morning, while Fisher T. Fish was rooting about the old quad at the deserted school, the Famous Five were collected in the hall at Wharton Lodge, and the old colonel was listening to what had happened in the night.

Bunter had been full of it, of course, when he came down.

Harry Wharton had cautioned him to say nothing about it before Aunt Amy; he did not want his aunt alarmed by a tale of a burglar in the night.

Had Bunter come down to breakfast with the other fellows, however, it was doubtful whether he could have bottled it up till brekker was over.

But that was all right, as the fat Owl did not breakfast till ten, and his breakfast was taken up to him, and it was nearer eleven before he came down.

Now the old colonel was questioning him, with a frowning brow.

Colonel Wharton allowed his nephew quite a free hand in asking fellows home for the holidays, and generally he liked the fellows who came. So he had said nothing when Bunter added himself to the party. But even the fat Owl, knowing as he did what an attractive fellow he was, could not be under the delusion that the old soldier regarded him with approval.

On this occasion Bunter was not only a spot of trouble in himself, but he had brought trouble in his train.

James Soames had haunted him like a Christmas ghost!

Bunter, perhaps, was not to blame for that. Certainly he did not want Soames to dog his footsteps like a grisly spectre.

Still, the old colonel could hardly be expected to be pleased. Soames, for some utterly mysterious and unaccountable reason, was after a silver cigarette-case that had been in Bunter's possession.

He had refused to believe that Bunter had lost it—which was not surprising; for no one at Wharton Lodge believed a word that Bunter uttered on any subject, and Soames was naturally of a more doubting nature than any of them.

Whether Bunter really had lost that cigarette-case, or whether he had parked it somewhere and declined to say where, was still an open question.

As he stated that he had lost it, the probability really was that he hadn't, as Bunter's statements generally went by contraries.

Whether he had or not, evidently Soames firmly believed that he still had it, as the attempt on Christmas night to get into his room fully proved.

This was not the first experience of Soames at Wharton Lodge by any means. In quest of that mysterious silver case, he had kidnapped Bunter, sent a huge trunk to the house in Bunter's name, and packed himself in the trunk, thus getting on the spot to search. He had held up the old colonel in his library with an automatic, and searched the safe. It was not surprising that Colonel Wharton was fed-up with this kind of thing at the festive season of Yuletide.

He tugged at his grizzled moustache, grunted, and glared at Bunter. He seemed to think that the fat Owl was to blame somehow.

"You are sure it was the rascal

Soames at your window?" he rapped.

"Oh, yes, rather!" said Bunter. "You see, I had the light on, and I saw the beast all right."

"Probably you were too frightened to see who it was!" grunted the colonel.

Bunter gave him an indignant blink.

"Oh, really, sir, I hope I'm not the fellow to be frightened!" he exclaimed warmly. "I was as cool as a cucumber—"

"What?"

"I mean, as cool as a cucumber—that is, a cucumber! Never turned a hair!" explained Bunter. "When I heard the beast at the window I thought at first of calling these fellows. But I knew they'd be scared—"

"What?" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"You fat ass!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I knew they'd be scared," went on Bunter calmly, "so I decided to deal with the scoundrel personally! I whopped a pillow at him, and knocked him right off the window-sill! He went down wallop! Then I strolled along to call the other fellows—"

"You strolled into my room like an escaped lunatic," remarked Bob, "or like a runaway fire-engine! Some stroll!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

Colonel Wharton glanced round at the juniors.

"I suppose it is a fact that someone actually did climb to Bunter's window, and that this foolish boy did not imagine the whole thing?" he rapped.

"Yes; we're sure of that much," said Harry. "He was gone, of course, long before we looked out of the window, so it seemed no use rousing the house at that time of night. I think it must have been Soames, uncle; only somebody jolly handy at climbing could have got up that rainpipe and reached the window-sill from it."

"I've told you it was Soames!" yapped Bunter.

"What you say is of no consequence whatever!" snapped the old colonel.

"However, probably it was Soames, as you say, Harry. I cannot begin to understand why the rascal is so bent on obtaining that cigarette-case; I conclude that he must have some rascally reason. It is Bunter's own fault that the rogue has followed him here—"

"My fault?" ejaculated Bunter.

"Yes, certainly! The man is a lawless rascal, but if you had told him the truth—that is, if the silver case really is lost—"

"I told him!" hooted Bunter. "I told him it was lost at the school before we broke up for the holidays. He didn't believe me."

"And you told him you'd sent it to me for a Christmas present, you fat fraud!" said Harry Wharton.

"And you told him you'd left it in your room here when he bagged you!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Well, I had to tell him something, hadn't I?" argued Bunter. "I was willing to tell him anything he liked to keep him off. If he wouldn't believe one thing, I had to tell him something else!"

Grunt from the old colonel.

"I've told you fellows how I came to lose it!" said Bunter indignantly.

"That cad Smithy made out that I was pinching his smokes, just because he saw me packing them in my case in his study, and he chucked the cigarette-case out of his study window—smokes and all—"

"Is that the truth?" snapped Colonel Wharton.

"Oh, really, sir—"

"I believe that's about as near as Bunter can get!" remarked Bob Cherry,

"If he still had the silver case, Soames would have frightened him out of it before now!"

"Yah!"

"It is extraordinary!" said the colonel. "The rascal's motive for wanting the thing is unaccountable. From what you have told me, it is of little value, even if it belongs to him; and it can hardly belong to him if it has a Greek name cut in the inside. I should be glad to see it. Mr. Konstantinopoulous, at Wimford, would tell us what the Greek word means. I will ask him to look at it. It can only be a name, I suppose, but I am very curious to see it. Is it the truth that it is lost, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter gave the old colonel a blink of the deepest indignation.

Bunter did not like having his word doubted.

"I've told you!" he hooted.

"I know that!" snapped the colonel testily. "What I want to know is, have you really lost the cigarette-case or not?"

"Do tell the truth for once, Bunter," said Frank Nugent—"just for once, to celebrate Christmas!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No wonder that villain Soames doesn't believe me when my own pals doubt my word!" said Bunter bitterly. "I tell you that beastly cigarette-case is lying in the quad somewhere at Greyfriars in the snow, and nobody will ever find it again till there's a thaw!"

The old colonel gave Bunter a doubtful glare, and stalked away into the library.

Bunter cast an indignant blink after him.

"That old fossil—" he said.

"That what?" asked Harry.

"That old frump—"

"Do you mean my uncle?"

"Yes! That old imago—"

"Stand up!"

"Eh—what do you want me to stand up for?"

"I can't kick you while you're sitting down!"

"Beast! If you think I'm going to have my word doubted, you're jolly well mistaken—see?" hooted the indignant Owl. "I've a jolly good mind to walk right out of this house this very minute—"

"Stick to that!"

"Only—only I won't!" said Bunter. "I never was the chap to let a pal down. Besides, that beast may be watching for me, for all I know!"

"You'd be safer at Bunter Court among all those crowds of liveried flunkies you've told us about!" suggested Bob Cherry.

"Yes, there's that," said Bunter, with a nod. "I should ask my pater to have all the keepers on the look-out, too! But—"

"Is the butfulness terrific?" inquired Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Well, he might cop me on the way home," said Bunter. "Once in my pater's mansion, with a crowd of menials round me, I should be all right. But I might never reach Bunter Court!" added Bunter, shaking his head.

"More likely to reach Bunter Villa!" suggested Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"On the whole, I shall stay!" said Bunter, unheeding. "But I expect you to give your uncle a hint to be a bit more civil, Wharton!"

"You'd better give him the hint, old fat man," said Harry, laughing. "But if you don't think you'd be safe on the way home—"

"No; that beast got me on the train, you know."



Billy Bunter sat motionless, the pillow swung back over his head, ready. The curtains parted, revealing the open window, a glimpse of the black night and the falling snow, and a figure kneeling on the snowy sill!

"Then why not telephone for the Rolls?"

"Eh?"

"And ask your pater to send a dozen or so of the keepers to guard it all the way home."

Billy Bunter blinked at the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

"Jolly good idea!" said Bob Cherry heartily.

"Topping!" agreed Nugent.

"The topfulness is terrific!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "N-n-not a bad idea. Quite a good idea, in fact. But—" Bunter shook his head. "No, I'm not going to turn you down, Wharton, old chap. This isn't exactly the sort of place I'm used to—but I can rough it—in fact, I rather like roughing it a bit, as a change from rolling in the lap of luxury, and all that. A fellow gets tired of stately apartments and swarming menials."

"Oh crikey!"

"Besides, there's the fancy-dress dance this evening, and Marjorie's coming," said Bunter. "She would feel it if I wasn't here. I don't want to spoil the evening for Marjorie Hazeldene." Bunter gave a fat smirk. "You fellows know, without my telling you, that Marjorie has a bit of a crush in my direction—"

Why the Famous Five, at that point, grasped Bunter's armchair, and rolled him out of it, Bunter never knew.

But he knew that they did.

That was not to be doubted; for he rolled out, headlong, and bumped on the floor, with an ear-splitting yell.

"Yoo-hoop!"

Harry Wharton & Co. walked away, and left him to yell.

Billy Bunter sat and spluttered with wrath and indignation. But when he

heaved himself to his feet, he did not roll away to the telephone to phone home for the Rolls.

Whether it was because he was fed-up with stately halls and swarming menials, or for some other reason, the fat and fatuous Owl was still sticking to his old pals.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Boxing Night!

"**M**ANY cooks make light work of the broth, as the English proverb remarkably observes," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Good old English proverb," chuckled Bob Cherry.

Everybody was busy

That is, everybody with one important exception—the exception being William George Bunter.

Bunter was unemployed, but he was not looking for work.

Bunter contributed criticism. Under the cheery and genial influence of Christmas-tide, the other fellows received Bunter's criticism without booting him as a reward for the same.

Guests were to arrive later. Six or seven Greyfriars fellows were turning up, and some of them bringing sisters and cousins. Local people were coming, too. There was going to be a dance to the radio or the gramophone; there was going to be fancy dress and masks. Everybody was playing up. Even the old colonel was unbending to the extent of appearing in the costume of an Arab chief in flowing garments. Miss Amy Wharton, in a pleasant little flutter of mild excitement, was to be an Elizabethan dame.

The Famous Five had their costumes laid out in Wharton's "den" upstairs.

Likewise had Billy Bunter. But at the present moment they were making preparations, and space!

Wharton Lodge was quite a commodious residence. But it was not built on the lines of Mauleverer Towers. Things had to be cleared out of the way—stacked away temporarily in corners and passages. The library and the colonel's study had to be borrowed, and added to the hall for the occasion.

All sorts of every-day things were happily disguised with gay chintzes and Christmas chains, and bunches of holly.

Among the things that had to be pushed out of the way was Billy Bunter. Every time he got in the way he was pushed out of it.

"Not much room—what?" remarked Bunter. "You want a place like Bunter Court for this sort of thing, really."

"Anybody seen that hammer?" asked Bob Cherry.

"My dear chap, you've banged in enough nails!" remonstrated Nugent. "You don't want to bang more nails."

"No; I want to bang Bunter."

"Oh, all right; here's the hammer!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter did not wait to be banged. He rolled away, and was silent for several minutes. But that was rather a long time for William George Bunter to be silent.

"I say, Wharton—"

"Yes. What—"

"What are you going to dance to?"

"Music."

"Oh, really, Wharton! I mean, we

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generally have a string band at Bunter Court. We don't consider expense on such occasions."

"Here's the hammer, Wharton!" called out Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, Wharton, look here! Don't walk off while a fellow's talking to you!" roared Bunter.

Wharton did walk off. He was too busy to linger even for the delights of Billy Bunter's conversation.

"I say, Nugent—"

"Don't bother!"

"I say, I shouldn't shove that holly up there! Look here, shove it over the old bean's portrait."

"What?"

"Good idea to cover up that mug—what?" grinned Bunter. "Make him snort when he sees it, too. Covering up an ugly mug with holly is a jolly good idea."

"First rate!" agreed Frank. "Stand steady!"

Billy Bunter did not stand steady. He made a backward jump as the bunch of holly jabbed into his fat features.

"Wow! Wharrer you up to?" he roared.

"Covering up an ugly mug with holly!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Bunter beat a retreat, rubbing his features. He backed away very rapidly, and backed into Wells, the butler, who was lending a plump hand in the proceedings.

He blinked at Wells.

"Skimpy place for a dance, Wells," he said.

"Indeed, sir!"

"I like a bit of space," said the fat Owl.

"No doubt, sir," agreed Wells. "I am sure you need it."

And Wells moved off before Billy Bunter could think of anything sufficiently crushing to answer to that.

Colonel Wharton looked out of the doorway of the library, with a load of coloured papers on his arm, and a cheery smile on his old bronzed visage. The old military gentleman liked to see happy young faces round him, and all faces were merry and bright, with one fat exception.

Bunter did not notice the old colonel there. He called to Harry who was coming up to take the coloured papers from his uncle.

"I say, Wharton—"

"Give us a rest, old fat bean!"

"But, I say, is the old fossil going to dance?" asked Bunter. "I say, he will jolly well creak at the joints if he does—what? He, he, he!"

"Indeed," said a deep voice, just behind Bunter—a voice that bore a remarkable resemblance to that of the great huge bear.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He revolved rapidly on his axis, and blinked at the colonel.

The old gentleman's genial smile had changed into quite a grim expression.

"Oh, I—I didn't see you, sir!" gasped Bunter. "I—I mean, I wasn't speaking of you. I—I meant another old fossil, sir—"

"What?"

"Honest Injun, sir! Not you; quite another old fossil!" gasped Bunter. "I—I— What I really meant to say was— Yarooop!"

Having turned to face the old colonel, Bunter had turned his back to the colonel's nephew. Now, all of a sudden, a boot was planted on his tight trousers, and he shot forward, yelling as he shot.

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"Harry!" exclaimed the colonel.

"Couldn't help it," said Harry. "Hold on, Bunter, I'm going to give you another."

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

And he rolled away in haste.

"Did you fellows see that?" he asked the grinning Co. "Kicking a chap after pressing him to come here for the hols—"

"Was the pressfulness terrific?" chuckled Hurree Janiset Ram Singh.

"If Wharton thinks I'm going to stand it," said Bunter, fairly wriggling with indignation, "I can tell him I ain't! I'm not going to stand—"

"Sit, for a change," suggested Bob Cherry.

Bunter sat—suddenly, as Bob hooked a fat leg. He roared as he sat.

"Wow! Look here, you beast—"

"Not satisfied yet?" asked Bob. "If you're not going to stand, and you don't want to sit, what the dickens do you want?"

"Lying suits him better," suggested Johnny Bull. "Lying's Bunter's long suit."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Beast! Wow!"

There was a sound of a car grinding on the snowy drive.

The door was flung wide, and the Famous Five rushed to welcome a very special guest.

Hazeldene of the Remove came in, with Marjorie on one side of him, Clara Trevlyn on the other, and a cheery grin on his face.

"I say, you fellows, do give a fellow room!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

Bunter barged energetically. "I say, here we are again, Marjorie, old dear! I say, do give a fellow room, Cherry! I say, Marjorie— Don't shove, Bull—you ain't in the Remove passage at Greyfriars now! I say, Marjorie, I've got a sprig of mistletoe here, and— Yaroooooh! Get off my toe, Bob Cherry, you clumsy beast! Wow!"

Bunter danced on one foot. Bob Cherry's heel had descended on the other, rather like a blacksmith's hammer! Bunter hopped, and danced, and bawled.

"Ow! My toe! Wow! My tut-tut-tut-toe! Wooooooh!"

"Hallo, Bunter, beginning already?" asked Hazel. "Doing a solo, old fat man?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! My toe!" wailed Bunter.

"Wow! It's squish-squish-squashed! You clumsy hippopotamus! Gerrouit of the way! I say, Marjorie, I've got a sprig of mistletoe here, and I say— Beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob Cherry seemed exceedingly clumsy that evening, for his other heel came down on Bunter's other foot. Bunter roared and danced again.

"Ow! Oh! My toe! Wow! Oh crikey! Yaroooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" howled Bunter. "My tut-tut-toe's squish-squish-squashed— Wow!"

Bunter had dropped that sprig of mistletoe. He did not pick it up again. He tottered to the nearest seat, sat down, and nursed his feet in turn. He had a pain in both of them.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

In Deep Disguise!

MERRY strains of music awoke the echoes of Wharton Lodge.

Merry young people tripped the light fantastic toe!

With one exception, it would have been difficult to say who was who and

which was which among the merry crowd, the costumes being, with the masks, a complete disguise—with the single exception of William George Bunter.

Bunter had sorted over the supply in Wharton's rooms, and decided to be a Cavalier. The garb of the Stuart period, Bunter thought, was rather well suited to a handsome and well-set-up figure—it went rather well with a fellow's natural air of distinction.

Bunter had no idea that his identity was any more apparent than any other fellow's. But, as a matter of fact, Bunter's circumference would have betrayed him under any guise. And even if his circumference had left anyone in doubt, the glitter of his spectacles through the eyeholes of the mask would have given him away.

Bunter was a dancing man! No elephant or hippopotamus had anything on Bunter when it came to dancing.

He was not, however, fearfully in request. As a matter of fact, Bunter danced only once—the Lambeth Walk—and even that was cut short!

Marjorie, whose kindness of heart was equal to almost any test, consented with many misgivings—and probably repented of her kindness when Bunter began to understudy the festive hippopotamus.

"Want all the floor?" inquired Hazel, as Bunter very nearly up-ended him.

"Yah!" was Bunter's impressive if not elegant reply.

"Ware porpoises!" murmured another voice, as Johnny Bull skilfully steered Clara Trevlyn out of danger.

"Beast!" was Bunter's polished rejoinder.

"Scrubby lot here, what?" he said to Marjorie, by way of light and elegant conversation. "Rotten floor!"

"Oh!" said Marjorie.

"That old fogey, Wharton's uncle, is got up as an Arab!" gurgled Bunter.

"Oh!"

"Bob Cherry's a Musketeer," said Bunter. "But you can pick him out all right—by his feet, you know! Biggest feet in the place! He, he, he!"

Marjorie did not even reply "Oh!" to that remark.

"If anybody treads on your feet, you'll know that Bob is on hand!" grinned Bunter.

"Oh dear!" ejaculated Marjorie, as Bunter's hoof clumped on her foot.

"Oh, sorry! Rotten floor, you know!" said Bunter cheerfully. "But look here, I was going to say— Yarooooop!"

Bunter slipped—and slid!

With great presence of mind, Marjorie detached herself from his frantic clutch.

Bunter spun, like a fat humming-top.

"Oh, my hat!"

"Look out!"

"Escaped elephant!"

"Dodge!"

"Yaroooooh! Whoop!" roared Bunter, as he sat down with a bump and then rolled. "Oh crikey! Yoo-hooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Don't fall over me! Oh crikey!"

A tall Arab picked Bunter up and piloted him out of the way.

He led him, not with any special gentleness, into the dining-room, where the refreshments were laid out. It was quite a welcome spot to Bunter, who really was keener on refreshments than on dancing.

Bunter could not recognise that tall,

veiled Arab; but he knew that it was the old colonel. He could recognise, at least, the iron grip that jerked him out of the way of the dancers.

The old colonel plumped him down in a seat and grunted.

"Young ass!" was his remark.

"Oh, really, you know!" squeaked Bunter. "I say, I haven't finished dancing, you know—I can't leave my partner like that—"

"You had better sit down!" said the colonel.

"Look here—"

"You are a young ass, Bunter!"

"Eh? How do you know who I am?" demanded Bunter, in surprise.

He knew the colonel's costume; but the colonel had not seen his before he donned it, so he was quite surprised to find his identity known.

"What? Of course I know!" grunted Colonel Wharton.

"Well, I don't see how! The fact is, I ain't Bunter!" said the fat Owl, by way of pulling the old colonel's leg.

"Wha-a-t?"

"You jolly well don't know who I am!" said Bunter, blinking at the old colonel through the eyeholes of his mask. "But if you want to know, I'm Bob Cherry."

"Good gad!"

As Bob was about six inches taller than Bunter, and about a yard less round the circumference, and had no specs to glitter through his mask, the colonel was not likely to believe that statement.

"I don't know who you are, either," went on the fat Owl. "Wharton never mentioned that you were getting up as an Arab, so, of course, I don't know you're his uncle at all."

"Good gad!" repeated the colonel blankly.

"Bit of an old frump, Wharton's uncle, ain't he?" said Bunter cheerily.

"What?"

"Stodgy old fossil, don't you think?"

The colonel stared fixedly at the fat Cavalier.

In the happy delusion that he had made the old colonel believe that he was Bob Cherry, and that he did not know who the tall Arab was, Bunter thought this a good opportunity for giving Wharton's uncle a piece of his fat mind!

If the colonel attributed that impertinence to Bob, it might be unpleasant for Bob, but it was all right for Bunter!

"Stiff old ramrod, you know!" rattled on Bunter cheerily. "Silly old ass, to put it plain! Don't you think so?"

Bunter realised that masks and fancy dress gave a fellow great opportunities. Identity being quite unknown, until the masks were taken off, a fellow could really say anything to anybody! It was quite agreeable to let Wharton's uncle know what he really thought of him—in this perfectly secure way!

"Rotten show, ain't it?" continued Bunter, while the colonel gazed at him speechless. "We do these things better at Bunter Court. They're rather poor here, really."

"Good gad!" gasped the colonel.

"Hardly my style," went on Bunter. "I came here out of good nature, really. That's my fault—I'm always too good-natured! I generally stay at much better places than this! I say, are you going?"

Colonel Wharton, with really wonderful self-command, refrained from boxing Bunter's fat ears. He turned and left him, breathing very hard.

Bunter chuckled.

He had, he fancied, made the old

bean sit up a bit! And if the old bean took it out of Bob Cherry afterwards, serve him jolly well right!

He was rather sorry to see the tall Arab go! He would have liked to tell him some more! He had quite a lot of remarks to make about Wharton Lodge and the inhabitants thereof—in the perfect security of his disguise!

Left to himself, Bunter decided not to rejoin the dancers. Foodstuffs were really more attractive than tripping the light fantastic toe! The merry strains of music were accompanied, from Bunter's corner, by a happy sound of gobbling!

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Caught By The Crook!

"SOAMES!" breathed Colonel Wharton.

The old colonel was standing by a window, looking on the merry crowd of young people with a genial eye. He hardly knew what made him glance at the window—perhaps some movement there had caught the corner of his eye—a hand that brushed off the frost.

Pressed to the pane, staring in from the terrace, was a face—a face that the colonel knew—a smooth, sleek face, with glinting eyes of steel.

It was the face of James Soames, sea-lawyer and crook; the seeker of the mysterious cigarette-case. Only for a moment or two it remained there—then it vanished; but Soames had seen what was passing within, and the old colonel had seen Soames.

He shut his teeth hard.

Evidently Soames was still watching Wharton Lodge in the belief that the silver case was in Bunter's keeping there. He was aware that festivities were going on; probably he had watched the many arrivals; and now he had ventured near enough to look in at a window. Likely enough he was calculating his chance of penetrating into the building—indeed, had he been provided with a costume and a mask, he might easily have found an opportunity of "gate-crashing."

Colonel Wharton moved away from the window, and a few minutes later he had quietly slipped a thick Malacca stick under his flowing Arab garb. Then, quietly, he stepped out of a french window on the terrace.

If Soames was still there, he was ready to deal with him with a heavy hand.

Chinese lanterns lighted the terrace for some distance; but beyond, all was dark.

Colonel Wharton moved along to the end, his eyes warily about him, the heavy stick gripped in his hand.

But there was nothing to be seen or heard; and he concluded that the crook was gone. With a grunt he turned and walked back towards the light.

There was a slight sound behind him as he went; and he whirled round instantly on his guard. But even as he turned, a sudden grip was on him, and a strength greater than his own bore him backwards.

The Malacca dropped from his hand as he grasped at his sudden assailant, and struggled fiercely; but he went down heavily, and a knee was planted on his chest.

The next moment something cold and hard was pressed to his face. He felt the round metal rim grinding through the Arab veil.

"Quiet!" said a low, tense voice.

"You scoundrel!" breathed the colonel. He had been, after all, taken off his guard; the man whose life had

been a series of desperate adventures, had been too wily and wary for him.

"Who are you?" breathed Soames. The colonel knew that it was Soames, though all he could see was a dim shadow bending over him in the dark. "Colonel Wharton, I think, from your voice."

"Release me, you rascal!" panted the colonel.

There was a soft, almost silent, laugh.

"Not likely—as you have so kindly walked into my hands, sir! Nothing could have happened more fortunately. I am obliged to you, sir, for seeking a spot of fresh air at this particular moment."

"You villain, I saw you at the window, and came out to find you!" breathed the colonel.

"Then my luck is in!" said Soames. "Keep quiet, sir! I do not desire to alarm a happy household with a shot—neither do I wish your Yuletide festivities to have a sudden tragic end. But I shall pull the trigger, sir, if you give me trouble."

The colonel panted with rage.

"What do you want, you villain?" he breathed. "What purpose do you dream of serving by this?"

"I think you know!" smiled Soames. "I am in search of the silver cigarette-case now in the hands of that fat young rascal Bunter."

"I do not believe that it is now in his hands—but, even so, you will have no chance of reaching Bunter!" snapped Colonel Wharton. "Since you came last night, he dare not venture out of the house."

"I have no doubt of it—I am quite well acquainted with Master Bunter and his ways! But you know, sir, that when the mountain refused to go to Mahomet, Mahomet went to the mountain."

"If you dare to enter—"

"That is my intention, sir!" Soames spoke in his smooth, deferential, manservant voice; though the automatic continued to grind on the colonel's cheek. "Had I been aware of the form your Boxing Night festivities would take, I should have come properly provided; and should have ventured to gate-crash—and I have no doubt that an additional guest in fancy dress would not have excited remark. But—"

He gave the soft laugh again.

"I have been watching for such an opportunity as this!" he went on. "Some of the young people have had an unsuspected eye on them already—but their outfit would have been useless to me. Yours, sir, will fit me very well, I think."

"Oh!" gasped the colonel.

"I did not know who you were, my dear sir, when I seized you—I was only thinking of borrowing your costume!" smiled Soames. "But I am very glad to find that you are the master of the house. In your guise, sir, I think I shall be able to carry out my plan undetected."

His voice snapped suddenly.

"Quiet! If you—"

Colonel Wharton made a desperate effort—at the imminent risk of his life, for he knew, only too well, how utterly desperate and ruthless the sea-lawyer was.

But Soames did not press the trigger. He whipped up the automatic and struck with the butt.

The old colonel gave a gasping groan, and lay like a log, stunned by the sudden blow.

"Fool!" muttered Soames.

The old colonel was unconscious. He was not likely to remain so many

minutes—but a very brief space of time was sufficient for Soames.

Swiftly, with nimble fingers, he stripped off the Arab costume. Then, with a thin coil of cord he drew from his pocket, he bound the unconscious man, hand and foot. A folded handkerchief was pressed into the colonel's mouth, and secured there with a knotted string.

Then, leaving him, Soames hurriedly, but carefully, assumed the Arab costume with veil and mask.

The colonel's eyes opened in a dizzy stare.

He struggled to move and to speak. With aching head and dizzy eyes, he stared up at the dim figure of a tall Arab in the gloom.

The figure bent over him.

"I regret this, Colonel Wharton," said the soft, deferential voice, "but you will acknowledge that you left me no choice. I have been as considerate as the circumstances allowed. Apart from my disinclination to alarm the household with a shot, I should have been very sorry to scatter your brains—such as they are—over your own terrace."

The colonel's eyes burned at him.

But he was helpless and silent; he could not stir a limb, or utter a sound.

"Believe me, sir, I regret exceedingly handing out such usage to an old hero of the War!" said Soames apologetically. "If you had submitted quietly, it would have been much more gratifying for both of us. I assure you, my dear sir, that I put only sufficient force into that blow to keep you quiet long enough for my purpose."

A faint mumble came from under the gag.

"Now I shall have to leave you for a time," went on Soames. "But, believe me, I shall release you from that uncomfortable position at the very earliest moment possible. I am far from being an unfeeling man."

With that, the sea-lawyer grasped the bound man and pulled him away to the darkest corner of the terrace, and left him in the deep shadow of a wall.

With deep feelings, Colonel Wharton lay there, while the crook in the Arab costume disappeared in the shadows.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Soames At Close Quarters!

BILLY BUNTER grinned.

Bunter was enjoying life.

He had a cosy corner to himself—a settee in an alcove, shaded by palms in tubs, from which he had a view of the dancing, so far as it interested him.

But it did not interest him very much. His interest was centred on things nearer at hand.

He had collected a supply of excellent provender, and placed it on the settee by his side. His podgy jaws had hardly ceased to move for quite a long time. He was sticky and he was happy.

Every now and then he cast a blink round about, and several times he had seen the tall Arab moving among the numerous company, and lost sight of him again. Now he spotted him once more, coming to the alcove where the fat Owl sat.

Wherefore did Billy Bunter grin in cheery anticipation of telling Colonel Wharton a few more flattering things about his Boxing Night party!

Having spotted Bunter through the nodding palms, the Arab sheik bore down on him. He seated himself on the settee by Bunter's side—Bunter's stack of tuck being on the fat Owl's other side.

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Harry Wharton, passing at a little distance, saw the figure in Arab costume in the alcove, and rather wondered that his uncle had sought the society of the fatuous fat Owl. However, he had plenty of other things to think about, and did not give the matter much attention.

He little dreamed whose identity was now hidden by that Arab costume—still less did Billy Bunter.

The fat Owl would have bounded as if he had received an electric shock had he fancied for a moment that James Soames was seated by his side.

"Rotten show, sir, what?" said Bunter, with his mouth full, on the same tack as before. "They can't throw a party here. Pretty putrid all round, ain't it?"

The Arab moved a little closer to him. Bunter, to his surprise, felt a grip on his fat arm from a hand that slid from under the burnous.

"Don't call out, Master Bunter," said a quiet voice. "Don't give the alarm, if you value your life!"

Bunter gave a convulsive jump and then sat still.

Only too well he knew that low, quiet voice, with its soft tones. It sent a chill of terror to his fat heart.

Up to that moment he had not doubted that the tall Arab was Colonel Wharton. It was the same costume, and the appearance was, naturally, exactly the same.

But that voice, so different from the colonel's deep tones, told another tale. It was Soames! And Soames knew him! How, Bunter did not know; but Soames knew him, in spite of the deep disguise.

But for the grip on his fat arm, Bunter would have leaped to his feet if he had not leaped into the air in his terror.

But that grip pinned him where he sat.

He turned his face towards the Arab sheik, his little round eyes distended behind his big, round spectacles.

He could not speak. He could only stare at Soames, speechless. How he had got there, in the colonel's costume, was a mystery Bunter did not think of trying to unravel. He was there—that was enough for Bunter. Soames, whose mere whisper frightened him out of his wits, was sitting by his side, holding his fat arm in fingers that seemed like steel. The fat Owl's podgy heart almost died within him.

"Don't stare like that, fool!" went on the quiet voice. "If you draw attention here I shall have to run for it, but I shall leave you dead where you are sitting."

"Ooooh!" gasped Bunter.

"I have been looking for a chance to speak to you, Master Bunter," said Soames. "I have found it at last, as your host has kindly lent me his costume—"

"Has he?" gasped Bunter. "Oh crikey!"

"I had to use somewhat rough measures before he did so," murmured Soames. "I trust that you will not force me to use rough measures with you, Master Bunter."

"Oh, no! Oh crumbs!"

"You may go on eating. I should be truly sorry to interrupt your enjoyment. Take care to draw no attention here. I have my automatic under this burnous, and if I have to shoot my way out of this house you can guess who will stop the first bullet."

"Oh lor'!"

Bunter mechanically chewed cake. It was a nice cake, but it seemed to have lost its savour. Probably for the first

time in his fat career William George Bunter was indifferent to cake.

"Now for a few words with you, my friend," resumed Soames, in the same low, soft voice, audible only to the fat Owl's ears. "You have told me many falsehoods on the subject of that silver cigarette-case. The time has come now to tell me the truth."

"I—I—I—"

"You led me to believe that it was left in this house when you fell into my hands," said Soames. "I ran considerable risk in searching for it. I have no doubt that it was left here, but it must have been hidden, as I failed to find it; and I warn you, Master Bunter, that you are now at the end of your prevarications. Another falsehood will cost you your life."

"Ow!" moaned Bunter.

He blinked at the merry throng, of whom some were within the sound of voices, unless subdued. Nobody was even looking towards him. In the midst of a merry-making crowd the hapless fat Owl was alone—with Soames!

"Now," went on the low voice, "I am here for that cigarette-case, Master Bunter. I shall not leave without it. You may guess that I am taking great risks, and I am not taking them for nothing. Where is the cigarette-case that was handed to you in Friardale Lane while you were at school?"

"I—I—I told you!" moaned the terrified fat Owl. "You wouldn't believe me—"

"You have told me tale after tale," said Soames, between his closed lips. "I warn you to tell the truth this time. Where is the silver case?"

"It's at Greyfriars."

"Take care!" hissed Soames.

"I tell you it was lost there!" gasped Bunter. "I told you a chap took it away from me and chucked it away."

"That was the most improbable of all the falsehoods you have told me," said Soames. "If you are tired of life, Master Bunter, you have only to make another attempt to delude me. For the last time, the truth!"

There was a deadly threat in the low voice, and the steely eyes glittered through the eyeholes of the mask.

Billy Bunter shook like a fat jelly.

Lying as a fine art had its drawbacks. Bunter had, in fact, told Soames the truth; but even the keen-witted crook had been unable to disentangle it from his many untruths.

The fat Owl dared not lie again now. He had to make Soames believe him somehow, and even the fat Ananias of Greyfriars realised that his only chance was to stick to the truth. All his whoppers, one after another, had been found out.

Soames suspected that he had hidden the cigarette-case. Bunter was quite prepared to tell him that it was so—if that would have been of any use.

But he realised that Soames, now inside the house in a safe disguise, would require to be led to the spot.

He had said that he would not go without the silver case, and Bunter was in his hands. His fat flesh fairly cringed at the awful thought of the automatic under the burnous.

Soames watched him. He could feel the fat Owl trembling in his grip.

"The truth!" he breathed.

Bunter cudgelled his fat brains for an untruth which might seem probable to Soames. But he was at the end of his tether in that direction. There was nothing for it but the truth, whether Soames would believe it or not.

"I've told you!" moaned Bunter.

"Smithy took it away and chucked it out into the quad. It really is the

truth! I shouldn't have told you anything else if you had believed that. It's really true. Oh crikey!"

"Nonsense!" muttered Soames, though he was impressed by the fat Owl's terrified earnestness. "Who was the boy, then?"

"Smithy—Vernon-Smith. You remember him. You used to be his father's valet!" mumbled Bunter.

"I remember Master Herbert perfectly," said Soames quietly. "He is a somewhat aggressive youth in many ways, but not the boy to be guilty of an act of stupid bullying such as you have described."

"You see, he thought I had pinched

Soames sat silent for a long minute, his eyes on the fat Owl.

Of the many yarns Bunter had spun him on the subject of that cigarette-case, this was the only one he had tried a second time. That looked as if it might be the truth. Moreover, now that the fat Owl had explained how Herbert Vernon-Smith had come to chuck away the silver case, it seemed less improbable.

The man who had been Mr. Vernon-Smith's valet knew Master Herbert very well indeed, and he knew that this was exactly what the Bounder of Greyfriars was likely to do if he caught Bunter

Soames sat silent again, thinking.

If this was the truth, and it seemed to him now that it was, he was done with Wharton Lodge; his search lay within the walls of Greyfriars. Somewhere within the radius of a throw from a certain study window the silver case lay hidden in snow.

"I will take your word provisionally, Master Bunter," he said quietly. "I think you have told me the truth this time. We shall see. If I find out that you have deceived me you will take the consequences, and I warn you that they will be very painful!"

"I—I—I say—"

"You need say nothing!" Soames rose

SUM fellows buy their Crissmus Cards by the duzzen, they are orl the same and Have the same silly rcurds on Each Wun, and if you send a Card to a frend or an ennemy, he gets eggsactly the same sentiment, to wit—

May orl your days be Jolly,
And orl your hours be Brite.
And may there be no holly
Insighd your bed at nite!

altho, if the fellow is a fo or a cheeky yung bratt, you hoop there will be kartlodes of holly in his bedd at nite, and, in fackt, you sumtimes put it there yoreself, just to give him beens—witch is hardly honnest, after wot was sedd on your Card.

I don't beleere in this beleere in this, Oh crikey, I have ritten that twice over, but it duzzent matter. My idea is that Every Fellow shood rite his own vurses and the Printer shood Print wun on each Card so that whoever gets each Card will get the vurse that was ment for whoever gets the Card, witch seems a bitt mixed up, but it duzzent matter, becaus you kno what I meen. I meen, you rite a vurse for whoever it is you rite the vurse for and whoever it is gets that speshful vurse that was ment for whoever it was—see?

Well, that's what I have dun this year, and my Crissmus Cards are reely pursonal Greetings to whoever it is that gets them, I have made a blott just there, butt it stands to reeson they can't print a Blott, so it duzzent matter.

Here's the Card I am sending to Mr. Prout, who is my Beek, butt verry iggerant and duzzent kno mutch about anything in partickycular, he makes out I can't spell, witch is abserd, and I despise him.

Well, heer's a Merry Crissmus, sir,
You doan't dexterve it, relly—
From yore best skollar,—I reffer
Of korse, to YORE'S SINSERELY,
H. J. COKER.

his smokes," stammered Bunter. "I was filling the cigarette-case in his study—"

"Oh!"

"And he got waxy, grabbed the silver case, and chucked it out of his study window. He did, really!"

"That is more like Master Herbert," said Soames. "But, in that case, why did you not pick it up again—if you did not?"

"I looked for it, but it fell in the snow," explained Bunter. "I couldn't find it—might have hunted for it for a week—and it was the last day before breaking-up. So it was lost. It—it really was, you know. It won't ever be seen again till the snow melts."

Coker's Christmas Cards By The GREAT HORACE Himself.



The masterly beauty of Coker's style, spelling and grammar has been left untouched. I couldn't touch it—I didn't know where to start.—Ed.

I am allso sending a Card to Wingate of the Sixth, who is so inkapable of jujing a man's form at phooter, that he ackchewally refused to give me a plaice among the half-bax in the 1st XI, and then woodn't fite me when I challenjed him, here it is—

A Merry Crissmustide, you Skunk,
A bonny brite Noo Yeer, you Wurm,
I'll see you, if yore not a Phunk,
In the jimnasium next turn!

To Loder of the Sixth, who is a kadd of the deepest di and a booly and a rotta and a wrank rascal, I am sending this:

Here's wishing you a Horrid Time,
An Orful, Orful, Orful vack,
Go kwickly to sum forrin klime,
And never think of kumming back!

Of korse, at Crissmus it's up to a fellow to berry the hatchit, but Loder is to thick, and I can't bare him, so he gets the abuv. To Wharton, on the uther hand, I shall send a Card that is Diggernified but Corjial, tho it is hard to forget that he and his cheeky yung bratts in the Remooove have ackchewally laid hands on me more than yunce this turn, tho, of korse, I whopped them for it, here it is—

My greeting to you is Sinsere,
Good forehin in all that you Plan,
Tho mind you don't bagg a thick eer
For cheeking a Seenior Man!

My Card to the Kliff House Girls will be Perlite and Grayshus, and in the most fawltless taste, as thuswise:

Greetings, girls, and best of luck,
To evvry merry mayden,
May you guzzle lodes of tuck
Until yore-foolly laden!

Well, that's the idea, and you must admitt it's a korka, or shood it be korker, I'm not quite sure, but it duzzent matter. Phinally, here is my Card to Evvry Reader of this paper, hoaping you'll all have a reckord-braking time this Xmas, and may yore prezzents be eggsackly what you want most.

The best to all, the best to all,
To all, the best, the best,
The best to fellows short and tall,
And also to the rest.

HORACE JAMES COKER
(Fifth Form).

Some fellows have the check to say that I can't spell. What rot! Reed threiv this artickle as carefully as you like, and I garantle that you won't fnd one mistake. (Quite true, Horace, more likely one-hundred-and-one!)

filling the case from his secret supply of smokes

Soames did not feel sure—it was impossible to feel sure in dealing with Bunter—but he had an impression that he had run the truth to earth at last, as it were

"Then the silver case is still at your school?" he asked, at last.

"Yes!" moaned Bunter.

"Lying in the snow in the quad-rangle?"

"Yes."

"There has been no thaw yet," said Soames thoughtfully. "There are no signs of one, so far. If that is true, the silver case is still there."

"Yes!" gasped Bunter.

to his feet. "I shall leave you now, Master Bunter! If you think of giving the alarm and endangering me, remember that the automatic is in my hand, and that I am a dead shot!"

"I—I wouldn't—" stammered Bunter.

"Pah!"

The sheik moved away.

Billy Bunter watched him with bulging eyes through his big spectacles as he went. The fat junior was not thinking of giving the alarm—he was only too glad to see the disguised crook go—the deadly automatic with him! Not for worlds, or for whole universes,

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A BAFFLING QUEST!



(Continued from page 13)

would Bunter have given a sign, or uttered a sound, that would have drawn the muzzle of that automatic in his direction.

He gasped with relief when the figure in Arab costume disappeared from his sight.

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter.

And a whole minute elapsed before he took another bite at the cake!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Exit Soames!

COLONEL WHARTON stirred and mumbled faintly as a dark figure bent over him in the deep shadows at the end of the terrace.

He knew that it was Soames, and his eyes burned up at the dim, shadowy form.

"I regret that I have had to leave you so long, my dear sir!" said the soft, deferential voice. "Believe me, it was unavoidable. I trust that you have not suffered too much from the cold."

The old colonel was in evening clothes, which he had worn under the Arab costume; a poor protection against the cold of the last days of December. But Soames, who had discarded coat and hat when assuming the disguise, had thrown his overcoat round the bound man, for which the old military gentleman was duly thankful, when he was left in the bitter night.

Crook as he was, pirate and free-booter as he had been, it seemed that there was a spot of the milk of human kindness in Soames' hard heart. Unscrupulous and ruthless as he was in carrying out his plans, he would do no hurt beyond what was essential to that end. Perhaps it helped him somehow to square his lawless career with his conscience—if James Soames allowed himself the luxury of a conscience at all!

A keen blade glided over the colonel's bonds, and the gag was taken from his mouth. He was free; and he staggered to his feet, his hand to his head, which was aching from the blow he had received.

Soames threw the Arab costume at his feet.

"Returned with thanks, my dear sir!" he said. "I will—with your permission—take my coat! You are very welcome to give the alarm now, if you so desire—it will be too late to do me any harm. But probably you would prefer not to disturb the harmony of a merry evening in your mansion. Merely a suggestion, my dear sir—please yourself, by all means."

The colonel stood unsteadily, his hand to his head. A moment more, and the crook had vanished into the blackness of the night.

For some minutes after he had gone, Colonel Wharton stood there, rubbing his head where there was a bruise under his grizzled hair.

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That it was useless to give the alarm, that there was no prospect of laying Soames by the heels, he knew only too well. The black December night had swallowed the crook from all knowledge.

Soames had carried out his plan, whatever it was—apparently to interview Bunter. Obviously he had done so undetected. The old colonel, at length, resumed the Arab costume.

Soames was away and safe, and there was no purpose to be served by giving an alarm, and casting a shadow over his nephew's Boxing Night party. Colonel Wharton decided to keep his own counsel for the present, and carry on as if nothing had happened. But his feelings were deep as he walked back along the terrace to the lighted windows.

The dancing was over now and the supper-room crowded. Masks were taken off and cheery faces revealed, and a happy buzz of youthful voices greeted the colonel as he came in.

He glanced round for Bunter—and spotted that fat and fatuous youth, sitting in his corner alcove. Bunter still had that cosy corner to himself, though the room was now crowded. Nobody seemed to be seeking the most attractive company going—till the colonel came in.

Bunter was sitting quite still. It was a quarter of an hour since the disguised crook had left him—but the fat Owl had not stirred or spoken. He was not likely to stir or speak, till he was sure that Soames was safe off the premises, and he was not sure yet.

Bunter gave a start and a breathless squeak at the sight of a tall figure in Arab costume bearing down on him again.

It did not occur to his fat brain that Soames, having finished with him, was not likely to return. That Arab sheik was Soames, to his terrified eyes.

"Oh crikey! I—I—I say, you—you—you keep off!" he gasped. "I've told you about that putrid cigarette-case—I—I say—"

"You need not be alarmed, Bunter!" snapped Colonel Wharton.

Bunter jumped at that well-known deep voice.

"Oh crumbs! I—I thought—is—is—is it you, sir? That beast—"

Colonel Wharton sat down in the seat occupied by Soames, in the same costume, a quarter of an hour ago.

Billy Bunter blinked at him, doubtful and uneasy. He knew the colonel's voice, certainly, but he was not quite reassured, until the old gentleman removed the mask from the upper part of his face.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "It—it's really you, sir! That beast Soames said he had borrowed your costume and—"

"You have seen Soames, then?" asked the colonel quietly.

"Oh dear! Yes!" gasped Bunter. "The beast was going to shoot me with a naughty-matic—I mean an automatic—"

"It is very improbable that he would have done anything of the kind," said the colonel dryly. "But no doubt it was easy to work on your fears."

"Oh, really, sir—"

"He questioned you, I suppose?"

"Yes, the cheeky beast! I dare say he thought I was afraid of him," said Bunter. "I had a jolly good mind to knock him spinning, only—"

"Do not talk nonsense, Bunter! I do not blame you for having been frightened, but try to talk sense!" rapped the colonel. "Have you told the man the truth this time, about that wretched cigarette-case?"

"I hope I shouldn't be likely to tell

anybody anything else, sir!" said Bunter with dignity. "I'm a bit more particular than some chaps—Wharton's instance—"

"Do you want me to box your ears, Bunter?"

"Eh, no, no!"

"Then stop talking nonsense and answer my question!"

"I've told him where that rotten cigarette-case is," grunted Bunter. "I've told him before, only he had the cheek to doubt my word! A dashed man-servant you know, taking it on himself to doubt the word of a Public school man! Blessed if I know what things are coming to."

"What did you tell him?"

"Same as I've told you—that that putrid case is sticking somewhere under the snow in the Greyfriars quad! He can go there and hunt for it, if he likes—he ain't likely to find it till the snow melts," grunted Bunter. "But I—I say, you've got your costume back, so he's gone all right—I say, hadn't you better set everybody looking for him—I'll go and tell the fellows—"

"You will say nothing, Bunter, until the guests are gone!" rapped the colonel.

"I think I'd better—"

"If you utter a single word on the subject, I shall box your ears!"

"Look here—"

"Be silent, and remember what I have said!"

The colonel rose to his feet and moved away—having had enough of Bunter.

The fat Owl blinked after him with a devastating blink.

Now that Soames was evidently gone, and the dreaded automatic was far away, Bunter would have liked to spread the news; in fact, he would have enjoyed a spot of dramatic excitement.

He had a jolly good mind to do so—but, on the other hand, he did not want his fat ears boxed, so on the whole, he had a jollier good mind not to!

He was annoyed, and he was peeved, but there was still balm in Gilead! He turned his attention once more to the foodstuffs, and was comforted.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

O.K. For Fishy!

SAY, big boy!" yapped Fisher T. Fish.

It was the following morning, and Fisher T. Fish was at the door of Gosling's lodge at Greyfriars School.

Gosling had been standing at the door of that lodge, but as Fisher T. Fish came jerking along on his bony legs, the old porter retired within, and shut the door. Apparently he was in dread of a spate of Fishy's bottled-up conversation.

Fisher T. Fish banged on the door and shouted.

It was not, for once, to unleash chin-wag that Fishy had run down Gosling to his lair. Fishy wanted to use the telephone in the lodge.

Fishy had thought it over. He had decided to "get" Bunter, if he could, on the telephone.

If Bunter was bedding down at any shebang that was worth a guy's while, Fisher T. Fish was going, if he could, to make the silver cigarette-case a pretext for joining him there.

He did not, as a matter of fact, believe that the silver case which he had found in the snow in the quad really belonged to Billy Bunter. But he was prepared to acknowledge Bunter's ownership, and offer to make a journey to return the lost article to its owner, if it meant a

chance of landing himself somewhere for even a day or two of those seemingly endless holidays.

To most Greyfriars fellows the hols seemed rather short; but to the fellow who was passing them at the deserted school, they seemed almost endlessly long! The gladdest of sounds, to Fishy's ears, was the tramp of returning feet at the new term.

But the new term was not at hand yet; that glad sound was still afar.

Fishy had thought the matter over very carefully. It had needed careful thought; for the idea of paying his railway fare for a long distance was painful in the extreme. But he had made up his transatlantic mind at last; and now he was going to get Bunter, if he could!

Thump, thump, thump! went Fishy's bony fist at Gosling's door.

"Say, bo, you getting doggoned deaf?" he bawled.

Gosling opened the door at last.

"You look 'ere, Master Fish," he said, or rather grunted, "wot I says is this 'ere—"

Fish: "Say, call one of the other guys to the phone—I guess I'll speak to Wharton—"

"Master Harry and his friends have gone out, sir, to see off a party who stayed the night."

"Oh, search me! Look yere, you go and hook Bunter out of bed!"

"I will take a message, sir, or you may speak to Colonel Wharton; he is in the hall at the moment."

"Sure; hike him along."

"Pray hold on a moment."

The suave voice ceased; and a moment later a deep voice spoke in its stead.

"What is wanted? Who is speaking?"

"Fish, sir—"

"What?"

"Fish—"

"What the dooce do you mean?" came the colonel's deep voice testily. "I do not deal in such matters personally. If it is about some order for fish, you must speak to the butler."

"Nope!" gasped the American junior, at the other end. "Fish, sir—Fisher T. Fish—"

a silver case—a leetle silver case—that he lost here—"

"A silver case!" Fisher T. Fish was quite surprised by the note of excitement in the voice at the other end. "Do you mean a silver cigarette-case, Fish?"

"Jest a silver case, sir—"

"Speak plainly!" Bunter has told me about a silver cigarette-case which he stated he had lost in the quadrangle the day before the school broke up! Is that what you have found?"

"Yep!"

It was a surprise to Fishy that Bunter had mentioned the cigarette-case at Wharton Lodge. He had displayed it up and down the Remove at Greyfriars, in the last days of the term; but it was not the sort of thing that Fishy would have expected him to mention to elders.

However, it was plain that the colonel knew about it; and, for some reason quite unknown to Fishy, was keenly interested in it.

"Describe it to me, please!" rapped the colonel.

"Sure! A flat, oblong, silver cigarette-case, sir—I picked it up here

HARRY WHARTON: I'd like a typewriter for my "Herald" work, or a television set, or an aero-glider, or a St. Bernard dog. I've an equal chance of getting any of 'em, i.e., nil!

BOB CHERRY: A motor-boat or a sailing cutter. The old boat I have at Cherry Place has now so many holes that I've given it to the cook for use as a colander. My pater is going to give me a new one "when his ship comes home," but I've a dim suspicion that it has foundered.

TOM BROWN: A new camera. If any fellow wants to make me a present, I've got my eye on the very one I want. It's at Chunkley's and costs £35. Don't all speak at once.

PETER TODD: A pair of cane-proof trousers.

LORD MAULEVERER: A mechanical secretary, who will do my work when I'm feeling tired.

WILLIAM WIBLEY: A stick of No. 3 grease-paint and a West End theatre costing 6d. and £15,000 respectively.

Perfect Presents

What I would like to get this Christmas, by

GREYFRIARS CELEBRITIES.

BILLY BUNTER: A fellow nacherally needs tuck. After all, tuck is tuck! A motor-bike or a sinny-kamera are all right in their way, but they're not tuck. You can't beat tuck. Tuck is the finest present in the world. Give me tuck every time. Tons of tuck. You can't give me too much tuck. If you want the perfect present, I can answer in one word TUCK!

FISHER T. FISH: A guy naturally needs cash. You can't beat cash. Cash is the finest present in the world. Give me cash every time. And I'll take it now, before you change your mind!

BOLSOVER MAJOR: A new chest-expander, a new rowing-machine, a new muscle-builder, and a new pair of boxing-gloves. (Why not a new face, while you're about it, Bolsy?)

TOM DUTTON: An ear-trumpet (we've filled this in without troubling to ask Dutton about it.)

PAUL PROUT, M.A.: A gag. (Ditto, ditto!)

COKER: A racing-kar, sumthing that will reelly go. Also a spelling-manyecal—not for me, of corse, but for my Beek, Mr. Prout, who is iggnurant of the art.

LODER (Sixth Form): A large vat of boiling oil, in which to end my miserable existence. (This isn't what Loder wants, perhaps, but it's what he jolly well needs.)

GOSLING, THE PORTER: I wouldn't say no to a what-d'ye-call-it—you-know-what—how-d'ye-do! It's twelve-and-six a bottle, I believe. (I never said nothing of the kind, you young rip! You 'op orf, before I report yer!)

"Park it!" interrupted Fisher T. Fish briskly. "I guess I want to cinch your phone for a long-distance."

"Oh!" grunted Gosling. "You can step in, Master Fish."

Master Fish stepped in.

Gosling grunted again, sat down, and picked up his newspaper.

Fisher T. Fish sat down at the telephone. He did not think of ringing up Bunter Court, or Bunter Villa. Fishy guessed, reckoned, and calculated that that was the unlikeliest spot to locate Bunter, in the hols. He resolved to try Wharton Lodge first; and it was to that address that his call was put through.

"Hallo!" came a suave voice over the wires.

"That Wharton Lodge?" asked Fisher T. Fish.

"This is Wharton Lodge; the butler speaking."

"Say, I guess you can put me wise!" said Fishy. "Is there a fat guy named Bunter staying with the galoots there?"

"Master Bunter is staying here at present, sir."

"Ask him to mosey along to the phone, will you?"

"Master Bunter is not down yet, sir."

"Aw, wake snakes and walk chalks! Nope—I guess he wouldn't be—at ten in the morning!" snorted Fisher T.

"Is this some absurd joke, or what? There is no such fish as fisherty fish, that I have ever heard of. What do you mean?"

"Aw, carry me home to die! Fisher T. Fish—Fisher Tarleton Fish, of Noo Yark, sir, speaking from Greyfriars School."

"Oh! Do you mean that your name is Fish?" exclaimed the colonel.

"You said it!" agreed Fishy. "I guess your nevoe knows the name O.K., sir. Say, I want a word with Bunter, and your butler allows that the fat gink is still snoozing. I sure want to speak to him a whole heap."

"You had better ring again later, then!" grunted the colonel. "Bunter is not an early riser."

"Mebbe he'd turn out, sir, if you told him I'd found suthin' he lost jest before the school broke up!" said Fisher T. Fish persuasively. "I guess he would be glad to get the noos of it."

"Probably! What is it?"

Fisher T. Fish, in Gosling's lodge, hesitated a moment or two. He could hardly suppose that the old colonel would approve of a junior schoolboy being the possessor of a cigarette-case. He decided not to be too specific.

"Mebbe you'd tell the fat goob—I mean Bunter, sir—that I've picked up

yesterday—jest happened to root it out with my boot as I was moseying around," answered Fisher T. Fish. "I guess it's sure Bunter's, and I kinder reckoned I'd put him wise that it had turned up."

"Have you looked inside it?"

"Sure!"

"Is there a Greek inscription inside—a number of Greek letters cut, or scratched on the metal?"

"You're telling me," answered Fisher T. Fish. "I see that you know it, sir—that's the very identical article. I guess I ain't wise to what it means, onless it's a name, but I'll say I know a Greek letter when I give it the once-over."

"Undoubtedly it is the same cigarette-case!" exclaimed Colonel Wharton. "It is very fortunate that you have found it, Master Fish. I am extremely anxious to see it."

Fisher T. Fish grinned over the telephone.

This was the goods!

It was surprising, or rather amazing, to Fishy, to find that the old colonel knew anything about that silver case, or if he knew, took the slightest interest in it. But amazing as it was, it suited Fisher T. Fish admirably.

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If the master of Wharton Lodge was extremely anxious to see that silver case, Fisher T. Fish was the man to convey it to him in the shortest possible time! "I guess I'd be glad to come along with it, sir!" he trilled.

"Oh! You must not take all that trouble, my boy—it is a great distance from Greyfriars here," said Colonel Wharton. "If you put it in the post—"

"No trouble at all, sir!" assured Fisher T. Fish. "I'll say I got time on my hands, being the only guy left here over the holidays."

"Oh, I see! In that case, Master Fish, if you are really willing to undertake a long railway journey—"

"Call it a cinch, sir."

"Eh?"

"I mean, you're talking!"

"What?"

"It's a go, sir—me for the railroad!" said Fisher T. Fish.

Then a brilliant thought—almost dazzling in its brilliancy—struck Fisher T. Fish.

Colonel Wharton, for some inexplicable reason, utterly mysterious to Fishy, was anxious to see that silver cigarette-case. If he was so anxious as all that, he might be touched for the railway fare!

The thought of getting to Wharton Lodge without the trip costing him anything, was really the opossum's eyelids to Fishy; indeed, it was the elephant's side-whiskers!

"Just one thing, sir," he went on. "Me staying here over the hols, they don't squeeze out the journey money for this infant. I guess I'm honing to oblige you, sir, but I'll mention that I shall have to borrow a pound for the railroad—"

"I will gladly reimburse you for your railway fare, Fish, if you will take the trouble to convey the cigarette-case here."

"You said it, sir," trilled Fisher T. Fish joyously. "I guess I'll be horning in, sir, as pronto as the one-horse railroads in this old island can move, which ain't a heap fast, I allow."

Fisher T. Fish rang off. He grinned joyfully at Gosling, who was regarding

him over the top of his newspaper, with an unfavouring eye.

"I guess you're going to lose me for a few days, old-timer!" said Fisher T. Fish, with a cheery chortle. "Me for Wharton Lodge! Say, big boy, this here is the cat's whiskers—I'm telling you, bo, that it's the grasshopper's eyelids—and then some."

And the elated Fishy jerked out of Gosling's lodge—leaving Gosling looking far from disconsolate at the idea of losing him!

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Knows!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! You up?" exclaimed Bob Cherry in astonishment.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"But it's only half-past eleven!" said Bob, looking very puzzled. "What are you doing out of bed, Bunter?"

"Look here—"

"New early-rising stunt, or what?" asked Bob. "By gum, you'll be washing next!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton & Co had come in, ruddy and cheery, in the cold and frosty morning. They had been to the railway station to speed the parting guests; and they found Billy Bunter frowsting over the fire in the hall when they came in.

"Oh, don't be a goat!" said Bunter peevishly. "I say, you fellows, what do you think?"

Bunter, apparently, had news!

"What do we think?" repeated Johnny Bull. "Well, I, for one, think that you had better go and get a wash!"

"Beast!"

"The thoughtfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Singh.

"Oh, no!" said Bob, shaking his head.

"Not too big a change at once! Bunter's turned out early—that's enough for one day! I'll tell you what, Bunter—wash on New Year's Day! See in the new year with a clean face, what?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly fathead!" roared Bunter. "If you'll stop talking rot, I'll tell you the news!"

"Well, what's the news?" asked Harry Wharton, laughing. "Don't tell us that your postal order's come and give us a shock!"

"My silver cigarette-case has turned up!" said Bunter.

"You fat villain! Then it was here all the time, was it?" exclaimed Nugent.

"No, it wasn't!" hooted Bunter. "Haven't I told you, over and over again, that Smithy chucked it out of his study window at Greyfriars? Well, that's where it's turned up, see? Found in the quad—"

"How the thump do you know, then?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Fishy found it—and phoned!" explained Bunter. "The old bean's just told me—I haven't been down long. Fishy's coming over with it to-day."

"Jolly obliging of Fishy!" said Bob, with a stare. "It's a thumping long railway trip, and will cost more than the cigarette-case is worth in the fare."

"Oh, I know Fishy's game all right!" said Bunter disdainfully. "Fat lot he cares whether I get my cigarette-case back again or not."

"But you say he's coming over with it—"

"Oh, he's coming all right! This isn't much of a show—I mean, compared with Bunter Court, or any decent place, you know—but it's better than sticking at Greyfriars over the hols. Think I didn't spot Fishy's game as soon as I heard he'd phoned? What-ho!" Bunter gave a fat sneer. "Fishy's idea is to barge in—that's Fishy's idea! Think I don't know?"

"Well, you've got lots of knowledge on that subject!" admitted Bob Cherry. "Sort of expert."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" snorted Bunter. "I despise that sort of thing—fishing for invitations and butting in where a fellow isn't wanted! I can't stand that kind of thing, and I don't mind saying so! It's mean!"

"Eh?"

"No class," said Bunter. "Not the sort of thing a decent fellow would do. Fishy don't care a boiled bean whether he's wanted or not—just so long as he barges in and sticks! Revolting, I call it!"

The Famous Five gazed at William George Bunter.

They did not speak; Bunter seemed to have taken their breath away.

"The fellow won't get much change out of me!" went on Bunter, evidently in a mood of lofty disdain. "He can walk in, and hand over the cigarette-case! I shall thank him politely! And that's all."

"That's all, is it?" gasped Bob.

"Yes! If Fishy thinks he's going to stick on to me for the hols, he's making a mistake! I'm not the sort of fellow to be done like that!" said Bunter emphatically. "I knew his game all right—he barged in, making out it's to return that silver case—and I'm to make it all right for him to hang on! Well, I shan't!"

Bunter shook his fat head decidedly.

"I shall be civil," he went on. "I shall thank him for taking so much trouble—he, he, he! And I shall say good-bye! I say, you fellows, fancy his face when he has to walk out again! What?"

And the fat Owl chuckled.

"Bunter's postal order must have come!" said Bob at last.

"It hasn't!" said Bunter, blinking at him. "What makes you think that?"

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"I mean, you must have bought Wharton Lodge from Wharton's uncle while we've been out this morning."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Co. "You silly ass!" yapped Bunter. "Wharrer you mean?"

"We shall have to be jolly civil to Bunter now, you men, now that he's master of the house and lord of the manor!" went on Bob. "Mind your p's and q's, or he'll be giving us a hint to quit!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "You can talk all the rot you like," yapped Bunter, "but you'll jolly well see that I'm going to put paid to Fishy's little game! He'll get here in time for lunch if he can. I shan't ask him to stay for lunch! You'll see."

"May I?" asked Harry Wharton meekly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Ob, really, Wharton—" "Or, if I mayn't, may my uncle?" further inquired the captain of the Remove.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Oh!" said Bunter, fixing his spectacles scornfully on the colonel's nephew. "Oh! Yes, I fancy if I turn Fishy down, as I'm going to, he will try next to stick on to you! I dare say you're fool enough to let him."

"Think so?" "Yes, I do!" said Bunter scornfully. "You're soft! You're just the fellow to let some sponging cad stick on to you in the hols! Just the sort of silly, soft thing you would do, Harry Wharton!" "Got you there, old man!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"The gotfulness is terrific!" "Ha, ha, ha!" The Famous Five yelled. Billy Bunter blinked at them scornfully through his big spectacles. Bunter could see no reason for all this merriment.

"Well, if you choose to be done by a sponging outsider, I can't stop you!" said Bunter contemptuously. "I shouldn't be! If Fishy turned up at Bunter Court he would get the marble eye fast enough. But I suppose any sort of a rank outsider could barge in here and stick on."

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Some fellows are a bit more particular," said the fat Owl. "My idea is that that sort of thing oughtn't to be encouraged. But have your own way. I dare say you're used to riff-raff butting in here!"

"I'm getting used to it!" admitted Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "Well, I can tell you this," said Bunter. "You ask Fishy to stay to lunch, and he'll manage somehow to hang on for dinner—and then he'll manage to lose a train, and have to stay the night! Don't I know 'em! And you'll find that he loses trains again to-morrow, or puts up some other excuse—I tell you, I know that sort of game."

"You ought if anybody does!" admitted Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!" "But have your own way and be done, like the silly, soft ass you are!" said Bunter, with a contemptuous wave of a fat hand.

"Thanks—I'm going to," agreed Harry Wharton. "Bunter, old fat man, you don't know how funny you are."

"Well, I've warned you what to expect!" said Bunter, with a shrug of his podgy shoulders. "You let a sponging tick glue on to you, and you'll never get shut of him! Still, if you don't mind, all right!" said Bunter sarcastically.

"Well, to tell the truth, I do mind!"

said Harry, laughing. "But it's all right, all the same, old porpoise!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Bunter gave a snort and plumped into his armchair. Fishy's little game was perfectly clear to Bunter, and he was disgusted; and why the Famous Five regarded his remarks on the subject as funny, remained a mystery to Billy Bunter!

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Fisher T. Fish Blows In!

"GUESS that's the article!" said Fisher T. Fish.

Fisher T. Fish had not arrived in time for lunch at Wharton Lodge.

No doubt he had done his best. But the one-horse railways in the mouldy old island in which Fishy now unhappily sojourned had let him down. Still, he had lunched on the train, and guessed, reckoned, and calculated that he would be able to "touch" the old colonel for the lunch as well as the railway fare.

Now here was Fishy, and here was the celebrated silver cigarette-case. It lay on the table in the library for inspection.

Colonel Wharton examined it very curiously.

Soames' repeated and desperate attempts to obtain possession of that silver case had made him very keen to see it, and discover if he could what could possibly be its value to the crook.

The Famous Five had seen it before at Greyfriars; still they were keenly interested in it.

Bunter was not present. It was Billy Bunter's custom in the holidays to take a nap after lunch, so Fishy's arrival had caught Bunter napping, so to speak.

Unaware that Fishy was on the spot, Bunter was sleeping and snoring.

Fisher T. Fish was quite puzzled and perplexed by the interest the silver case excited. Except for the Greek letters scratched inside, which he supposed to be a foreign name, it was exactly like hundreds of cigarette-cases. It was quite a mystery to Fishy.

But he was greatly bucked. The general keenness on the subject of that silver case promised well for Fishy's own designs. Quite unexpectedly, he found that not merely Bunter, but the whole party at Wharton Lodge, took the deepest interest in that silver case.

Obliging Bunter was a rather frail reed to lean upon in the way of fishing for invitations. But obliging Colonel Wharton, his nephew, and his nephew's friends was quite another proposition.

It had never happened before that anybody had been glad to see Fishy, especially in the holidays. Now everybody was glad—as he was the bearer of that mysterious cigarette-case.

So Fishy was elated! His little game no longer depended on Bunter—he was on surer ground—and he guessed that he was going to make the grade.

"That's the article!" beamed Fisher T. Fish. "Jest kicked it up in the snow, you know, permiscus-like, while I was moseying around in the quad. I guess I knew it was Bunter's—at least, I knew he'd had it—though I guess I wouldn't undertake to say that it was his'n!"

"This certainly is the case that Bunter lost," said Colonel Wharton, as he snapped it open and examined the Greek letters cut inside. "Unfortunately, I am not acquainted with the Greek language—and you boys—"

"We don't do Greek in the Remove, sir!" said Bob Cherry. "Hardly one man in ten does Greek at Greyfriars. But I suppose everybody knows a Greek letter when he sees one. That's the extent of my knowledge!"

"And so say all of us!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"It must surely be a name!" said the colonel, wrinkling his brows over it. "Leaving out a space between Christian name and surname might account for its length—forty letters, at least. On the other hand, it might be some sort of a message written in Greek."

"That would account for Soames wanting it," said Harry.

"But you have told me that Soames was a manservant in Mr. Vernon-Smith's service before he took to crooked ways," said the colonel. "It is very unusual for such a man to be acquainted with Greek!"

"Soames wasn't always a valet, sir," said Bob. "He's played a good many parts in his time, I know, and he was a rogue when he was in Mr. Vernon-Smith's service; it was just one of his games. From things he let drop when we knew him at one time, I believed that he was a University man."

"That makes it probable, then, that this may be some sort of a message," said the colonel. "But it is far from clear, for Bunter has told us that this cigarette-case was given to him by a stranger to be taken to a man named Thompson, at Pegg, whom he was unable to find. It is not clear how Soames comes into the matter at all. Still, there is no doubt about his keenness to obtain possession of this case."

"Hardly!" said Bob. "At all events, we shall be able to elucidate the meaning of this phrase, if it has any meaning," said Colonel Wharton. "I will ask Mr. Konstantinopoulos to call and look at it. He does not read English, but he speaks our language; he can, of course, read anything in Greek."

He laid the cigarette-case on the table.

"You may leave this with me for the present," he said.

Fisher T. Fish nodded. "Sure!" he said amiably. "Say, I guess I'm a piece interested in that pesky Greek, and I'd jest like to hear what the guy you've mentioned makes of it, if a galoot could stop around a few."

"By all means," said the colonel; while the Famous Five, remembering what Bunter had said, smiled.

"But I reckon I'd be a heap late hitting the railroad!" remarked Fisher T. Fish regretfully.

"Fishy might put in the night here, uncle," suggested Harry, playing up, as it were.

Fishy's company was not attractive, but a fellow who could stand Bunter could stand Fishy. And it was certainly rather "fierce" for Fishy to be left over at the school like a remnant left on the counter.

"Quite!" assented Colonel Wharton. "I will direct Wells to have a room prepared, if you would care to stay over the night, Fish."

"Sir," said Fishy, "you're talking!"

"Talking?" repeated the colonel.

"I mean to say that's O.K. with me!" explained Fisher T. Fish. "I don't mind telling a man that it hits me where I live."

Colonel Wharton looked a little bewildered. He knew no more American than he knew Greek!

"I guess," further elucidated Fishy, THE MAGNET LIBRARY—No. 1,611.

"that I'll bed down in this shebang with pleasure, sir. I'll tell a man!"

"Oh, quite! Very well," said Colonel Wharton. "Quite so! No doubt you will like to look after your schoolfellow here a little, Harry."

"I guess so!" said Harry gravely; and the colonel stared at him for a moment and smiled.

The Famous Five marched Fisher T. Fish off, leaving the colonel in the library, still examining the mysterious silver case with deep interest, perhaps in the hope of reading its secret, if it had one.

Fisher T. Fish grinned cheerily as he jerked off with the Famous Five. Bunter was still napping, but every fellow was prepared to leave Bunter napping as long as he liked, and would not have dreamed of disturbing him. Bunter napping was really more agreeable than Bunter awake—at all events, when a fellow was out of range of his snore.

"Say, you got a cute little shebang here, Wharton!" remarked Fisher T. Fish, as he glanced round the hall and made a rapid mental calculation of the value of the furnishings thereof.

"The cutefulness is terrific, my esteemed Fishy!" remarked Hurree Singh.

"Cute, I allow!" said Fishy. "That ain't denying that you could put the whole shebang inside the garage at my popper's mansion on Riverside Drive, Noo Yark."

"That garage must be as big as the Blue Drawing Room at Bunter Court!" remarked Bob Cherry gravely.

"Eh? How come?" asked Fishy.

"I mean, we've heard from Bunter that this shebang would go into the Blue Drawing Room at Bunter Court," explained Bob. "So I suppose Bunter's Blue Drawing Room and your popper's garage must be much of a size!"

Fisher T. Fish coughed, and the Co. grinned.

"What about a spot of skating?" asked Harry, laughing. "I can lend you some skates, Fishy, and the ice is all right on the lake."

"You said it!" agreed Fishy.

The Co. walked Fisher T. Fish down to the lake in the park.

Arrived at the lake, Fisher T. Fish glanced round him, as if in search of something.

"Where's the lake?" he asked.

"Blind?" asked Johnny Bull, with a grunt.

"Aw! You call this the lake?" asked Fishy. "This leetle pond?"

"Yes, that's what we call it!" said Harry politely.

"You should give my popper's lake the once-over!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess it would make you open your optics some!"

"Might think it was Bunter talking, if Bunter talked through his nose—what?" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Hem! Try these skates, Fishy!" said Wharton hastily.

Fisher T. Fish got on the skates. He was still getting them on when the Famous Five slid out on the ice.

Fisher T. Fish watched the gyrations of the skaters with the superior smile of a guy who could do things!

"Say, Cherry, big boy!" he called.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"That skating?"

"Just our poor little efforts in that line," agreed Bob, whose good temper was proof against almost anything. "Hop on and show us how to do it, Fishy!"

"Jest the idee!" said Fisher T. Fish.

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"I'll mention that skating is jest where I live. I'll say that I'll be sure pleased to show you guys a thing or two!"

"Go it!"

Fisher T. Fish went it! He slid out on the ice, but for some reason his bony legs seemed to desire to fly in different directions. He slid, he slipped, he gyrated on one leg, and he yelled:

"Aw! Give a guy a hand—wake snakes! Yaroooh!"

"Go it, Fishy!"

"Show us a thing or two!"

"Is that how it's done?"

"Aw! Carry me home to die! Gee-whiz! Whooop!" Fisher T. Fish spun about frantically, charged into Bob Cherry, and grabbed him convulsively around the neck.

"Here, look out!" yelled Bob, struggling wildly. "If that's how it's done, Fishy, I don't want you to show me any more!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Aw! I guess I'm going! Oh, jumping toads!" gasped Fisher T. Fish breathlessly. "I'll say this is the rhinoceros' whiskers! Say, I want to get off!"

Bob steered the hapless Fishy to the bank and sat him down.

Fisher T. Fish sat with rather a bump.

"Say, them skates is no good!" gasped Fisher T. Fish. "What a guy wants is American skates, I guess!"

"And American ice?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Leaving Fishy on the bank, the Famous Five proceeded to skate.

Fisher T. Fish did not venture on the ice again; having apparently abandoned his kind intention of showing the guys how to do it. Neither were the Famous Five in a hurry to rejoin that attractive visitor.

Fisher T. Fish called to them several times, but they turned a deaf ear; and did not come off the ice till it was time to go in to tea.

Still, they had as much of Fishy's conversation as they wanted on the way back to the house; perhaps even a little more. Fishy gave them a description of the railway on which he had travelled to Surrey that day, comparing it with much derision to the railroads in the Yew-nited States; which, according to Fishy, laid over anything in this mouldy old island, and then some!

Fishy talked—and the other fellows listened, more or less. Fishy was quite happy with his bony chin-wagging; and the other fellows were happy when, at long last, it ceased to wag; so everybody was pleased, in one way or another.

As they went in, Johnny Bull dropped behind to speak to Wharton; giving the back of Fishy's bony head a glance of strong disfavour.

"I thought Bunter was the limit!" said Johnny.

"Well?"

"He isn't!" said Johnny.

— —

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Too Late!

"PLEASE sit down, sir!" said Gosling, politely and respectfully.

Gosling was not always polite and he was not always respectful. But he was favourably impressed by the well-dressed gentleman who had driven up in a car, and he scented a tip.

It was not uncommon for visitors to look in during the vacation, to give the ancient foundation of Greyfriars what Fisher T. Fish would have called the "once-over."

Gosling had had quite a lot to do in his time with antiquarians and archaeologists, "and sich," as Gosling would have expressed it.

This well-dressed, sleek gentleman did not look much like an antiquarian or an archaeologist, to Gosling's eye; but if he was interested in taking a view of the old school, Gosling was more than willing to oblige. His experienced eye detected the certainty of a tip, and the probability of a good one!

"My name is Anderson!" explained the sleek gentleman, in a smooth, quiet voice, which was reassuring, if Gosling wanted reassurance; for Anderson was a thoroughly respectable and reassuring sort of name—which was doubtless the reason why James Soames had selected it. "I am secretary to Mr. Vernon-Smith—the father of one of the boys here."

"Yessir!" said Gosling.

"Mr. Vernon-Smith has requested me to call here," went on "Mr. Anderson," "in reference to an article left behind by his son, when the school broke up for the holidays. It appears that the article was lost in the quadrangle."

"Hindeed, sir!" said Gosling, in surprise.

"I will explain the circumstances," said Mr. Anderson, "and then no doubt you will be able to assist me; and I may mention that every recompense will be made for your loss of time, Mr. Gosling."

"Thank you kindly, sir!" said Gosling.

"The article," continued Mr. Anderson, "is a very singular one for a school-boy to have possessed, and Mr. Vernon-Smith, in fact, insists upon his son handing it over to him—very properly, in my opinion, as it is a cigarette-case."

"Young rip!" said Gosling.

Mr. Anderson smiled.

"You will appreciate," he remarked, "that Mr. Vernon-Smith cannot approve of his son smoking cigarettes, or having a cigarette-case in his possession; and Master Herbert, having mentioned the matter, he insists upon the article being given up to him."

"Very right and proper!" said Gosling.

"Perfectly so!" said Mr. Anderson. "According to Master Herbert, the cigarette-case was lost within a moderate distance of the spot overlooked by his study window. It appears to have fallen in the snow, which was, I understand, the reason why Master Herbert did not recover it."

"Ho!" said Gosling.

He blinked.

Had Mr. Anderson called one day earlier, all this would have been news to Gosling. But since he had sat, that morning, within hearing of Fisher T. Fish on the telephone, Gosling, of course, knew all about the cigarette-case that had been lost in the snow in the quadrangle.

But Mr. Anderson could not have called a day earlier, as it was only the previous night that Soames had screwed the truth out of Bunter.

Soames was a day too late!

"What sorter cigarette-case would this 'ere be, sir?" asked Gosling. He nourished a hope that it was a different one.

Certainly, it would have been very odd had two cigarette-cases been lost in the snow in the quad. Still, he had heard Fisher T. Fish say on the phone that the one he had found was Bunter's.

Gosling could hardly help guessing, however, that the case Fishy found must be the one that Mr. Anderson was inquiring after. Still, he hoped that it was a different one, in view of a handsome tip for helping in a search.

"Possibly you may have found it already!" said Mr. Anderson, with a sudden gleam in his eyes. "I will describe it to you! A flat, oblong silver cigarette-case—"

"Ho!" said Gosling. "That's it!"

He had heard Fishy use those very words over the telephone in describing his find.

"Then it is found!" exclaimed Mr. Anderson, not quite able to repress his eagerness.

"It was found yesterday," said Gosling. "A boy who stays at the school over the holidays found it in the snow."

"Excellent!" said Mr. Anderson, with great satisfaction. "That will save both of us a great deal of trouble. At the same time, Mr. Gosling, I am authorised by Mr. Vernon-Smith to hand you a five-pound note for your trouble in the matter, and shall do so immediately I receive the cigarette-case."

Gosling could have groaned.

He knew that Mr. Vernon-Smith was a millionaire, and a five-pound tip was nothing to him. But it was a great deal to Gosling—if only he had found that cigarette-case instead of Fishy!

"Old on a minute, sir!" said Gosling, with a sort of last hope. "Let's make sure it's the same harticle, sir! Cigarette-cases is much alike."

"Most certainly," said Mr. Anderson. "This particular case will be easy to identify, as I understand Master Herbert, in an idle moment, scratched some Greek letters inside with a penknife."

"That's it, then!" said Gosling gloomily. "I 'eard him talking about Greek letters on the telephone! That's it!"

"On the telephone!" repeated Mr. Anderson quickly. "I do not quite understand. Who is the boy who found the silver case?"

"Name of Fish, sir—an American boy!" answered Gosling. "He ain't here now—"

"Not here!" exclaimed Mr. Anderson. "But the cigarette-case, I presume, is here?"

"No, it ain't!" said Gosling. "He took it away with him. I can't make it out, as you tell me it belonged to Master Vernon-Smith; but this here Fish thought it belonged to Bunter—"

"Bunter?"

"That's one of the boys in the same Form here, sir—a fat covey, named Bunter! Bunter being, I understand, at Wharton Lodge—"

"Wharton Lodge?"

"That's the 'ome of Master Wharton, sir, another boy in the Lower Fourth Form 'ere. Very nice young gent, too!" said Gosling. "No blooming cigarette-cases in his pockets, I'll be bound. Master Fish come in 'ere this very morning, sir, to telephone to Wharton Lodge, Master Bunter being there—"

"This very morning!" breathed Soames.

"From what I 'eard, sir, Master Bunter wasn't down, and he talked to the old gentlemen—Colonel Wharton—and arranged to take the cigarette-case to the owner at his place!" said Gosling. "I 'eard him describe it! I don't know what the old gentleman thought of Bunter owning such a thing—must have looked at 'im pretty old, I think! What I can't make out is why Master Fish fancied it belonged to young Bunter when you tell me it belonged to Master Vernon-Smith. But he did fancy so, and he went off to Wharton Lodge with the cigarette-case only this morning, to give it back to Bunter, I s'pose."

Soames breathed hard.

"But I'll tell you what, sir," said Gosling. "Master Fish must have been

mistaken about that silver case belonging to young Bunter, from what you say, and if you call at Wharton Lodge, Master Bunter will hand it over. He wouldn't keep what didn't belong to him. If it was something to eat, I wouldn't say, but being a cigarette-case—"

Soames rose to his feet.

His disappointment was bitter. But he had, at all events, learned where the silver case was, and in whose hands it was. Once more his quest was leading him back to Wharton Lodge.

"Probably Master Fish has reached Wharton Lodge already," he remarked casually.

"Howers ago, sir," answered Gosling. "He went off hearly in the morning. P'raps you'd like to phone, sir—"

Soames looked at him.

"You can use my telephone, sir, and welcome," said Gosling. "If you ring up Colonel Wharton and explain to him, I've no doubt that he will tell Master Bunter at once to send that there article on by post, and save you a journey."

Soames suppressed a smile. Gosling little dreamed of the effect the voice of Mr. Anderson would have had on the old colonel at Wharton Lodge.

"Thank you very much!" said Soames smoothly. "But I think the matter may be better explained in a letter. I shall acquaint Mr. Vernon-Smith with what you have told me, and no doubt he will write. I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Gosling. You will oblige me by accepting this."

"This" being a banknote for five pounds, Gosling was only too willing to oblige.

"Thank you, kindly, sir!" said Gosling, beaming. "Anything I can do, sir—"

Gosling bowed his visitor out with respectful attention.

Mr. Anderson departed in his car, grinding away at a good rate through the snow.

His lips were set tight as he drove.

He had succeeded at last in disentangling truth from untruth in what Bunter had told him about that cigarette-case. But he had succeeded too late, and the

silver case, which had never been at Wharton Lodge, as he had believed, was there now, beyond doubt.

It was once more in Bunter's fat hands, and no falsehood would avail the young rascal, now that Soames knew. Probably now that he had recovered it, he would carry it in his pocket. Soames' eyes glinted.

Through the snow, and the falling winter dusk, he drove on for Surrey.

That silver case, with the message scratched inside from Rat Hankey, telling of the hiding-place of the loot

(Continued on next page.)

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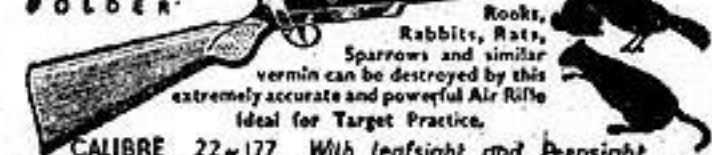
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from the raid at Lantham Post Office, was going to fall into his hands at last.

Somewhere near Greyfriars School twelve hundred pounds, in banknotes and currency notes, lay hidden deep, and the Greek letters cut in the cigarette-case were the only clue.

But, after following many false scents, he knew at last where to lay hands on the silver case. It had been worth his journey to Greyfriars. Within twenty-four hours, Soames told himself, that cigarette-case should be in his hands, or it would be the worse for Bunter.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Nothing In It!

MR KONSTANTINOPOULOUS was in the hall at Wharton Lodge, when Harry Wharton & Co. came in with Fisher T. Fish. The Greek gentleman had just arrived, and he was talking to Colonel Wharton when the juniors came in.

Billy Bunter was there, blinking at the colonel with a displeased and indignant blink.

Bunter had learned that Fishy had arrived, and handed over the silver case to Colonel Wharton, which was, in Bunter's opinion, just cheek.

That silver case, being Bunter's property, should have been handed over to Bunter, and he had a jolly good mind to tell the old colonel to hand it over at once. However, he did not venture to do so, but his blinks were expressive of considerable annoyance and indignation.

This sort of thing, really, was treating Bunter as a fellow of no account, who did not matter—not the sort of thing that Bunter liked.

Harry Wharton & Co. were very pleased to meet Mr. Konstantinopoulos. He was a little bald old gentleman, with a good-tempered smile. As he was of Greek nationality, they had no doubt that he would be able to tell them at once what the inscription in the silver case meant—if it meant anything.

Mr. Konstantinopoulos spoke English—in his own way—but did not read the language, having no acquaintance with the Roman alphabet. He knew, in fact, less of printed English than the juniors knew of Greek.

It did not occur to them that this might be a difficulty in the way of elucidating the word, or words, in the silver case.

Greek letters, to their minds, naturally implied Greek words, which, of course would be as easy as pie to a Greek.

Mr. Konstantinopoulos was smiling as he listened to Colonel Wharton, who was explaining the matter to him.

"Zat is very easy," he remarked. "If it is a word of my language, it is only to need one glance, and I shall be happy to translate. Although I read not, nor write ze English language, I speak him with large facility, like one native of your country."

At which the juniors were very careful not to smile.

Mr. Konstantinopoulos' facility was not so large as he happily believed. Still, he knew enough English to translate Greek into that language, and that was all that was wanted.

"We're all very curious about it, sir," said Harry Wharton.

"Very soon I tell you what he

mean," said the Greek gentleman, as Colonel Wharton handed him the silver cigarette-case.

The juniors gathered round eagerly as Mr. Konstantinopoulos opened the case, and glanced at the Greek letters cut inside.

Billy Bunter rolled nearer, his eyes and spectacles fixed on the silver case. Even the sedate old colonel was a little excited. Fisher T. Fish's eyes gleamed like a cat's in his intense interest.

Having heard, since his arrival at Wharton Lodge, of the strange and mysterious value attached to that silver case by Soames, Fisher T. Fish understood the interest felt in it by the whole party, and shared that interest very keenly.

It was clear that the silver case had a value, outside its market value, which was no more than about thirty shillings.

Whether the value resided in that mysterious Greek inscription or not, it undoubtedly had a great value—to Soames, at least.

In view of that circumstance, the business-man of Greyfriars was rather sorry that he had handed it over so readily. Fishy was rather keen to get his bony fingers on it again.

If it was Bunter's, Bunter, of course, had to have it, but Fishy had never believed that it was Bunter's. And now that he knew that it had a value, he guessed and reckoned that he was not passing it on to a guy to whom it did not belong—not if he could help it.

Every face was keen with interest and excitement as Mr. Konstantinopoulos fixed his eyes on the Greek letters.

A puzzled look came over the Greek's olive face.

"Zat is very curious," he remarked.

There was a buzz of excitement.

"A name?" asked Colonel Wharton.

"No, no! Zat is not a name! Even in Greeco zere is no name so long as zat," smiled Mr. Konstantinopoulos. "Also it is not like a name. It is nozzing like no name at all."

He adjusted his glasses, and gave the cigarette-case another scrutiny. It was plain that he was perplexed.

Then a broad smile overspread his olive face.

"It is nozzing," he said.

"Nothing?" repeated Colonel Wharton blankly.

"Nozzing at all—unless one small joke. I zink some schoolboy, perhaps, scratch zere letters to make a small joke. Zey mean nozzing—nozzing at all."

"Oh!" came a general gasp.

"Zey spell no Greek word. No name—nozzing. It is vat you call one higglo of a piggle," said Mr. Konstantinopoulos.

"A—a—a what?" ejaculated the colonel.

"Higgledy-piggledy," said Bob, grinning.

"Zat is it—one higglo of a piggle," said Mr. Konstantinopoulos. "Zose are Greek letters, but zey go anyhow—all higglo and piggle, and make no sense. Zey must be scratch zere by some schoolboy zat know not ze Greek."

"Oh!"

It was quite a blow to the expectant party.

After all their anticipations of elucidating a meaning from that mysterious inscription, it was rather a shock to be told that the letters had been scratched at random, apparently by some idle

schoolboy, and did not spell anything at all.

Mr. Konstantinopoulos smiled.

"I am sorry," he said; "but zere is nozzing—nozzing at all—only one higglo of a piggle."

And he closed the case, and handed it back to the colonel.

"Sold," said Bob Cherry.

"Rotten sell!" remarked Johnny Bull. "Just some ass scratching Greek letters in his silly cigarette-case for want of something to do!"

"Well, if the Greek letters have no meaning, evidently they do not account for that crook's desire to obtain possession of the cigarette-case," said Colonel Wharton. "He must have some motive, but that cannot be it."

He laid the silver case on the hall table. His interest in it had evaporated now.

Two hands reached out for the silver case as soon as the colonel laid it down. One of them was a fat paw; the other a bony claw.

The bony claw was quicker than the fat paw. Fisher T. Fish got hold of the cigarette-case before Bunter could reach it.

"Here, you gimme my case, Fishy!" exclaimed Bunter, in great indignation.

"Yourn?" grinned Fishy.

"Yes, you beast! I say, you fellows, make him gimme my cigarette-case!" howled Bunter.

Colonel Wharton, who was turning away with the Greek gentleman to go into the drawing-room to tea, turned back sharply at the sound of dispute.

Mr. Konstantinopoulos, politely affecting to hear nothing, walked on, and joined Miss Amy Wharton at the tea-table.

The colonel gave Bunter and Fisher T. Fish a grim stare.

"What—" he began.

"It's mine!" howled Bunter.

"Guess ag'in!" said Fisher T. Fish.

He slipped his bony hand into his pocket and kept it there, with the silver case gripped in it. Fishy had got back the goods, and Fishy was not parting with the goods again—not if Fisher Tarleton Fish knew it!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Whose Property?

HARRY WHARTON & CO. stood looking from one disputant to the other.

The old colonel frowned.

Billy Bunter's fat face was excited and angry. Fisher T. Fish's bony countenance was inflexibly determined.

"Look here, Fishy—" began Bob Cherry.

Fish shrugged bony shoulders.

"I guess if that article is Bunter's he can have it," he said. "I found it at the school, and I got to hand it over to the owner. All Bunter's got to do is to put it plain that he's the owner."

"You came here to hand it over to Bunter—"

"Figuring that he was the owner," said Fisher T. Fish blandly. "But I guess I've thought a few since. I'll tell a man that Bunter never owned this here case, and I got no call to hand it over to him."

"You—you—" gasped Bunter.

"This won't do, Fishy!" said Harry Wharton.

"Yeah!" grinned Fishy.

"Make him gimme my case, sir!" roared Bunter, turning his spectacles on



"I'll mention that skating is just where I live," said Fisher T. Fish. "I'll be sure pleased to show you guys a thing or two." "Go it!" said Bob Cherry. Fisher T. Fish went it. He slid, he slipped, he gyrated on one leg, and he yelled: "Aw! Give a guy a hand—wake snakes! Yaroooh!"

the colonel's frowning face. "He knows it's mine!"

"I hardly know how to decide," said Colonel Wharton slowly. "As Fish found the article, he is entitled to retain it, to be handed over to the owner, or to the police in lieu of the owner."

"Yep!" agreed Fishy. "That's the big idea, sir! I guess it's my dooty to see that this here article goes where it belongs."

"It belongs to me!" yelled Bunter.

"I'll say it's for Colonel Wharton to decide that, and all you got to do is to tell him how it came to be yours," said Fisher T. Fish. "You make it plain to him, and I'll sure hand it over at his word. I guess I can't say fairer than that."

That certainly sounded fair enough, whatever Fishy's actual motive might have been.

"I say, you fellows, you all know it's mine!" howled Bunter. "I showed it to a lot of fellows in the Remove before we broke up. Fishy jolly well saw it, too, and he knew it was mine when he picked it up and came here!"

"Where'd you get it?" grinned Fisher T. Fish. "I guess every guy you showed it to knows that you'd picked it up somewhere and froze on to it."

"Bunter has told us that a man handed it to him in Friardale Lane, to be taken to a Mr. Thompson, at the village of Pegg," said Colonel Wharton.

"I guess you don't swallow that, sir. Do it sound likely?"

"Um!"

"And if it was kerrect, where does Mr. Thompson come in?" grinned Fishy. "Bunter don't seem to have taken it along to that guy."

"I couldn't find him!" hooted Bunter. "I'm going to keep that case till I find him—may find him when we go back next term—perhaps!"

"Some perhaps!" said Fishy.

"Gimme that case, you rotter!"

"Guess ag'in!"

Colonel Wharton's eyes fixed on the keen, sharp, unscrupulous face of Fisher T. Fish.

"What is it your intention to do with that cigarette-case if you retain possession of it, Fish?" he asked very quietly.

"I guess I got to find the owner, sir," answered Fisher T. Fish. "And if I don't spot that guy, I got to hand it over to the police. That's the law about articles of valoo found lying around."

"That is certainly true," said Colonel Wharton slowly; "and, in all the circumstances, it would probably be much the best for it to be placed in official hands."

"You said it, sir!"

"It's mine!" yelled Bunter.

"Be silent, Bunter!" snapped the colonel. "On your own statements, it is not yours. If you have told us the truth—which I am bound to doubt, in view of your habitual untruthfulness—it was your duty to hand it over to the authorities if you could not find the owner. You have no right whatever to keep it."

"Oh, really, sir—"

"You have not done so," said Colonel Wharton. "As it has been lost, and as Fish has found it, it is his duty in turn to return it to the owner or hand it to the police. I cannot advise him to trust it into your hands, as it is plainly your intention to keep possession of it."

"Look here—"

"That will do! You have no right or claim whatever to the article—no more than Fish himself. Fish will hand it over to proper keeping—"

"Sure!" said Fisher T. Fish, with a sly twinkle in his eye.

The colonel's eyes dwelt on him searchingly.

"And I have no doubt," he went on quietly, "that my nephew and his friends will be quite happy to walk to the police station with you, Fish—"

"Eh?"

"To see the article conveyed safely there."

"Oh!"

"What-ho!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, Bunter! Fishy's going to hand it over, and we're going to help him!" said Nugent.

"That is settled," said Colonel Wharton; and he turned away and went to tea, dismissing the matter from his mind.

Billy Bunter shook a fat fist at Fishy's bony face.

That bony face was rather long.

Fisher T. Fish had not the slightest intention of handing over that silver case. Probably the colonel suspected as much; he had read Fishy's character pretty accurately in his sharp face—hence his suggestion that the Famous Five should see it done.

The Famous Five more than suspected as much. They were perfectly assured that Fishy, now that he had learned that the cigarette case had a mysterious

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value, intended to "freeze" on to it, as he would have expressed it, with a sharp eye on possible profit from it. But they were perfectly assured also that they were not going to let him do anything of the kind.

"Nice walk after tea, Fishy!" grinned Bob. "We'll all come!"

"I guess I hate giving you all that trouble!" mumbled Fisher T. Fish.

"I guess you do!" chuckled Bob. "But I guess and reckon that we're taking the trouble, all the same, you fraud!"

"We are—we is!" said Johnny Bull. "If anybody's going to pinch that silver case, Fishy, Bunter's entitled to pinch it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"O.K.!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess it'll be dark after tea, and I ain't walking out with it in the dark, not with that crook you've told me of rubbering around looking for it! I'll say a walk in the morning will suit me!"

"Good egg! We'll all like a walk in the morning!" said Harry Wharton. "Now let's get some tea."

"I say, you fellows—"

"Pack it up, old fat man!"

"Beast!"

The juniors went to tea, the cigarette-case safe in Fisher T. Fish's pocket.

Billy Bunter eyed him during tea and after tea with devastating blinks through his big spectacles.

But the most devastating blinks had no effect on the business man of the Remove.

Fishy took no heed of Bunter. He was "through" with Bunter. It was the prospect of the Famous Five's company, on a morning walk to Wimford, that worried Fishy!

Somehow or other he had to dodge the Famous Five on that morning walk, but as the five were quite well aware of his design it was not likely to be easy.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

No Luck!

JAMES SOAMES caught his breath and stepped swiftly behind a frosty tree-trunk by the Wimford road.

It was a bright, frosty morning.

If the crook lurking in the vicinity of Wharton Lodge had hoped to spot Billy Bunter outside the safety of the walls of an establishment his hope had been very faint.

The sudden sight of the fat Owl of Greyfriars was, therefore, a surprise to him—indeed, he could hardly believe his eyes.

In the distance, coming along from Wharton Lodge, was quite a party of schoolboys, tramping cheerily through the snow.

Six of them tramped in a bunch, and one lagged behind, panting for breath. It was on the one that lagged behind that Soames' eyes specially fixed, having dodged promptly out of sight.

Five of the six he knew well enough—Wharton, Nugent, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and the Nabob of Bhanipur. One was a stranger to him; he had never had the pleasure—or otherwise—of beholding the sharp features of Fisher Tarleton Fish before.

Soames was not interested in him, or in the Famous Five; his interest was keenly concentrated on the breathless fat junior who lagged behind.

The whole party, apparently, were walking to Wimford that morning. Soames could hear their voices as they

came nearer, and he carefully bloated himself from sight behind the tree.

Fortune had not favoured him in his quest of Rat Hankey's cigarette-case so far, but fortune seemed to be smiling now.

Even the hardy and desperate crook could hardly have thought of holding up so numerous a party on a public road. But Billy Bunter was lagging behind, and the other fellows showed no desire to wait for him. If he lagged a little farther on the winding road it was all that Soames could want.

He watched with glittering eyes as the party came along, and listened intently to the voices that floated to his ears.

"Nice walk, Fishy!" he heard from Bob Cherry. "Enjoying life, old bony bean?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the Co., though what there was in Bob's remark to excite merriment was a mystery to Soames.

"Sure!" answered Fisher T. Fish cheerfully. "I'll say I can walk any galoot here off'n his legs, and then some!"

"I don't think!" said Johnny Bull. "Put it on, you fellows, and let's see Fishy walk us off our legs."

"I say, you fellows—" came a fat and breathless squeak. "I say, don't race, you beasts! I say—Yah! Rotters!"

Soames smiled softly as he watched. Really nothing could have suited him better.

Bob Cherry set the pace, striding along at a great rate. His friends kept pace with him; and Fisher T. Fish, not to be outdone—for the moment, at least—jerked his bony legs at unaccustomed speed. Billy Bunter was left hopelessly behind.

"Beasts!" he yelled.

But his yell passed unheeded. Farther and farther ahead the half-dozen juniors went, Bunter dropping farther and farther behind.

Soames quitted his cover and followed, keeping among the trees by the roadside. It was slow going in the trees, but more than fast enough to keep pace with the plodding, breathless fat Owl.

There was a turn of the country road ahead, and, once the half-dozen had passed the corner, Soames was ready to pounce on the plodding Owl.

Happily unaware of the steely eyes that were on him, Billy Bunter plodded and trudged and puffed and blew on the track of the juniors ahead.

His fat face was crimson with wrath and exertion.

Exertion was not in Bunter's line at all. If Bunter hated anything more than getting up early in the morning, it was setting his little fat legs into quick motion.

Now, however, he was exerting himself to the utmost.

Fisher T. Fish had to hand that cigarette-case over at the police station in Wimford that morning. The Famous Five were going with him to see that he did it. Bunter was going with him to see, if he could, that he didn't.

Bunter was not going to lose his property if he could help it. If Bunter had the remotest chance of grabbing that silver case back, Bunter was going to grab it.

It was, Bunter felt, absolutely rotten. That cigarette-case had caused him trouble enough. Now, however, he had got rid of Soames. Soames, if he was still after it, had transferred his activities to Greyfriars—and he was welcome to root about the school as long as he liked!

It rather amused Bunter to think of

the crook rooting about Greyfriars for the article that was no longer there.

With Soames safe off the scene, Bunter was able at last to keep possession of his silver cigarette-case, untroubled by a crook's pursuit. And at that very time, when it was otherwise "all clear," that iniquitous rotter Fishy had snaffled it! Bunter was not going to stand this. Somehow or other, he was going to get it back from that unspeakable swab Fishy.

But alas for Bunter! His fat little legs were accustomed to slow motion, and, with all his exertions, the party drew farther and farther ahead.

It was in vain that he squeaked, in vain that he yelled. So far from stopping for him to come up, the Famous Five did not even look round.

They walked on and on and on, turned the turn of the road, and disappeared from Bunter's sight.

"Beasts!" groaned Bunter.

He rolled on, panting for breath. But he did not, like Iser in the poem, roll rapidly. He rolled more and more slowly as wind failed.

It did not occur to him to look back, so he remained happily unaware of a figure that emerged from the trees by the roadside and walked in his track.

Not till a grasp fell on the back of his collar did Billy Bunter become aware that he was followed.

"Oooogh!" he gasped in breathless surprise, as he felt that sudden grip.

With a swing of his sinewy arm Soames swung him off the road on to the grass verge; with another swing he landed him among the trees.

It happened so suddenly, so swiftly, that Bunter hardly knew what was happening to him.

He spun among the trees, staggered against a frosty trunk, and leaned there, gasping for breath.

"Urrrgh! Ooogh! Urrrgh!" gurgled Bunter.

Soames gave a swift glance round. He was screened from the sight of passers on the road, and he had the Owl of the Remove exactly where he wanted him.

Billy Bunter, spluttering, set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose and blinked dizzily at the man who had hooked him off the road.

"Look here, you cheeky beast—" he yapped.

Then he recognised Soames.

"Oh crikey!" he gasped.

"Stand where you are, Master Bunter," said Soames softly. "You are not going, just yet!"

"Oh lor'! I—I say—"

"You need say nothing. Kindly hand over the cigarette-case!" smiled Soames. "I advise you not to keep me waiting."

"Oh jiminy!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, I—I ain't got it! Oh lor'!"

Soames' lip curled.

"I suppose you cannot help lying, my fat young friend," he said. "It appears to be second nature with you, but—"

"I—I haven't got it—really!" gasped Bunter. "That beast Fish has got it! Oh crikey! I—I say—"

"I may tell you," said Soames quietly, "that I have visited your school and found out that you told me the truth on Boxing Night at Wharton Lodge. I found out also that the cigarette-case had been found by a boy named Fish—one of the party who passed me a short time ago, I conclude, as I heard the name mentioned. He came here yesterday to hand it over to you. Do you see now that lying is of no use?"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. He had pictured Soames rooting about Greyfriars after that cigarette-case. It had never occurred to him that Soames

would learn that it had been found and taken to Wharton Lodge.

"Now hand it over!" said Soames.

"Fish gave it to you, yesterday—"

"He didn't!" gasped Bunter.

"Take care!" muttered Soames, with a glitter in his eyes.

"He—he—he never!" groaned Bunter.

"The beast pretended that it wasn't mine—just because he knew that it didn't belong to me, you know—and he kept it—"

"You lying young rascal—"

"He—he—he did!" gasped Bunter.

"He's got it now in his pocket. They're going to make him hand it over at the police station—"

"What!"

"He won't if he can help it. I jolly well know that he's going to dodge them if he can, and keep it!" mumbled Bunter. "But they've all got an eye on him. I was going after him to get it back if I could; I was going to punch the beast in the eye if he wouldn't let me have it—"

Billy Bunter broke off, wriggling with terror at the rage that flashed into the crook's sleek face.

Soames' hands clenched.

"Is that the truth?" he said, between his teeth.

"Oh crikey! Yes!" stuttered Bunter.

"I haven't got it; he wouldn't give it to me. You can search my pockets if you like. Oh crikey! I tell you that ead Fishy has got it; and if he can dodge those fellows he will jolly well keep it, too!"

It did not take Soames long to ascertain that the silver case was not on Bunter, and he had little doubt—or, rather, none—that the fat Owl was telling the truth. It all fitted in with what he had seen. His rage at this fresh disappointment was keen and bitter.

"I—I say, he—he's got it!" moaned Bunter. "You go after that beast Fishy; he's got it! Oh lor'! Yaroooooh!"

Soames gripped him by his collar again. He swung him round and planted his foot behind the fat Owl, sending him spinning and sprawling.

Bunter's yell rang far and wide as his fat person was spread out on the frosty earth.

"Ow! Yow! Wow! Yarooooop!"

The fat Owl sat up and blinked round him dizzily. Soames was no longer in sight. Soames was on the road, on the track of the Famous Five and Fisher T. Fish, and running like a deer.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Cute!

"**S**EARCH me!" ejaculated Fisher T. Fish, with an air of great surprise.

In the old High Street of Wimford the juniors had halted outside an official building. Fisher T. Fish ran his hands through his pockets and ran them through again.

But those bony hands emerged empty! It seemed that Fisher T. Fish failed to find the cigarette-case in any of those pockets.

The Famous Five gathered round him. They had been rather surprised by Fishy making no attempt to dodge away during the walk to Wimford.

He had made up his keen transatlantic mind to freeze on to that cigarette-case. They knew that he was not going to hand it over if he could help it. So they rather expected Fishy to give them the slip on the road—if he could—and park that silver case in some spot where he could find it again.

As Fisher T. Fish had done none of these things, the Famous Five supposed

in the innocence of their hearts, that he had made up his mind to play straight, as there was no help for it. Which showed that, well as they knew Fishy, they were not quite wise to all the wiles of the business-like youth from Noo Yark.

Now it dawned on them!

Fisher T. Fish went through pocket after pocket. He was more than willing to do so, as the silver case was not there!

"Lost it?" asked Harry Wharton very grimly.

"You said it!" agreed Fishy.

"Better find it again," said Harry, still more grimly. "And the sooner you find it the less likely you are to be bumped in the snow."

"I guess it's gone."

"It will be preposterously unpleasant for you, my esteemed Fishy, if the gonefulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Boot him!" suggested Johnny Bull.

"We'll boot him all right, and push his head into the snow if he doesn't

Answers to Puzzles

on page 5.

1. "If the grate be empty, put coal on. If the grate be full, stop putting coal on." (If the great-B empty, put colon. If the great-B full-stop putting colon. See?)

2. A little blackie in bed with nothing over him. A little black "e" in "BeD"—twig?)

3. A little seedy (c d) after a capital tea (T).

4. A row between two pals, faults on both sides.

5. 50.

6. 49. (You make only one cut to sever the last two pieces.)

7. 51. (There is a bush at the beginning and at the end.)

8. Two shillings. The two fathers were also, oddly enough, two sons.

9. Albert is 30 and Bill is 10. "Four times older" doesn't mean "four times as old," don't forget. Four times older is really five times as old. Five years ago Albert was 25 and Bill was 5.

cough up that case," said Bob Cherry.

"Aw, be reasonable!" urged Fisher T. Fish. "Give a guy a chance! Look yere!"

He turned out the lining of a coat pocket. There was a gash in that lining. Obviously, anything that was carried in that pocket was liable to slip through the gash and fall to the ground.

"Oh, my hat!" said Frank Nugent.

"Was it in that pocket?"

"Sure!"

"Then it's dropped somewhere on the road. Over a mile to look for it in!" said Frank.

"I'll say it's a goner!" said Fisher T. Fish regretfully. "I'm sure sorry! I'll say I never knew there was a hole in that lining. I jest slipped it into that pocket, and I guessed it was O.K."

Snort from Johnny Bull.

"We've had a nice walk," said Fisher T. Fish amiably. "I guess we'll have another nice walk back, and keep an eye open for that doggoned case, what? We may spot it. Unless, of course, some guy has picked it up and froze on to it. Might mosey out again to-morrow and have another look, if we don't find it."

The Co. regarded Fisher T. Fish fixedly.

Fishy had no intention of parting with that cigarette-case. Neither had he any intention of parting from Wharton Lodge, if he could help it.

Unfortunately for Fishy and his astute plans, the Famous Five were not quite simple enough to take his transatlantic word.

"We won't look for it to-morrow," said Harry. "We'll have it to-day, Fishy! Now hand it over and stop telling crammers!"

"Aw! Ain't you got eyes?" demanded Fisher T. Fish. "Look at that hole in the lining—"

"I'm looking at it," answered Harry, "and I can see that it isn't a hole worn in the lining; it's been cut!"

"By gum, so it has!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, grabbing the pocket lining and scanning it closely. "There was no hole in that lining; it's been cut with a penknife, specially to back up this yarn."

"Aw, can it!" exclaimed Fisher T. Fish, in alarm. "You figure I'd cut that lining and redooce the valoo of my overcoat? Not by a jugful!"

"Where's that cigarette-case, you bony fraud?"

"Spotted about the road somewhere."

"Not in your other pockets?" asked Harry.

"Nope."

"You're sticking to it that you put it in that pocket, and it slipped through the lining and got lost?"

"Yep."

"Very well," said the captain of the Remove, "if it's lost it's got to be found! The fellow who lost it has got to find it. We'll walk back now, and you can pick it up."

"If I spot it—sure!"

"I advise you to spot it, for your own good. You see, we're going to kick you all the way back, and we shan't leave off kicking till you've coughed up that cigarette-case."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Good egg!"

"Come on!"

"Say, you galoots," exclaimed Fishy, in alarm, "I'll mention that that ain't good enough! I sure ain't standing for it."

"You don't like the idea?" asked Harry.

"Nix, and then some!" said Fisher T. Fish emphatically.

"Then all you've got to do is to hand over the cigarette-case. We're not anxious to soil our boots on you."

"Ain't I allowed it's lost—slipped through that lining?" howled Fisher T. Fish. "Ain't my word good enough?"

"About as good as Bunter's. You'll save trouble by handing over the cigarette-case."

"I guess you can search me from top to toe if you durned well like!" hooted Fisher T. Fish. "Go through a guy and see for yourself."

"We're not going to search you," said Harry, "and it wouldn't be any use, either. If you're willing to be searched it shows that you haven't the cigarette-case on you. What have you done with it?"

"Ain't I put you wise? That there hole in that lining—"

"Might have dropped it somewhere as we came along to pick up again," said Johnny Bull thoughtfully. "He had this yarn all ready, of course. Did anybody notice the swab drop anything?"

"Well, we never thought of a trick like that," said Harry. "If that was it, Fishy can find it again easily enough."

"I'm telling you it dropped through that lining—"

"Possibly; but if it did, you know

exactly where it dropped, and you're going to lead us back to the precise spot."

"If you don't believe a guy—" "Not a word! Not a syllable! Come on!"

Fisher T. Fish glared at the five in intense exasperation.

Accustomed as he was to regarding all the inhabitants of a mouldy old island as goobs, ginks, geeks, and boneheads, he had had no doubt—none whatever—of getting by with this yarn, backed up by a rent in the pocket lining.

In case of doubt he was prepared to undergo a search, which would not have worried him, as he had left the silver cigarette-case locked up in his suitcase in his room at Wharton Lodge.

But it was not a case of doubt; it was a case of certainty. Harry Wharton & Co. knew that Fishy was trying to diddle them just as well as if Fishy had told them so, and they were not taking any.

Whether Billy Bunter was entitled to retain possession of that cigarette-case was very doubtful. But it was absolutely certain that Fisher T. Fish had no right to retain it, and they were going to see, quite definitely, that he did not.

Fisher T. Fish breathed hard and deep. Such perspicacity on the part of goobs, boobies, ginks, and boneheads was a surprise to him, and an exasperating one. But F. T. Fish was a stickler, and he was going to stick to his loot if he could.

"I guess I ain't coming," he said. "I'd sure have been pleased to put in a few days with you ginks, but if that's how you're going to behave, I guess I'm through. Me for the railroad depot."

"Tired of our company already?" grinned Bob Cherry. "We're not tired of yours yet, Fishy!"

"You figure you can rope in a guy against his will?" hooted Fisher T. Fish, in great exasperation. "Jumping toads and gophers! I guess that's the bee's knee, and then some! I'll say I'm hitting the railroad depot right now. I'm telling you I'm through!"

"You mean you're going to pretend to catch a train, and when we're gone, sneak back to where you dropped the cigarette-case?" asked Bob.

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

"Aw! Guess again!" yapped Fisher T. Fish. "You can see me off in the train for Kent, if you like."

"Gammon!"

"Seeing's believing!" snorted Fishy. And he jerked away towards the railway station, or the railroad depot as he called it, which was a little distance down the High Street.

The Famous Five followed him, perplexed.

That the cigarette-case was not on Fishy they were sure; his offer to be searched was proof of that. They wondered whether he might, after all, have lost it on the road, as he had stated.

If he really caught the train back to Greystones, it looked like it! But they did not believe that he had any intention of catching a train, without having first got hold of the silver case again.

So they walked after him to the station, with keen eyes on him, to see that he did not dodge away.

In their intense interest in Fishy, they did not observe a man with his coat-collar pulled up and a hat pulled low over his brow, who followed, at a little distance, in the same direction. They were not thinking of Soames, but of Fisher T. Fish.

They entered the railway station to—

gether. There was half an hour to wait for Fishy's train—if he was going to take a train! During those thirty minutes they did not take their eyes off Fishy.

When the train came in they fully expected the transatlantic junior to make some excuse for not taking it. They hardly knew what to think when he stepped into a carriage and banged the door in their faces.

Farther down the train the man with the turned-up coat-collar stepped into another carriage unnoticed.

Fisher T. Fish looked from the window as the engine shrieked.

"So long, you guys!" he said through his nose. "I guess you can look for that pesky cigarette-case along the road, all you want! Mebbe you'll cinch it! Mebbe you won't. I'll say I'm through with you! Go and chop chips!"

The train roared out of the station! Harry Wharton & Co. gazed after it, till it disappeared! Then they gazed at one another!

Fisher T. Fish was gone, and they were assured that he had not taken the cigarette-case with him. Had he really and truly lost it—or what?

The chums of the Remove really did not know what to think—though it was probable that the facts would dawn on them later when they remembered that Fishy had left a suitcase behind him, which would have to be sent after him to Greystones School!

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER

A Precious Pair!

FISHER T. FISH grinned serenely.

Fishy was tremendously bucked.

True, he had lost his intended holiday at Wharton Lodge, where he had intended to hang on, if he could, till the end of the vacation. But he was going to keep that mysterious cigarette-case, and sooner or later, he reckoned, he was going to get in touch with the guy who was after it so keenly, and finger a handsome profit on the transaction.

It was no wonder that the business man of Greystones was bucked at that happy prospect.

He was destined, as it happened, to get in touch with the "guy" who was after the cigarette-case, sooner rather than later.

At the first stop of the train that very "guy" got out of another carriage, cut along the train, and entered Fisher T. Fish's carriage.

Fishy took no heed of him; he had never seen James Soames, and had no suspicion that this was the "guy" of whom he was thinking.

There were three other passengers in the carriage, and while they remained the man with the turned-up collar sat and read, or, at least, looked at a newspaper. But they left at later stations; and then Soames moved along to the door and took care that no fresh passengers entered after the last had gone.

And so, as the train boomed on through the snowy landscape, the seafarer was left, at last, alone with the American junior.

Then he moved along, and sat opposite to Fisher T. Fish, who glanced at him carelessly.

"Master Fish, I think!" said Soames smoothly.

"You said it!" agreed Fishy, staring.

"Quite! Will you have the kindness

to hand over that silver cigarette-case, Master Fish?"

Fisher T. Fish fairly bounded. "Wake snakes!" he gasped. "Say, say that agin will you?"

"Will you have the kindness to hand over that silver cigarette-case, Master Fish?" repeated Soames politely.

Fisher T. Fish sat back and stared at him. He had been taken utterly by surprise; but he realised at once that this must be the "guy" who was after that silver case.

"You Soames?" he asked.

"My name is of little consequence, Master Fish! What I want is the silver case, and I prefer to take it quietly, without throwing you from the train! But if you insist on rough measures—"

"I guess you can pack that up!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I'll mention that I ain't got it on me."

Soames smiled.

"I have seen Master Bunter this morning, and he has explained the whole matter to me," he said smoothly. "I lost so much time on Bunter that I was unable to overtake you before you reached Wimford. But I was fortunate enough to spot you in the High Street—and even caught a few words of your altercation with your friends."

"You're telling me!" ejaculated Fishy.

"Exactly! I do not think the schoolboys believed that you had lost the silver case—they are hardly so simple as that! At all events, I do not believe it; and you will save trouble, and time, and possible danger, by handing it over to me without further delay."

"What's it worth to you?" asked Fisher T. Fish coolly.

Soames eyed him narrowly. His strange way of life had made him a good judge of character, and he could read, in the sharp face, that this was a very different kind of fellow from Harry Wharton & Co., and even from Billy Bunter. This was a sharp, unscrupulous fellow on the make! He smiled—a faint, contemptuous smile.

"I understand," he said, "that cigarette-case belonged to an old comrade of mine, and I desire to possess it as a souvenir. Its intricate value is small; but I would willingly give a couple of pounds to recover it."

"Guess again!" suggested Fisher T. Fish.

"I advise you not to bandy words with me," said Soames quietly. "I prefer peaceable measures, but I am prepared to take any others that may be required."

"I guess I'd fake that offer, bo, if I had the article on me—I'll say I shouldn't have a big chance!" grinned Fisher T. Fish. "But you can search me if you like—same as I said to them guys back in the burg."

Soames' eyes narrowed again.

"I shall certainly search you!" he said.

"Go it!" grinned Fishy. "I'll eat all the cigarette-cases you find on me, with the cigarettes thrown in!"

"Where is the silver case, then?" snapped Soames. "It is in your possession, you young rascal—you will not deny that?"

"Sure!" assented Fisher T. Fish. "But I'll mention that I wasn't such a bonehead as to stick it in my rags when them guys walked me off to the station to hand it over to the cops! Not in your lifetime, sir."

"You left it at Wharton Lodge?"

"Mebbe," drawled Fisher T. Fish. "If you're willing to talk business, Mr. Soames, I'll allow that I was raised

where business is talked, a few. You can tell any gink you like that you want an old comrade's cigarette-case for a souvenir—I guess I know why you want it. And if it ain't in connection with them Greek letters scratched inside, I'll say I'm the dumb man from Dumbville."

Fisher T. Fish chuckled.

"They had a Greek guy at the old hombre's shebang, to give it the once-over," he said. "He couldn't make head or tail of it—he allowed it wasn't genuine Greek! Jest scratched per-miscus, he figured! But I guess you ain't run all them risks, Mr. Soames,

to have any owner, I'll say it belongs to the guy that found it lying around. I'm open to sell that cigarette-case!"

"Five pounds!" said Soames quietly.

"You make me smile!" said Fisher T. Fish.

Soames drew a deep breath. The hidden message in the cigarette-case was worth twelve hundred pounds to him—if once his eyes fell on it! His dislike and contempt for the grinning, unscrupulous young rascal before him were strong, but he did not allow these feelings to influence him.

"Twenty pounds!" he said. "I am prepared to pay twenty pounds, Master

Greyfriars. That suitcase will be delivered by the railroad guys to-morrow—and if you like to be around, you can see me unpack it."

Soames sat silent for a moment or two.

"The boys may guess where it is!" he said at last.

"They're sure boobys," said Fisher T. Fish. "But I allow they might! But they won't break the lock on a guy's suitcase—the old hombre wouldn't stand for it, if they wanted to—and I guess they wouldn't, anyhow. There ain't no danger of that, or I'll mention that that suitcase wouldn't have been left where

GOOD King Wenceslas looked out on the Feast of Stephen, where the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even; when suddenly there hove in sight a fuel-seeking peasant, and Wenceslas said: "Blow me tight! That job looks most unpleasant! I think we'll feed this poor old coot before he gets much thinner, so bring me flesh and fxx and fruit to make his Christmas dinner!"

Now when they took the tuck across, the peasant felt quite dizzy. He murmured: "Thank you kindly, Boss!" and very soon got busy, while Good King Wenceslas felt gay and beamed across the table as that old peasant tucked away as fast as he was able.

So good Christian men be sure, wealth or rank possessing, ye who now will bless the poor shall yourselves find blessing.

Another year sped swiftly by, the snow fell crisp and even. Again old Wency cocked an eye upon the Feast of Stephen. The peasant duly came in sight, now followed by another, and Wency murmured: "Blow me tight! He's been and brought his brother! Hither, page, come, bring that tuck, and make the order double! And say, we'd better hire a truck and save ourselves some trouble!"

A double load they then conveyed towards St. Agnes' fountain, and Wency thought, by what it weighed, it must have been a mountain. The peasants duly touched their hats and waded through the courses, then gasped and sighed and murmured: "That's the stuff to give the forces." While Good King Wency sat and beamed as usual on their dinner, although his smile may now have seemed perhaps a trifle thinner.

So good Christian men be sure, wealth or titles earning, ye who

Good King Wenceslas!

THE TRUTH AT LAST!
Discovered and Uncovered
By BOB CHERRY.



now will bless the poor will see the poor returning.

Another long, long year was o'er, the snow fell crisp and even, and Wenceslas looked out once more upon the Feast of Stephen. He said: "I hope I do not see a single beastly peasant!" He didn't—for no less than three were obviously present. And Wency gasped: "Upon my life, the third one is a woman! His brother's been and brought his wife! Great Scott! It isn't human! Well, hither page—go, phone the stores, and never mind the worry! Get turkeys, pies and things in scores, and hire a motor-lorry!"

Page and monarch forth they went with Good King Wency driving. The van was loaded, bowed and bent, and took some time arriving. The peasants waited with a grin, and murmured: "Eeven blessher!" And when they'd finished tucking in they looked a good deal fresher than poor old Wency who, to smile, exerted all his talents, though he was thinking all the while about his banking balance.

So good Christian men be sure,

wealth or rank accruin', ye who now will bless the poor are on the road to ruin!

And so there passed another year, the snow fell crisp and even, and Good King Wency looked with fear upon the Feast of Stephen. His voice rose high in bitter pain: "Well, strike me to a blister! The brother's wife has come again and been and brought her sister! The peasant's nephew's there as well, the peasant's brother's cousin, his cousin's wife, his cousin's gal—Why, lumme, there's a dozen! Here, page, go pawn our crown and rings, and sell the grand planner to buy the usual loads of things—I've only got a tanner!" A dozen lorries took the food through where the snow had drifted, and by the peasant multitude it very soon was shifted.

So good Christian men be sure, with wealth or rank entrusted, ye who now will bless the poor will soon be broke and busted.

Another weary year then passed, the snow fell crisp and even, and Good King Wency looked his last upon the Feast of Stephen. The park was black with human forms, the crowd was simply cruel, for peasants came along in steamers to find a bit of fuel. No smile was seen on Wency then, his face was dark and callous, for half a dozen broker's men were in the Royal Palace. Outside the peasants, every one, had started up a carol, while Wency took a nine-inch gun and squinted down the barrel. Outside the waiting peasants sang their noble monarch's praises, when suddenly there came a BANG! And they were blown to blazes!

So good Christian men be sure, wealth or rank adorning, ye who now will bless the poor, read this—and then take warning!

for a thirty-bob case, with no value attached! Nope! I'll say that them Greek letters might mean something to you, though they don't spell Greek words! What's your idee?"

Soames' lips set in a tight line.

"Don't you go off on your ear!" advised Fisher T. Fish. "I guess, from all I've heard about you, that you're some hoodlum, and you pack a gun—and you'd handle it as soon as not! But it won't buy you anything! You can't cinch that pesky case off'n me when I ain't got it, nohow!"

"Quite!" agreed Soames quietly.

"Name a figure!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess that silver case belongs to me, jest as much as it does to that fat goob Bunter—and as it don't seem

Fish, to recover that silver cigarette-case, and you may take any precautions you like—though if you knew me, you would know that I am a man of my word! Now—"

"Now you're talking!" said Fisher T. Fish heartily. "I guess I ain't doubting your word none, sir, but I'll allow I'll take a spot of care to see that I get the spondulics, when you finger the case! You call around Greyfriars School to-morrow afternoon, and it's a trade!"

"And how—"

"I'll put you wise!" grinned Fishy. "I've sure left that article locked up in my suitcase in the old hombre's house. Me having left, they'll send my baggage arter—I guess I'm phoning the old colonel about it when I mosey in at

it is now, with the goods inside! Nope, sir!"

The crook sat silent again for a few minutes, in reflection.

He realised that the cunning Fishy was right; whatever Harry Wharton & Co. guessed, or suspected, they most certainly would never break the lock on a suitcase left behind by a departed guest.

All was safe there. Fisher T. Fish was going to telephone Wharton Lodge; the old colonel would direct Wells to send the suitcase on at once, and that was that!

Soames smiled.

"You are an astute young rascal, Master Fish," he said.

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"I'll say I cut my eyeteeth in Noo Yark!" admitted Fishy complacently. "We will leave it at that, then!" said Soames. "I shall see you to-morrow, at your school, Master Fish. The porter is already acquainted with me, as Mr. Anderson. I shall look forward to our meeting to-morrow, Master Fish."

"I'll say I'll be sure glad to see you, bo!" grinned Fishy.

Soames stepped out at the next station. The train ran on with Fisher T. Fish. Soames was left in a satisfied mood; sure at last of success. He had only twenty-four hours to wait, and the cigarette-case would be his. Fisher T. Fish, in the train, was feeling still more satisfied. He grinned, and chuckled, and chortled with glee, in happy anticipation of the morrow.

Neither of them gave a thought to Billy Bunter! But they would have given him very serious thoughts indeed, had they known how the fat Owl of the Remove was occupied at Wharton Lodge.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Back To Bunter!

"**B**EAST!" breathed Billy Bunter. Bunter's eyes gleamed through his spectacles. The fat junior was standing in Fisher T. Fish's room, at Wharton Lodge. And his eyes, and his spectacles, gleamed vengeance!

Bunter had plodded home, after Soames had left him on the Wimford road, with a kick by way of farewell. He had arrived, tired, breathless, and fairly bursting with wrath.

That unspeakable swab, Fisher T. Fish, had walked off with his silver cigarette-case, and the fat Owl had no hope of ever seeing it again. All Bunter had to put down to his profit-and-loss account was a weary walk, and a booting from Soames. But the worm will turn!

Bunter, being a fat worm, had turned! He was going to make that cad, that swab, Fishy, sorry for himself! Hence his presence in Fishy's room.

His little round eyes glittered through his spectacles at Fishy's suitcase. Fishy had snaffled his property—and if there was one absolutely certain way of making Fishy squirm, it was by damaging Fishy's property.

He closed the door and looked round for some implement. There was a rather heavy poker in the grate, and the fat Owl grasped it.

Then, grinning, he started on Fishy's suitcase.

Bang! Crash! Bang!

In a few minutes, that suitcase was a hopeless wreck, and its contents spread on the floor.

Grinning, the fat Owl picked up article after article—pyjamas, shirts, socks, collars; and each article, as he picked it up, he rent with ruthless hands.

Thud!

As he grabbed up a pair of socks, folded together, and unfolded them for rending, something that had been concealed in them dropped to the floor. Bunter blinked at it.

Then he jumped.

A silver cigarette-case lay at his feet. Bunter's eyes almost popped through his spectacles.

"Oh crikey!" he gasped.

In great amazement the fat Owl picked up that silver case—blinking at it quite blankly.

It was the mysterious case of which Soames was in search.

"The tricky toad!" breathed Bunter. "Leaving it here locked up, all the time! Oh crumbs! And I've got it!"

Bunter gave a fat chuckle! He had never dreamed that it was in Fishy's suitcase! He had wrecked that suitcase for vengeance on the iniquitous Fishy! Utterly unexpectedly, the bone of contention had turned up in the wreck!

Billy Bunter's fat face was wreathed in grins!

He packed that cigarette-case carefully into an inside pocket! It was his again, and it was going to stay his!

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## Between Ourselves.

**B**EFORE I discuss the programme for our next issue, I feel that I would like to wish every reader A HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR. May the New Year bring you all that you wish for.

Although this message will not reach many hundreds of boys and girls who live in the Colonies until some few days after the first of January, I want them all to feel that they have not been forgotten. In fact, I think I might write on behalf of all the readers in Great Britain, and send our Colonial chums an extra warm greeting.

Always look on the bright side of things, and encourage your chums to do the same, then everybody will be ready to tackle the New Year with a light heart.

If you remember, this time last year I promised to give you the best school yarns possible; well, judging by the many hundreds of complimentary letters I have received, I have carried out my promise. All I can say now is that I am going to keep up this high standard!

Our GRAND NEW YEAR'S NUMBER will contain yet another splendid supplement filled with all the current events of the week at Greyfriars. All your favourite contributors have given of their best to make this a real tip-top issue. "My Own Page"—our new feature—will be taken over entirely by William Gosling, the Greyfriars porter, and, believe me, "he's dun 'is job well"! You'll be tickled to death when you read what he's got to say.

Our great school yarn,

"SPOTTING THE SECRET!"

By Frank Richards,

which incidentally winds up the Christmas series, will go down as being one of the best the ever-popular Mr. Frank Richards has written.

A final word, chums, if you want to increase your circle of friends, tell all your school fellows how you enjoy reading the MAGNET and get them to read it as well. They'll be for ever grateful.

YOUR EDITOR.

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Nobody was going to know that he had it!

Those beasts, the Famous Five, were jolly well not going to make him hand it over at the police station—neither was that old frump, the colonel! Soames, on Fishy's track, could never guess that the silver case had, in this

undisputed way, got back to Bunter! All that Bunter had to do was to keep it dark and it was his—undisputed!

Bunter chuckled a gleeful chuckle as he rolled out of Fishy's room, leaving Fishy's property scattered on the floor. In the circumstances, now that he had got that silver case back, he was anxious not to have it known that he had been there at all!

"**I** SAY, you fellows!" "Hallo, hallo, hallo! You got back alive, Bunter?"

Harry Wharton & Co. came tramping cheerily in, fresh and ruddy after their walk in the frosty air. Billy Bunter blinked at them from his armchair, with a grin on his fat face.

"I say, where's Fishy?" asked Bunter.

"Gone!" answered Harry.

"But I say, you fellows, Fishy will have Soames after him now!" grinned Bunter. "I say, Soames got me after you fellows cleared off on the road—"

"What?" "Grabbed me," said Bunter. "I told him that Fishy had that cigarette-case—you see, I thought he had it in his pocket when he went—"

"So did we!" said Harry. "But have you really seen Soames?"

"He got me—I mean, I met him, and he had the cheek to speak to me," said Bunter. "I treated him with the contempt he deserved. He never had the cheek to kick me—of course, he would never dare—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, cackle! Well, I fancy he's gone after Fishy!" said Bunter. "Fishy's welcome to him! He won't get that cigarette-case in a hurry—he, he, he!"

"I've been thinking about that, as we came back," said Harry. "I'm certain that Fishy never had it on him; and he must have parked it somewhere—most likely in his bag—"

"Think so?" grinned Bunter.

"Well, I don't see where else he could have left it. If he had parked it anywhere else, he wouldn't have been willing to clear off and leave it! But his bag will have to be sent after him, of course."

"We can make him cough it up, next term, if he's got it!" said Bob. "We can't very well bust his suitcase open and look for it—"

"He, he, he!"

"What are you guggling at, you fat Owl?"

"Oh, nothing!" grinned Bunter. "Nothing at all! He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter did not explain what he was "guggling" at! But during that day, Bunter was heard to "guggle" a good many times, apparently greatly amused by something unknown to the other fellows.

And when he heard that a telephone-call had come through from Fisher T. Fish, requesting that his suitcase should be dispatched after him pronto, Billy Bunter guggled, and giggled, and gurgled, as if he would never leave off guggling, giggling, and gurgling. The thought of Fishy's face when the suitcase arrived at Greyfriars, minus the article that Fishy expected to find therein, was fearfully entertaining to Billy Bunter!

THE END.

(The final yarn in this grand series: "SPOTTING THE SECRET!" will appear in next Saturday's MAGNET. You cannot afford to miss it, chums!)

PETER HAZELDENE On— THE PEOPLE WE MEET AT CHRISTMAS!

After living in the self-contained little world of a school like Greyfriars, it's a curious and not entirely exhilarating experience to meet the crowds of relatives, friends, and strangers that we all meet at Christmas.

Most of these people are as remote from our normal daily lives as Martians. They don't seem to have the foggiest idea how to get on to common ground with us.

The mater, having seen her young hopeful only once, at half-term, since the summer hols., seems to imagine that he is still a mere toddler. Flinging her arms round him, she tells him he is still her same ikkle precious ooky-wookums or something of the sort and that it seems only a few weeks ago when he was uttering his first infantile gurglings in the pram.

I must say I have always found myself that you can rely on the mater to make things as embarrassing as possible for you!

The pater, flying to the other extreme, makes uncomfortable efforts to treat you as an equal. He calls you "old chap" and asks you how you're getting on at footer; but all the time you know he's groping to get down on level terms with you and failing lamentably—and he knows you know it!

Your pater's old bosom friend who you haven't seen for a couple of years is even more in the dark about appropriate conversation.

"Well, my little man!" he begins, giving you an affectionate pat on the head. Then he decides on a hasty change of tactics and tries to shake your hand. In doing so, he probably trips over the cat and lands on the carpet with a yell. It's a lucky break for you if he does, because you can then have a jolly good laugh, which will ease the tension and make everybody happy—with the exception of the pater's pal, and he won't matter, anyway!

Your maiden aunt, of course, is completely impossible and must be suffered in a mood of patient resignation. She'll hug you and hold you out at arms-length for a detailed examination and ask you reproachfully what's happened to your kiss-curl and finally present you with a bag of lollipops.

The servants are no less difficult. Unless you belong to the class that perpetually retain their faithful old retainers (I don't, myself!) you'll find that the servants are all new since you were last at home, and that they regard you as some weird kind of animal that rightly belongs to the zoo and ought to be kept there during the vac. as well as during term-time.

The cook will look on you with undisguised hostility. The maids will eye you out of the corners of their eyes with a blank lack of understanding. The tradesmen's boys cheerfully take the rise out of you at the kitchen door or jeer at you if they meet you in the street.

A globe-trotting uncle usually displays more acumen than most of your circle. He tells you interesting anecdotes and regards you as at least something approaching a human being. But even then he's up against the difficulties that surround you—especially if he offers you a cigarette after dinner and you take it!



The GREYFRIARS HERALD

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EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

December 31st, 1938.



YOUR EDITOR CALLING FROM WHARTON LODGE

With the editorial offices temporarily removed to Wharton Lodge, the job of producing the "Greyfriars Herald" during the vac. is by no means a light one.

My den at Wharton Lodge has been fitted out as an emergency editorial sanctum and, though it is by no means so well equipped as our famous quarters at Greyfriars, it serves the purpose pretty well. At Wharton Lodge this holiday I have four very willing helpers in the editorial work in the shape of Frank Nugent, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Inky.

As Editor-in-chief I have to exercise even more tact and diplomacy than at Greyfriars, for my assistants at Wharton Lodge happen also to be my guests, and are in consequence entitled to more consideration than editorial assistants usually get!

It was quite a ticklish business, I can assure you, when I had to turn down a long poem which Inky had written with the idea of filling up this week's number. The poem started like this:

"The nightful shades o'er Wharton Lodge fall crashfully;
'Gainst window-panes the snowflakes whirl dashfully;
The burnful log fire's flickerful light glows flashfully;
While youthful tongues of spookful ghosts talk rashfully!"

There were nineteen more verses like that, and Inky was naturally proud of his effort. It took a lot of patient and careful argument from me to convince him that his poem was not the one thing needed to make this week's "Herald" score a record hit!

Must put up the shutters now, old pals. But before doing so I will wish all chums, on behalf of the staff of the "Greyfriars Herald," a merry Christmas and a very happy and prosperous New Year.

Meet you again next week, everybody.
HARRY WHARTON.

NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

HARRY WHARTON: To give readers of the "Greyfriars Herald" plenty of crisp, snappy news of Greyfriars and the best of the laughs that come my way!

BOB CHERRY: To learn to tie my tie as neatly as Frank Nugent does his.

FRANK NUGENT: To try to be as cheery and carefree as Bob Cherry—even if cheeriness does involve a danger of carelessness!

HURREE SINGH: To induce my esteemed and ludicrous chums ceaselessly to stop talking slangfully and to use speakfully only the pureful and honoured English language as taught by my learned and preposterous native tutors in Bhanipur.

HAROLD SKINNER: To say "Bah!" to convention and to remain a black sheep.

HORACE COKER: To try to get the unintelligent Greyfriars crowd to reckonise a jeeenius when they see one.

CECIL REGINALD TEMPLE: To put you cheeky Remove kids in your place.

"MY TUCKSHOP IS HAUNTED!"

Says JESSIE MIMBLE

I'm not the sort of person who believes in ghosts and such-like. But I must say there has been some funny goings-on in my tuckshop this Christmas. Dearie me, yes!

I said to Mr. Mimble just after you young gentlemen had gone home for your holidays, "It's funny," I said, "but I could swear," I said, "that that cokernut candy in the shop is gradually going without a soul touching it," I said.

"Go on, silly," he said. "You must be dreaming," he said. "How could candy go of its own accord?" he said. "It strikes me you want a new pair of glasses!" he said.

"Do you think," I asked, "it's possible that there's something supernatural or such-like in the shape of a ghost or what-not that is playing tricks with my stock?" I asked. Mr. Mimble laughed.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared. "I must say, it never struck me," he roared, "that our little place could be haunted. But if you think that there's candy is going," he roared, "why not weigh it now and again, and see?"

Weight it I did, then and there. It weighed 2 pounds and 7 ounces.

When young Trotter, the page boy, came round to my back door that morning, I asked him what he thought about it.

"You rely on it, ma'am, it's ghosts as sure as eggs," he said. "This here school," he said, "is fair running alive with ghosts; and the tricks they get up to nobody would believe unless they saw for themselves. I would

Unattached guests in the house are usually the worst of the lot! If they are left alone with you they stare at you in silence, trying hard to think of something to say. Finally, they ask you if you play golf or bridge. You say "No," and that floors them. In sheer panic they rush out of the room to escape from you!

Well, well, I suppose it's all part of the business of growing up. We shall probably be the same ourselves when we're old fogeys meeting schoolboys on holiday.

But I must say it's quite an ordeal, meeting the people we meet at Christmas!

door, as usual.

After he had gone, I weighed the candy again.

It weighed 2 pounds only. Seven solid ounces of candy had vanished into thin air!

The same thing happened the next day, except that instead of seven ounces disappearing, it was nearly a pound!

Next day, I noticed that several quarters of slab chocolate had gone, not to mention some sugared almonds.

That night, when I was having supper alone, Mr. Mimble having gone off to see Mr. Gosling, I heard a sound in the shop.

Tip-toeing out, I had the shock of my life when I saw a white, shrouded figure standing there in the middle of my shop, helping itself to treacle toffee!

I rushed back for my rolling-pin. When I returned, imagine my surprise to find the lights switched on and Trotter standing by the counter.

"Did you see the ghost, ma'am?" he asked, all breathless.

"I hid myself in the shop to watch for it. It didn't half give me a shock when I see it helping itself to treacle toffee! I jumped out and switched on the light—jolly quick, I can tell you—and then it vanished."

Well, we searched the place from top to bottom, young Trotter and I; but no sign of any ghosts did we see after that. We did find a sheet behind the counter; but Trotter said that it was only a sheet from his bed that he was taking to Mrs. Keble for changing. It's a funny thing, but since that night I have seen nothing of no ghost and lost no more from my stock.

Trotter steers clear of the tuckshop now. He says that experience was too much for him.

I wouldn't like it to happen again, myself, either.

It's not very nice, living in a tuckshop that's haunted. Dearie me, no!

HE WILL HAVE HIS CHRISTMAS "BOX"!

Bolsover major is intending to spend most of his holiday improving his boxing.

If you want to please Bolsoy, send him a greetings card to wish him a Very "Scrappy" Christmas!

never trust a ghost no further than what I could see him," he said.

He went out through the shop and let himself out by the front

H. VERNON-SMITH'S WEEKLY SPORTS SHORTS

"Why don't you play Rugger at Greyfriars?"

This is a question some readers fire at me.

There is a curious impression amongst them that Rugger is in some way superior to Soccer. "All the best schools play Rugger," is a comment I frequently hear from them.

Now, if it were true that Rugger was in some mysterious way more "posh" than Soccer, I should personally consider that an excellent reason for favouring Soccer. Sport and snobbery don't go well together, in my opinion.

In actual fact, the idea that Rugger is more classy than Soccer is a legend. Many first-class Public schools, of

certainly no feeling of superiority on the part of Rugger schools over Soccer schools.

You can take it from me, anyway, that Soccer is all the rage at Greyfriars and that we are unlikely to transfer our affections to Rugger for a long, long time to come. What's more, I feel that our choice meets with the approval of the vast majority of the people who follow the fortunes of Greyfriars in the realm of sport!

With the hols. on there is, of course, nothing to report in the way of organised games; but the news from various places to which Greyfriars men have adjourned for the vac. shows that outdoor games are being kept up as far as conditions permit.

DICK RAKE Reveals— SECRETS OF A SCHOOLBOY SLEUTH

Dick Penfold is a talented chap. In addition to being the champion poet of Greyfriars, he is also a keen amateur Sherlock Holmes. Readers who have perused our occasional police court news will already be aware of the cold, remorseless logic that is invariably applied to a case when Detective-inspector Penfold of the Remove Police gives evidence.

Having had a unique chance of studying Penfold's methods at first hand I am going to pass on the information I received to "Greyfriars Herald" readers, feeling sure they will be just as interested in it as I was.

I am doing this with Penfold's full permission and approval. Penfold says it's just a matter of common sense and observation. I dare say he's right; but I should find it jolly difficult myself to get such results as he gets just by using my common sense and observation.

It was at Barbara Redfern's party that Penfold showed me his methods. The first illustration was given before we actually got there. I was taking him along in my uncle's car, when I happened to mention that I had received a present of a pocket-case from somebody who had forgotten to put his name to the attached Christmas card.

"Got it on you?" Penfold asked.

"Yes, but there isn't a clue in the whole packet. Even the address label is typed."

"Let's have a look all the same," Penfold said.

I passed him over the packet just as I had received it, wrapped up in tissue paper and with a Christmas card pinned to the outer layer of brown paper.

Penfold looked at it for a split second.

"I think you'll find it came from Morgan," he calmly told me.

"But how the thump—"

"The pin has its head to the left of the point," interrupted Penfold. "That means the Christmas card was pinned up by a left-handed person."

The most notable case of left-handedness in the Remove is Morgan, and Morgan happens to be your study-mate. The inference is irresistible.

"Elementary, my dear Watson, in fact!" I gasped. "All the same, old bean, it strikes the uninitiated as pretty slick work!"

When we arrived at the party, in which, by the way, all the guests had to wear masks and fancy dress, I mentioned the incident to Barbara Redfern, who promptly challenged Penfold to test his powers by picking out six of the guests who were Greyfriars men.

I would have wagered anyone fifty to one in doughnuts that it couldn't be done. But Penfold, perhaps emboldened by the pirate costume he wore, feared no foe in shining armour—or any other kind of fancy dress!

Without the slightest hesitation, he

At Mauleverer Towers, a house party which included several Greyfriars fellows actually held a tennis tournament during a brief spell of favourable weather.

From Essex, where Peter Todd is staying, comes a report of an inter-village hockey match in which one of the teams included Squiff, Dutton, Rake and Toddy himself. The team which was so generously sprinkled with Removeites won by the handsome score of 8-1, which seems to indicate that Greyfriars men can keep their end up at holiday time just as well as in mid-term.

Ogilvy, writing from Scotland, sends me a vivid description of a curling match on the ice in which he and Russell took part. It's written in racy Scottish dialect; and as that's all Greek to me and would probably be to most of my readers, I am refraining from printing it.

In any case, I have now reached the end of my space.

So-long, sports—and a happy New Year to you!

identified a cavalier as Peter Hazeldene, a pierrot as Bulstrode, a human milk bottle as Kipps, a policeman as Wibley, a Beau Brummell as Russell and a highwayman as Lord Mauleverer.

"How on earth do you do it?" asked Barbara, who knew all her guests in spite of their masks and disguises, and was able to check off Penfold's answers as right. "You're right in every case!"

"It's quite simple, really," Penfold answered modestly. "Everybody on earth has a characteristic walk peculiar to himself—in fact, people's ways of walking vary more widely even than their faces! I happen to have studied the way different Remove men walk, and it's just as easy for me

to pick out a man by his walk as by his chivvy. That's all!"

"But what about the highwayman?" I broke in, thinking I had found a flaw in the argument. "He's not walking at all; in fact, he's lolling back in that settee as though he's asleep!"

"Exactly!" grinned Penfold. "That's why I identified him immediately as Mauleverer!"

After which, I remained silent. Penfold as a detective is one too many for me!

