

THE
MAGNET

The Mystery Man of Eastcliff Lodge!

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2^D

Billy Bunter's
Own Paper



BUNTER'S TREASURE CHEST!



The GREYFRIARS HERALD

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON

STOP
PRESS
NEWS

DEBUNKING BUNTER COURT!

By BOB CHERRY.

BUNTER'S first words when I ran him to earth in the tuckshop were: "It wasn't me!"

"Eh?"

"It wasn't me!" said Bunter firmly. "If you ask my opinion, old chap, it was Mrs. Kebble's cat. I never even knew you had any doughnuts in your study cupboard. Even if I had, I shouldn't have touched 'em!"

"Oho!" I roared. "So you've scoffed my doughnuts, eh?"

"Certainly not! I wouldn't dream of such a thing, old chap. And anyway, they tasted jolly stale!"

"You're a purloining, prevaricating porpoise!" I said sternly. "A nice beginning this is, I must say, to a special interview in which I want you to tell the truth."

Bunter registered relief.

"Is that all you want, Bob, old chap? Well, if it's the truth you're looking for, you couldn't have come to a better chap to get it. You know my reputation for telling the truth!"

"I do—but in spite of that I'll still have the interview!" I chuckled. "'Herald' readers are clamouring for the truth about Bunter Court, and the Editor has sent me to get it. You can have a ginger-pop and three jam tarts out of the funds while you're giving it me."

"Thanks, old chap!" grinned the fat Owl, promptly fielding a jam tart from the counter and burying his teeth into it. "You shall have it! Bunter Court is a noble pile, standing in a tremendous stretch of gorgeous grounds—miles and miles of 'em, you know! When you walk up the crazy paving through the front garden—"

"Front garden?" I gasped.

"Ahem! I mean through the spacious parkland!" corrected Bunter hastily. "When you walk through the spacious parkland, you see before you a vista of geraniums—"

"Geraniums?"

"That is to say, oak-trees! Magnificent old oaks, you know! They're a marvellous sight. The neighbours each side look over their fences and admire 'em—"

"They—they look over their fences?" I repeated almost dazedly.

"Hem! Through telescopes, of course—powerful telescopes!" explained Bunter. "They attract a lot of attention, I can tell you. The pater plants them every year—"

"Pip-pip-plants oak-trees?"

"Hem! What I mean is, they've

been there for hundreds of years—sort of family heirlooms, and all that! Well, when you get to the doorstep—"

"D-d-doorstep?"

"Er—I should say the magnificent flight of marble steps leading to the broad, sweeping terrace," amended Bunter. "When you get to the door, anyway, you are welcomed by Mary, our cook-general—"

"Cook-general!" I yelled.

"Slip of the tongue! What I meant, old chap, was that you are welcomed by a double row of powdered and liveried flunkies," said Bunter, attacking a second jam tart. "You are shown into the front room—"

"The whatter?"

"Or rather, into one of our lavishly appointed great reception-halls. Then the pater comes in; and if you're peckish, he'll take you into the kitchenette—"

"Kik-kik-kik—"

"I mean, he'll send the butler down into the enormous wine-cellars for a bottle of pop—er—a bottle of rare old vintage port, I should say! Then he'll take you into the living-room—"

"D-d-did I hear you say—"

"He'll take you into the great galleried dining-hall of the Bunters," corrected Bunter quickly, as he polished off his third jam tart. "And—you did say have some more, didn't you?"

"Sorry, old fat bean!" I grinned.

"I'm paying for those three and the pop, and then I'm buzzing!"

"But you said you wanted the truth—"

"I did. I'm going to look for it here when I get back to my study," I said, tapping the notebook in which I had been recording the interview. "Luckily, I've got just the thing that will help me."

"What's that?"

"A microscope!" I grinned; and I buzzed out of the tuckshop, leaving Bunter speechless.

Shorts!

Trotter, our page, has bought a pet tortoise. He'd better keep it on a lead, because he'd never be able to catch it if it ran away.

Loder had a bad egg at breakfast this morning. Birds of a feather—

SINNEMA SENNARIO FOR SALE.—Famous orther has ritten a 1st klass sennario for a film company. What offers? Feechering St. Sam's and Dr. Birchmall, who could be played by Clark Gable or Boris Karloff. No offer of £1,000 or over refewsed. Write: R. NUGENT, Greyfriars Skool.

THE UNPARDONABLE CRIME!

By BOB CHERRY AGAIN.

Something was wrong on this particular Sunday morning. I could tell it as soon as I arrived in the quad.

When I saluted North of the Sixth with a cheery grin and a wave of the hand, the old bean responded with a chilling stare and elevated eyebrows.

When I saw Temple of the Fourth, he gaped and said: "Oh gad!" in a faint and horrified voice.

When I met Gosling, he scratched his nose and shook his head sadly and tramped off, muttering that he didn't know what Greyfriars was a-coming to!

I felt a trifle mystified. It was a bright and breezy morning—just the sort of day to set lambs dancing and prefects prancing and so on. Why, then, was everybody so blue?

Pondering on the problem, I turned my footsteps in the direction of the school chapel, hoping to spot the rest of the Co. before they went in to morning service.

I passed Tubb of the Third, en route. He stood aside to make way for me, and gave me a long-drawn-out, mournful whistle as I passed him.

A little farther on, I bumped into Vernon-Smith. The Bounder gave me a pathetic look, then buried his face in his hands and sobbed aloud!

Really, it was becoming distressing. There must be some reason why everybody I met was so upset. What was it?

I came in sight of the school chapel. At the same moment there was a gasp behind me and a stern voice said "CHERRY!"

"Yes, sir!" I said, capping Mr. Quelch respectfully.

"Cherry! This is—is outrageous!" cried the beak, his steely eyes gleaming quite ferociously as they surveyed me. "Oh, to think that I should have lived to see this day! Wingate!"

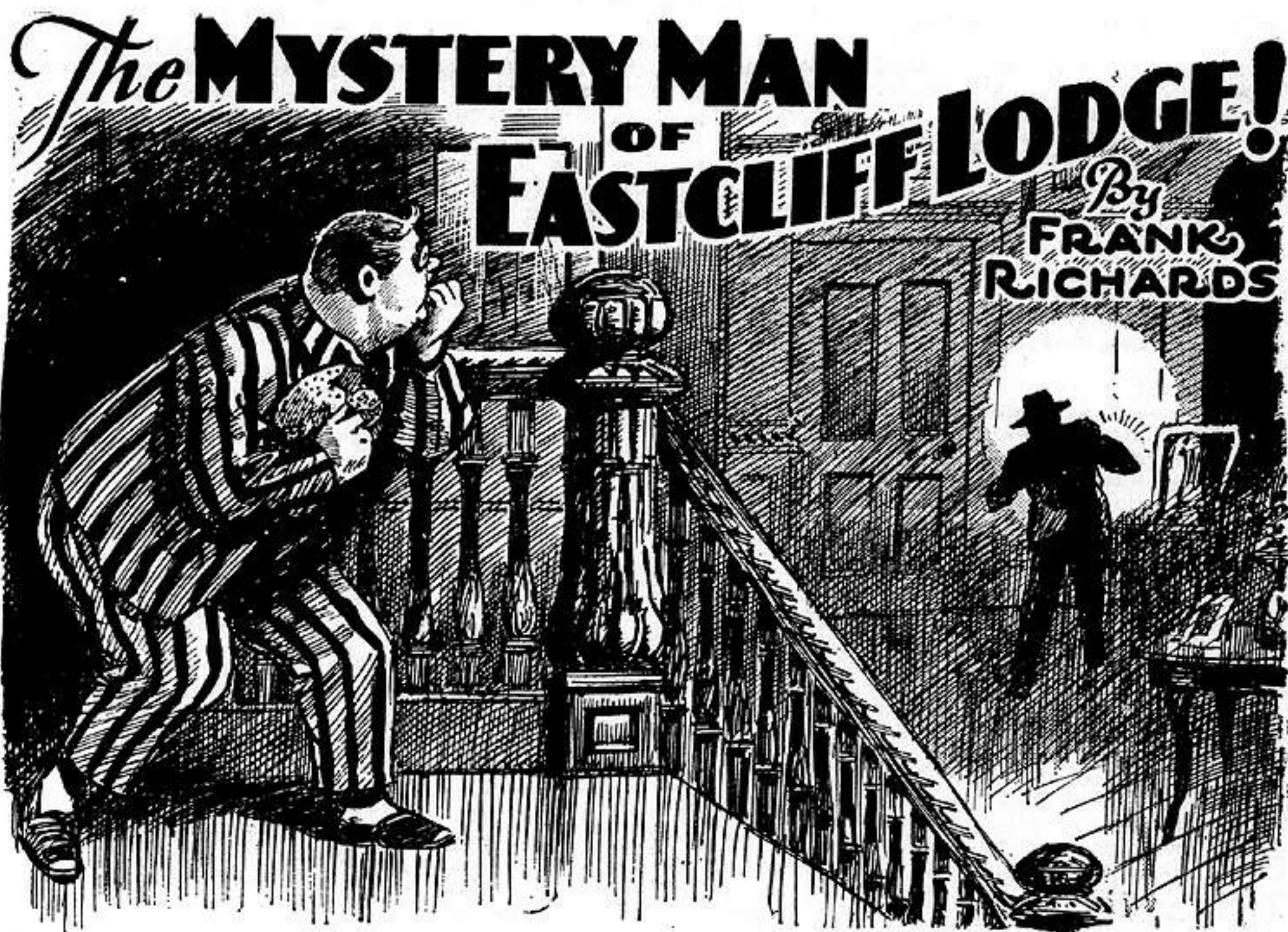
"Sir!" came from the skipper.

"Take charge of this wretched boy immediately! Place him in a cell and see that he is put on a diet of bread and water. I will interview the Head and—"

"But what's wrong, sir?" I cried, tumbling at last to the fact that it was little me that was making everybody so peeved. "What have I done?"

"HOW DARE YOU, CHERRY—HOW DARE YOU, I ASK—TURN UP TO CHURCH PARADE IN BROWN SHOES?"

THE HOLIDAY GUESTS AT EASTCLIFF LODGE ON THE KENTISH COAST
MAKE THE DISCOVERY THAT DESPERATE MEN ARE DOGGING THEIR
FOOTSTEPS. WHY?



The startled Bunter blinked at a spot of light which gleamed out suddenly from the dark hall below.

NOT NICE!

BILLY BUNTER awoke.

It was midnight.

He sat up in bed and blinked round him in the gloom.

It was quite an unaccustomed hour for Billy Bunter to awake. Seldom, or never, did the fat Owl of the Greyfriars Remove hear the chimes at midnight. At the witching hour of night, Bunter was generally fast asleep, if not silent—his steady snore waking the echoes like an unending melody.

But circumstances alter cases.

Had Billy Bunter been in his bed in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars School, no doubt he would have slumbered on till the rising-bell clanged in the dewy morn.

But Bunter was far from Greyfriars now, the old school having broken up for the Easter holidays.

It was his first night at Eastcliff Lodge, the handsome residence of Sir William Bird on the south-east coast.

Harry Wharton & Co. shared a big room—they liked to be together, as at Greyfriars. Bunter preferred a room to himself, and had one. Which was satisfactory to Bunter, also to the Famous Five, who had quite enough of Bunter's snore in the dormitory at Greyfriars.

Sitting up in bed, Billy Bunter groped for his big spectacles and jammed them on his fat little nose.

Faintly through the mild spring night came the boom of the sea on the cliffs. There was no other sound in the silence. But it was not that sound that had awakened Billy Bunter.

Bunter had been dreaming.

It had been a lovely dream—about a cake!

That was why Bunter had awakened.

At Greyfriars, Bunter had to get through the long stretch between supper and brekker without anything to eat. It was tough; but, at school, a fellow had to toe the line, tough as it was.

In holiday-time matters were much improved—at least, in holidays when the fat Owl succeeded in planting himself out.

Supper at Eastcliff Lodge had been hospitable and ample. Bunter had done it full justice. Likewise, he had put a cake under a fat arm when he left the supper-table and conveyed the same to his room. Bunter was not usually likely to

wake; but if he did wake, it was certain that he would wake up hungry. Bunter was the fellow to take precautions in really important matters, when precautions were practicable.

The surprised gaze of the butler when he walked off with the cake did not worry Bunter. Bunter was not at Eastcliff Lodge to bother about butlers. If Harry Wharton & Co. gave him expressive glances, he did not even notice them.

That cake was deposited on Bunter's bedside table.

Naturally it haunted his dreams. Bunter had slept like a top for a couple of hours. Now he was awake, and it was entirely due to the cake. A beautiful dream was about to change into a beautiful reality. Bunter stretched out a fat hand for his bedside light to switch it on.

Click!

No light came.

"Blow!" grunted Bunter.

He was still in the dark.

It was irritating. That bedside light had been in perfect order when he turned in; he had switched it off last thing before laying his fat head on the pillow. Now it was off.

There was another switch by the door. But to reach that meant getting out of bed. Bunter had a constitutional objection to getting out

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HARRY WHARTON & CO.
of GREYFRIARS in An
Amazing New Holiday Ad-
venture.

of bed, if he could help it. He remained where he was.

After all, a fellow did not need a light to eat a cake. Bunter could eat in the dark. He could, in fact, eat anywhere, in any circumstances.

He groped for the cake.

His fat hands established contact, and he lifted the cake from the table and rested it on his fat knees, hunched up under the bedclothes.

Had it been light, and had there been an eye to see, a beatific smile could have been discerned on Billy Bunter's fat features.

His little round eyes glistened with anticipation behind his big round spectacles.

This was life!

A three-pound cake was not too much for Bunter. It was, perhaps, hardly enough! But it would see him through nicely till morning. It was a scrumptious cake, with lots of plums in it. Bunter was going to enjoy life—and then sink back happily into the land of dreams.

The fat Owl snapped off a large hunk of cake. He opened the largest mouth in the Greyfriars Remove to its fullest extent. He jammed in the hunk of cake.

Large as the mouth was, it was filled to capacity. Bunter crunched—happily!

But, as the poet has remarked, happiness too swiftly flies!

Bunter gave one crunch.

Then there was something like a volcanic explosion in that apartment at Eastcliff Lodge.

"Grooooooggh!"

Fragments of a large mouthful of cake shot in all directions. Bunter had been eager to get that cake in. Now he seemed still more eager to get it out.

"Urrrrggh!"

Bunter spluttered frantically.

"Groooooogh! Salt! Urrrrgh! Pepper! Wooooogh! Vinegar! Yurrrggh!" gurgled the fat Owl. "Beasts! Urrggh! That beast Cherry! Wurrgh! Urrgh!"

It was awful!

It was iniquitous!

That cake had been absolutely scrumptious when Bunter deposited it on his bedside table. It was less scrumptious now. The most scrumptious cake was bound to deteriorate, if some iniquitous practical joker sprinkled it with salt and pepper and drenched it with vinegar.

And that was what had happened.

One of the Famous Five—that blithering idiot, Bob Cherry, no doubt—had done this! He must have come in after Bunter was asleep and done the fell deed. Perhaps it was intended as a lesson in good manners. Billy Bunter had no use for a lesson in good manners; what he wanted was a cake.

But he did not want that cake—now!

For the first time in history, one mouthful of cake was not only enough for Bunter, but too much!

"Urrggh! Gurrgh!" Billy Bunter clawed at his mouth, intensely disliking the mixed flavours of salt, pepper, and vinegar. "Oh crikey! Beast! Urrggh!"

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There was a thud as the cake rolled off the bed and landed on the floor.

Bunter did not care where it landed. He did not want that cake. He was fed up with that cake!

He sat and spluttered. He breathed fury. His eyes glittered through his spectacles. He knew now why his light would not come on. Of course, the beast had taken the lamp out of the socket—just to make Bunter start on that cake in the dark, without discerning that it had been doctored.

Billy Bunter rolled out of bed, breathing rage and vengeance.

Bunter was not a vengeful fellow, as a rule. But some things are beyond pardon—such as spoiling a fellow's cake. A lioness robbed of her cubs had nothing on Bunter robbed of a cake! The fat Owl forgot his dislike of turning out of bed.

He turned out. He groped for slippers, and jammed his feet into them. Then he groped for the cake, and grabbed it up. With the cake in his fat hands, he rolled to the door.

Bob Cherry was going to have that cake—jammed down on his chivvy as hard as Bunter could jam it! After which he might think twice, or three times, before he larked with a fellow's cake.

Billy Bunter, on the trail of vengeance, emerged from his room and rolled along in the dark to the door of the room occupied by the Famous Five.

A FACE FROM THE PAST!

"OH!" gasped Billy Bunter suddenly.

He came to a sudden halt.

His startled eyes and his spectacles fixed on a spot of light in the black darkness of the interior of Eastcliff Lodge.

The fat Owl of Greyfriars was groping his way along an oaken gallery over the hall of Sir William Bird's mansion deep below.

On that gallery opened a number of rooms; one of them the large apartment where Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, Bob Cherry, and Hurree Singh had five beds in a row.

Bunter was heading for that room, groping along the massive oaken balustrade on the side towards the hall.

All was black as a hat.

Outside, the stars of spring-time were gleaming on land and sea, but the black-out blinds at the big windows shut out every gleam of starlight.

A sudden spot of light, gleaming from the dark hall below the gallery, was startling.

Bunter knew that it was past midnight. Every occupant of Eastcliff Lodge had long been in bed. But that spot of light showed that someone was stirring downstairs.

The startled Owl blinked at it through the thick carvings of the oak balustrade.

He could see that it came from a flashlamp.

Not a sound was to be heard; whoever was carrying that light was treading softly, making no noise.

"Oh!" breathed Bunter again.

He felt an icy trickle down his podgy back. The thought of burglars flashed into his fat mind at once. Who else could be moving about so quietly in the sleeping house at that hour?

The spot of light had crossed the hall to the staircase. It glimmered on the stairs. The man who carried it—invisible to Bunter—was coming up.

From the bottom of his fat heart Billy Bunter wished that he had not quitted his room. He had not bargained for burglars. He made a movement to retreat, but stopped at once. Suppose the burglar heard him?

Instead of retreating, the fat Owl crouched down close by the balustrade. The gallery was a good fifteen feet wide, and he was invisible in the darkness. Unless the man actually turned the light right on him, he would pass unseeing at a safe distance. All that the shivering fat Owl had to do was to remain quiet.

The faintest of footfalls came to his fat ears now. It was a light tread, but he could hear it as it came nearer up the broad staircase.

Was it, after all, a burglar?

It dawned on Bunter's fat brain that it might be some member of the household coming home late, and treading lightly in order not to awaken sleepers.

Now that he thought of that, Bunter remembered Jermyn. Jermyn, Sir William Bird's valet, had been absent when the Greyfriars party arrived. They had heard of him, but seen nothing of him so far.

He had been expected back that day. He had not arrived, so far as Billy Bunter knew. Trains were slow and uncertain in war-time. Billy Bunter realised that this was very likely the manservant Jermyn getting back late, letting himself in with a key and going quietly to his room. His room, Bunter knew, was on that gallery, next to Sir William's.

It was a comforting thought to the fat junior.

But he was not taking chances. If this was Jermyn coming in late, it was all right. If it was not Jermyn, it wasn't.

The fat Owl crouched in the dark, and waited and watched.

The man, whoever he was, was going to pass him.

He held the flashlamp in front of him; the light did not swerve towards Bunter. Suddenly, to Bunter's horror, it stopped. He dreaded to see it turn on him. But it turned in the opposite direction and gleamed on an oaken door—the door of the room occupied by the Famous Five.

Behind the light Bunter could see nothing of the man. Across the gallery, he watched the spot of light on the door of the juniors' room.

Evidently, the man was interested in that room. Why, Bunter could

not imagine, whether he was Jermyn or a burglar.

But the fact was clear. There was a settee by the wall near the door. The unseen man placed the flashlamp on it, and then knelt by the door, with his ear to the keyhole.

The light was now on him.

Billy Bunter, staring across the gallery, could see the side view of his face towards the light as his ear was pressed to the keyhole.

He could guess why the man was listening. It was to ascertain whether the occupants of the room were asleep. That could only mean that he meant to enter if they were asleep, as they were fairly certain to be at that hour. He was making sure first. Billy Bunter gave up the idea that it could possibly be the baronet's man coming in late. It must be a burglar.

Then, as his eyes and his spectacles were glued on the face that was now clearly visible, Billy Bunter's fat heart gave a jump, and he barely suppressed a squeak of terror.

For it dawned on him that he knew that face.

It was long since he had seen it, but it was a face he knew. It was a smooth, clean-shaven, clear-cut face, with rather thin lips, and a well-shaped but rather sharp nose.

"Soames!" breathed Bunter inaudibly.

He remembered James Soames, though till that moment he had forgotten the existence of the smooth-faced, smooth-spoken man who had been Mr. Vernon-Smith's valet at one time—and many other things at other times—a South Sea freebooter among other things.

Billy Bunter hardly breathed.

It was Soames—he was sure it was Soames. The mere glimpse of that smooth, quiet face struck terror to his fat heart. Soames! It was James Soames, creeping in the silence of the night in Eastcliff Lodge!

Bunter crouched, petrified.

Obviously, the man, whether he was Soames or not, had not the faintest suspicion that anyone was in the dark gallery but himself.

For a long minute he listened at the door. Then he rose and opened the door silently.

All was dark and silent within. He listened again at the open door. Then he picked up the flashlamp and stepped into the room.

Billy Bunter's fat heart almost died within him. What was Soames up to? What did he intend to do? The fat Owl remained in a petrified state, listening with all his ears.

The man remained less than a minute in the room. Perhaps he had stepped in to glance at the sleepers now he was sure that they were sleeping—perhaps to ascertain who they were. At all events, there was no sound, and under a minute he stepped out again, and closed the door as silently as he had opened it.

The spot of light passed on up the gallery.

It vanished—either shut off or because a door had closed on it.

Billy Bunter was left blinking in dense darkness.

It was several minutes before he

ventured to move, in the dread that Soames might come back. But all was silent and still, and he stirred at last.

With the cake still under a fat arm and the other arm groping, the fat Owl stumbled across the gallery to the juniors room. He was too terrified to think of returning to his own.

He groped for the door-handle, opened the door, and rolled in, and promptly shut the door after him. Then a scared squeak broke the silence of the room where the Famous Five were sleeping the healthy, sound sleep of happy youth:

"I say, you fellows!"

ALARM IN THE NIGHT!

HARRY WHARTON came out of slumber with a bound.

"Oooogh!" he gasped. "What—"

Something was clawing at his face. It was rather startling in the middle of the night. The captain of the Greyfriars Remove had been sleeping soundly—but a fat paw clawing at his features would have awakened Rip van Winkle.

His eyes opened to dense darkness. He could see nothing. But somebody—or something—was there. A clutch fastened on his nose and shook it.

He gave a howl of anguish.

Bunter, of course, could not see in the dark. His fat squeak had not awakened the Famous Five. He dared not shout, lest Soames should hear. He groped to a bed, groped for a sleeper, and shook him to wake him, and it was sheer chance that it was a nose on which his fat clutch fastened.

But it was painful to the proprietor of that nose.

"Oh!" roared Wharton. "What's that? Who's that? Oooogh!"

What it was, who it was, he did not know; but he knew that his nose was grabbed in the dark and nearly jerked off his face. He hit out. Something or somebody loomed over him in the dark, grabbing his nose. His fist landed on that something or somebody with a bang.

Bump!

There was a loud howl and a loud bump as that something or somebody let go the nose and sat down suddenly on the floor.

"Ow!" roared Bunter.

Harry Wharton sat up. From four other beds came startled exclamations. Bunter's bump and Bunter's roar had awakened all the Co. at once.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" came Bob Cherry's voice.

"What's up?" exclaimed Frank Nugent.

"What the thump is that row?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"What is the terrific upfulness?" ejaculated Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Look here, is that one of you fat-heads larking, or what?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, rubbing his nose.

"Who grabbed my nose in the dark?"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Bob.

"Did anybody?"

"Ow! Wow! Beast! I say, you fellows—" came a breathless squeak.

"Bunter!" howled Bob.

"That fat ass Bunter—"

"That terrific idiot Bunter—"

"Bunter!" hooted Harry Wharton. "You mad porpoise—"

"I say, you fellows, shut up! He'll hear you!" gasped the unseen Owl from the dark. "If he hears you—"

"Who, you piffling porker?"

"That villain!" gasped Bunter.

"What villain, you blithering bandersnatch?"

"That awful scoundrel!"

There was a sudden gleam in the darkness. Bob Cherry had switched on the electric light! Sudden illumination filled the room, and revealed Billy Bunter, sitting, gasping, on the floor with a dismantled cake beside him. The cake had dropped when Bunter dropped, and it was now in sections.

"Oh!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. He grinned. "Didn't you scoff that cake after all, Bunter?"

"Beast!" hissed Bunter. "I jolly well know that it was you that sneaked into my room and doctored it with salt and pepper and vinegar!"

"Guilty, my lord!" chuckled Bob.

"You beast, I came here to jam it on your silly face!" hissed Bunter. "I mean, that's why I was coming, and—"

"You blithering, burbling bloater!" hissed the captain of the Remove. "What did you grab my nose for? You nearly lugged it off!"

"How could I see your silly nose in the dark?" yapped Bunter. "Blow your nose! I wanted to wake you up. I say, you fellows, don't yell! Suppose he heard you?"

"Who?" howled Wharton.

"That awful villain!" gasped Bunter.

The fat Owl scrambled to his feet. He turned his spectacles on the door, as if in fear that it might open and reveal some terrifying form.

The Famous Five stared at him.

They understood that it was the doctoring of the cake by Bob's playful hand that had brought Bunter from his bed. But it was not that now. Bunter was in a state of terror; his fat face like chalk, and his podgy knees knocking together, his eyes almost popping through his spectacles. Plainly the fat Owl had had a scare in the dark.

"All serene, old fat man," said Bob Cherry soothingly. "You're safe here from all the villains that ever villained! But what sort of a villain is it that you fancy is lying around loose?"

"That desperado!" groaned Bunter. "I say, you fellows, you remember the time we had a vac with Smithy, and his father's valet turned out such a villain—that man Soames—"

"Soames?" repeated the Famous Five with one voice.

"I've seen him!" gasped Bunter.

The juniors blinked at him.

"You've seen Soames!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "You potty porpoise, do you fancy that you've seen Soames here?"

"Oh dear! Yes!"

"Soames isn't in this country at all, you mad ass!" growled Johnny Bull. "It wouldn't be healthy for him!"

"I saw him!" quavered Bunter. "I say, you fellows, suppose—suppose he comes in here again? I—I saw him come into this room——"

"You saw Soames come into this room!" stuttered Harry Wharton. "When?"

"Not ten minutes ago!"

"Nightmare!" said Frank Nugent. "You parked too much supper, Bunter. You might have expected nightmare after all that pudding!"

"You silly idiot, do you think I dreamed it?" hissed Bunter.

"Didn't you?" asked Bob.

"No, you ass! No, you idiot! No, you dummy! No, you chump! I soame Saw—I mean, I saw Soames!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" howled Bunter. "You know what a desperate villain Soames is! I expect he's got an automatic—I remember he had that time on the cruise with Smithy and his pater. I say, you fellows, think we had better wake the whole house?"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob. "Hardly! You howling ass, you've been dreaming! It was the pudding did it; you shouldn't eat more than enough for six! When you scoff enough for ten or twelve something's bound to happen!"

"Beast! I say, go and call Wibley!"

"Wibley?"

"Oh! I—I don't mean Wibley, I—I mean——"

"I don't think you know what you mean, you fat ass!" said Harry Wharton. "You've had a nightmare, or you fancy you've seen something in the dark. Go back to bed, you fat chump, and let other fellows sleep!"

"I'm not going out of this room so long as Soames is in the house."

"Soames isn't in the house, you mad ass!" hooted Johnny Bull.

"I tell you I saw him——"

"Fathead!" said Bob Cherry.

"Suppose he came into this room and blew all our brains out?"

"You wouldn't be in any danger! Soames couldn't blow out what's not there!"

"Beast! I say, you fellows, go and call the butler and the footmen!" gasped Bunter. "Call the whole house! Ring up the police! Call everybody!"

"Shall we call up the Army and the Air Force while we're about it?"

"You silly idiot!"

"Are you going back to bed, you potty owl?" demanded Harry Wharton.

"I'll watch it! Catch me going out of this room while that awful villain Soames is about! I'm jolly well going to stay here. I'll have your bed, Wharton——"

"Will you?" ejaculated the captain of the Remove. He seemed to doubt it.

"I'll have yours, Cherry!"

"I hardly think so!" grinned Bob.

"I say, you fellows, I'm not going

out of this room again! If you won't wake the house I shall stay here. Whose bed am I going to have?"

"The whosefulness is terrific."

"You silly owl!" said Harry Wharton. "You've been frightened about nothing. But if you're scared you'd better stay here till morning. The fat chump looks as if he will faint if we push him out, you fellows. You take the sofa, fathead; we'll let you have some blankets!"

"Beast!" answered Bunter, doubtless by way of thanks. However, he annexed blankets and rolled to the sofa. "I say, you fellows, leave the light on in case he comes here!"

"Idiot!"

"Beast!"

That Bunter really had seen Soames none of the Famous Five thought of believing for a moment. It was highly improbable that the one-time valet, the one-time free-booter of the South Seas, was in Eastcliff Lodge; but it was, on the other hand, quite probable that Bunter had had a nightmare, after a Gargantuan supper, and had been scared by a shadow in the dark.

But the fat Owl was in such a state of twittering terror that they left the light on to reassure him as they settled down to sleep again. They were soon asleep; but it was longer before Bunter slept. His eyes closed at last, and his snore echoed through the spacious room. Once it had started it did not cease till morning, when John, the footman, came in to draw the blinds and let in the flood of spring sunshine.

PLAYING A PART!

WILLIAM WIBLEY of the Greyfriars Remove sat up in bed, smiled in the bright sunshine from big windows that looked over the cliffs and the sea—smiled, in fact, from one ear to the other.

Wibley of the Remove was in high feather.

That Easter holiday was one of the best the schoolboy actor of Greyfriars had ever had. It was unique. It was no end of a catch! It was the very thing that Wibley would have chosen had he been given the very widest of choices.

Wibley, indeed, could hardly believe in his good luck.

Sitting up in a magnificent bed in a spacious bed-room at Eastcliff Lodge, Wibley looked round him, half-expecting to find that he had dreamed it all and that he was still in the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars School or in his little attic at home.

But it was no dream.

It was real—real and jolly! Wibley of the Remove, whose father was an actor, and not a very wealthy one, was master of a fine mansion on the south-east coast—lord of the manor—monarch of all he surveyed—with a butler and footmen at his orders!

Really, it was rather like a gorgeous dream!

Harry Wharton & Co., guests for Easter, had not the faintest idea that Wibley of the Remove was within a hundred miles. They had been asked there by Sir William Bird, and they supposed that they were the guests of the Old Bird. Not the remotest suspicion crossed their minds that this was Wibley's Easter party!

But it was!

On a chair beside Wibley's bed were folded up the clothes he wore at Eastcliff Lodge—nothing like his Greyfriars clobber. Beside them lay a very peculiar outfit—a silvery mop of hair, a beard, moustache, and eyebrows. Wibley wore those fixings by day; but, naturally, he discarded them when he went to bed.

By day the schoolboy actor was Sir William Bird's double; by night, safely locked in his room, he was Wibley again.

Nobody at Eastcliff Lodge had seen him without his make-up. Nobody was going to see him without it!

Blump, the butler, and the rest of the household staff, had no suspicion that it was not the little old baronet who presided over the mansion. Only one man was in the secret—Sir William's valet, Jermyn.

Jermyn had a room which communicated with Sir William's.

Wibley, sitting up in bed, touched a bell, which rang in Jermyn's room.

Almost on the instant, the communicating door opened and Jermyn appeared.

A rather slim, but strongly-built man, with a smooth, sleek, clean-shaven face entered, with the soft, respectful step of a well-trained manservant.

Wibley grinned at him.

Jermyn gave him a curious look—for a moment. Then his sleek face was expressionless.

"Good-morning, Jermyn!" said Wibley.

"Good-morning, Sir William!" said Jermyn, in a voice that was as smooth and sleek as his face.

"Topping morning!" said Wibley.

"Quite so, sir."

"So you're back, Jermyn!" said Wibley. "You hadn't got back when I went to bed last night."

"There was considerable delay on the railway, sir!" said Jermyn. "I regret very much having returned so late, but such inconvenience and delays, sir, are only to be expected in war-time."

"It doesn't matter a rap!" answered Wibley. "I expected to find you here when I got back from the station with my friends, that's all!"

"I trust, sir, that Blump gave you my message?" said Jermyn apologetically. "I was called away suddenly by telephone——"

"Yes; that's all right!" said Wibley. "Have you seen anything of the Greyfriars fellows yet?"

"No, sir! I do not think the young gentlemen are about yet," said Jermyn. "I was somewhat surprised, sir, when I was told that a number of Greyfriars boys were to be here. It is not for me to give advice, sir, but as I have the honour of being in my master's confidence in this matter,

and in yours, sir, perhaps you will permit me to speak."

"Go ahead!" said Wibley.

Jermyn coughed apologetically.

"In such a matter as this, sir, one cannot be too careful," he said. "From what my master has told me, he is engaged on a mission abroad, in connection with the Secret Service, and his success, and perhaps his safety, may depend on certain parties remaining unaware of his actions and believing that he is still at home—"

"Something like that!" agreed Wibley.

"It seems that while visiting his

"Yes—I nipped out to let in the light—"

"If some early riser in the grounds, sir, had observed you at the window—" said Jermyn.

Wibley gave a whistle.

"Well, I was careful," he said. "Still, you're right, Jermyn. After this, I'll ring for you to draw the curtains."

"I was about to suggest it, sir. With regard to your guests here, I was, as I ventured to remark, somewhat surprised, sir. If I may suggest it, you would be safer in playing this part with none of your

come. If Sir William thinks it's all right, it's O.K., Jermyn!"

"But, sir, in the very strange circumstances—"

"My dear chap, it's all right!" said Wibley. "Don't you worry! You said something of the same sort yesterday, before I went in the car to meet them at the station! Well, I met them, got up as Sir William, and did they smell a mouse? Not in your lifetime."

"Your skill, sir, is certainly wonderful," said Jermyn. "In all my experience, I have never come upon anything like it before."



Billy Bunter sat gasping on the floor, with the dismantled cake beside him. "That desperado!" he groaned. "I've seen him!"

nephew, a Sixth Form boy at Greyfriars School, he discovered your really wonderful gift, sir, for making-up in a theatrical way and playing impersonating parts—"

Wibley chuckled.

"I made up as the old bean himself, and nobody knew which was which," he said. "It was a lark, Jermyn! I should have got into a fearful row for it, too, only Sir William spoke up for me."

"And that suggested this plan to Sir William!" went on Jermyn. "It is a very good plan, sir, and may mean success and safety for my master—so long, sir, as you are careful to play your part without failure."

"Bank on that!" said Wibley.

Jermyn made a gesture towards the wide windows, into which the spring sunshine streamed.

"You have drawn back the curtains, sir—"

schoolfellows on the spot. They know you so well at school—"

"No better than Blump & Co. know Sir William!" answered Wibley. "Nobody here has a spot of suspicion."

"That is certainly correct!" admitted Jermyn. "Yet, in the strange circumstances, sir, I venture to suggest that the boys should leave. In your part as Sir William Bird, the slightest accident may ruin everything—and in that part, sir, you can scarcely join in schoolboy games and excursions, such as would naturally fill up the time on a holiday."

Jermyn, standing respectfully by the bedside, gave Wibley a sidelong look as he spoke smoothly and respectfully.

"Something in that!" said Wibley, with a nod. "All the same, a fellow likes some fellows of his own age about on a holiday. Sir William agreed at once when I said I'd like them here, and he asked them to

Wibley nodded, and grinned. Wib had a very high opinion of his wonderful skill as an actor. He liked to hear a similar high opinion from others. Wib had a spot of the artistic temperament, and he liked flattery, like pineapple, in chunks.

"I fancy I can pull it off!" he said complacently.

"Undoubtedly, sir, with so very rare a gift in the difficult art of impersonation," said Jermyn. "Nevertheless, with such important matters at stake, perhaps even Sir William's personal safety, I cannot help thinking that if the boys left—"

Wibley laughed.

"Think I could buzz them off, after they've been asked here?" he said. "Even if I wanted to—which I certainly don't! Fact is, there's one of them that couldn't be buzzed off—a fat chump named Bunter."

"Bunter!" repeated Jermyn. He gave the slightest of starts.

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It seemed as if the name was both familiar and unexpected to the man. "Of how many boys does the party consist, sir? I think you told me five—"

"Six!" said Wibley. "I told you five because that was all I knew. Bunter came with the others unexpectedly. The truth is, Jermyn, that that fat scoundrel somehow spotted the game—he must have heard something when Sir William was speaking to me at the school—Bunter hears everything. Anyhow, the fat villain is wise to it—and he has landed himself here on the strength of it. If I kick him out—all the fat may be in the fire."

"Oh!" said Jermyn, with a deep breath.

"Bunter will hold his silly tongue, so long as I let him rip!" said Wibley. "He's not a bad chap—only a blithering idiot! As he knows, I'd rather keep him here under my eye. He might open his mouth too wide, you know! As for the other fellows, they could keep a secret, even if they knew what's going on—but they don't, and won't."

"Yet, sir—" said Jermyn.

"My dear man, chuck it!" said Wibley. "No more about it, please! Now prepare my bath—I'm going to turn out!"

"Very good sir."

Jermyn went with his soft tread to the bath-room, which opened from Sir William's room.

Wibley tumbled out of bed and enrolled himself in a dressing-gown of Sir William's. He stepped towards the window to look out at the sea, and then checked himself, Jermyn's warning recurring to his mind. He had to keep clear of windows till he was fixed up for the day.

Jermyn reappeared in a few minutes.

"Your bath is prepared, sir!"

"Right-ho!" chirruped Wibley.

He ambled happily away to the bath-room.

When the door closed on him the manservant's smooth face changed in expression.

The sleek brows came together in a grim frown, and the eyes glittered under them. Jermyn stepped to the window and looked out—taking care to keep in cover of the curtains—for what reason, Wibley, if he had seen him, could never have guessed; for certainly he never dreamed of suspecting that Jermyn, like himself, had any reason for keeping out of sight.

But it seemed that Jermyn had!

Looking from the window, Jermyn's eyes rested on five figures that sauntered in the grounds; and glittered at the Famous Five of Greyfriars.

So far as Wibley knew, Jermyn had never seen those cheery youths before, and did not even know their names. But Jermyn now looked as if he knew them very well indeed.

As Harry Wharton & Co. passed beneath the window, Jermyn drew back, as if uneasy lest they might glance up and spot him, even through

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the curtain. His thin lips came together hard.

"Could anything be more unfortunate?" he breathed. "That young fool Wibley matters no more than the old fool, Sir William—he has never seen me before. But those young rascals—they would know me at a glance! If I had remained here yesterday—"

He looked from the window again, and scowled at the tops of five unconscious heads.

"That young fool will not send them away, and I cannot go," he muttered. "I have avoided them as yet, but—" He set his teeth.

"The young fool told me that five Greyfriars boys were coming; but out of so many that it should be these—these. They must go. Somehow, they must go!"

He moved restlessly about the room, with a black brow.

But when Wibley emerged, fresh and cheery, from the bath-room, Jermyn was his smooth and sleek self again. He helped the new master of Eastcliff Lodge to dress his part, and when that process was complete, Wibley grinned at his reflection in a pier-glass—the reflection of a little old gentleman with silvery hair and beard and eyebrows and moustache, and a plump, pink face, with a gold-rimmed eyeglass stuck in one eye.

Wibley chuckled.

"O.K., Jermyn—what?" he said, with great complacency.

"Quite, Sir William," said Jermyn.

"You can unlock the door now, Jermyn."

Jermyn unlocked the door, and Wibley, grinning behind his silvery beard, walked out. And the black, grim look did not return to Jermyn's face till he had closed the door after him.

WHAT ABOUT SOAMES?

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life?" roared Bob Cherry.

Bob and his friends looked as if they were enjoying life. It was a glorious spring morning, and the Famous Five had been down to the sea.

Eastcliff Lodge faced the cliffs, and there was a deep and rugged chalk gully that led down to the beach. At high tide the sea came right up to the steep cliffs, and roared and foamed up the gully; but when the tide was out, there was a wide stretch of sand, broken here and there by jutting boulders of sea-worn chalk. Caves and fissures opened in the face of the cliffs, hollowed by the sea, attractive spots for school-boys with a taste for exploration.

It was, in fact, a jolly place, and the chums of the Remove were going to have a jolly time there, though they were a little surprised to find themselves there at all.

They had never seen Sir William Bird until a week ago at Greyfriars School, when he had come there to visit his nephew, Loder of the Sixth. An invitation for the Easter holidays was rather unexpected, after so

very brief an acquaintance. True, they had done him a small service, but that hardly accounted for so much hospitality.

Certainly it never occurred to them that the little old baronet they had seen at Greyfriars and the little old baronet at Eastcliff Lodge were not one and the same, and that the latter was, under his venerable outfit, no older than themselves. Had they been aware of that they would have known that they were old acquaintances of Sir William.

Coming back to lunch after a ramble on the beach, they encountered Billy Bunter.

The fat Owl blinked at them through his big spectacles—not, on his looks, enjoying life so much as the cheery quintet were.

"Seen him?" asked Bunter.

"Who?" asked Harry Wharton.

He had forgotten Billy Bunter's extraordinary alarm of the night before.

"Him!" hooted Bunter.

"Him?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"You silly ass, I mean Soames!"

"Oh, Soames!" Bob chuckled.

"Yes, I've seen Soames."

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter. "Where did you see him?"

"On Mr. Vernon-Smith's yacht—the time we had a vacation with Smithy."

"You silly chump!" shrieked Bunter. "I mean, have you seen him here?"

"Not quite," grinned Bob. "You see, he isn't here, or anywhere about. You fat chump, you had a nightmare! Haven't you got over it yet?"

"I saw him—"

"Bow-wow!"

"We ain't safe with that desperado about," said Bunter. "He was Smithy's pater's valet when we first saw him, but he turned out to be an awful desperado. He must have got into the house last night to burgle it, of course."

"Lucky you never got that postal order you were expecting—he might have had it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you talk sense?" hooted Bunter. "I say, I've asked the butler, and he says there wasn't any burglary last night. But if it wasn't that, what did Soames get into the house at all for?"

"That's an easy one; he didn't."

"I tell you I saw him. When I see a man, I suppose I know whether I saw him or not. I soam Sawes—I mean, I see-saw Soames—that is, I saw Soames—" Bunter seemed to be getting a little mixed in his excitement. "I tell you I saw him!"

"Did he make a row?" asked Bob.

"No. He was as quiet as a cat."

"Then you couldn't have. If you saw a man, he's bound to make a row," argued Bob Cherry. "You can't saw wood without making a row, and if you saw a man, he would be bound to kick up a row."

"You silly dummy!" shrieked Bunter. "Can't you be serious? I tell you it ain't safe with Soames about. Know where Wibley is?"

"Wibley!" repeated Bob, staring,

"Wibley's at his aunt's in Derbyshire, so far as I know. What about Wibley?"

"Oh, nothing! I don't mean Wibley," said Bunter hastily. "I mean to say, I'd better tell Sir William about Soames. The butler said he went out before I came down—seen him about."

The Famous Five all looked at Bunter. This was the umpteenth time that he had mentioned Wibley in the short space since Greyfriars School had broken up for the Easter holidays.

Why the fat Owl kept on mentioning Wibley was quite a puzzle to them. He seemed, as Bob had remarked, to have Wibley on the brain.

"My idea is," continued Bunter, "that the police had better be called in to search for that villain Soames. This place ain't far from Broadstairs. Wibley can ring up the police at Broadstairs."

"Wibley!" yelled Bob.

"I—I—I mean, I—I don't mean Wibley," stuttered Bunter.

Billy Bunter was keeping the secret of Wib's impersonation of the little old baronet at Eastcliff Lodge. He had his own way of keeping it.

"Do you mean anything, by any chance?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"What does that fat ass keep on burbling about Wibley for?" asked Johnny Bull.

"What I mean is, old Bird can ring up the police at Broadstairs, and get them after that villain!" said Bunter. "I'm jolly well going to tell him! If you fellows know where he is—"

"Here he comes," said Bob. "But you'd better not spin him any fat-headed yarns about Soames."

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter blinked round.

A small but rather portly figure was coming along the avenue, and a silvery mop of hair gleamed in the sunshine under the brim of a hat. Billy Bunter grinned at the lord of Eastcliff Lodge. Bunter knew what the Famous Five did not dream of suspecting.

"Good-morning, my boys!" said Sir William, in his rather throaty voice, which did not sound in the least like that of William Wibley of the Greyfriars Remove. "You find yourselves comfortable here, eh—what?"

"Yes, rather, sir!" answered Harry Wharton.

"The ratherfulness is terrific, honoured and venerable sahib!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"We've found a cave on the shore," said Bob. "Wreckage washed up into it, too. We're going to explore it some time."

"I say, you fellows, shut up a minute! I want to speak!" squeaked Bunter.

"You generally do," sighed Bob.

"I want to tell him about Soames, and—"

"Soames!" said Sir William, turning his eyeglass on Billy Bunter. "Who is Soames? One of the servants?"

"No, you ass," yapped Bunter. "Ow! Stop tramping on my foot, Bob Cherry, you mad hippopotamus!"

The Famous Five gave Billy Bunter five concentrated glares, unaware that he was speaking to Wibley of the Remove, and greatly incensed at his lack of respect to Sir William.

"If you have anything to say to me, Master Bunter—" grunted Sir William.

"Ow! Yes! Soames was valet to Smithy's father—Smithy of the Remove, you know."

"Sir William doesn't know Smithy, you ass!" said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, don't talk rot!" yapped Bunter. "Of course he knows him! I—I—I mean, nunno, of—of course he doesn't. No. Look here, Sir Wibley—"

"Wibley again," said Bob.

"I—I mean Sir William—" stammered the fat Owl.

"Come, come, say what you have to say!" snapped Sir William.

"Well, that man Soames was Smithy's father's valet, and he turned out to be an awful villain! I saw him last night, creeping about the house—"

"What nonsense!"

"I tell you I did!" roared Bunter. "Think I don't know Soames when I saw him—I mean, when I see him? I see him—I mean, I saw him—and it was Soames, and he was in the house, after midnight—"

"That fat duffer turned out in the night, and fancied he saw something in the dark!" explained Harry Wharton.

Sir William laughed.

"Perhaps he saw Jermyn," he said. "My man, Jermyn, came in very late, owing to delay on the railway, and let himself into the house quietly. If Bunter was out of his room, he may have seen him."

"Yes, very likely, if he saw anybody!" said Harry. "But he's such a silly ass, he might fancy anything!"

"I saw Soames!" yelled Bunter. "I tell you, I see-saw—I mean I so-see—that is, I so-saw—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle, you silly chumps," howled Bunter. "But I jolly well know that I see—so—saw—I mean, I soamed saw—I saw Soames—"

"It will be lunch soon!" remarked Sir William. "Race you fellows up to the house, what?"

"Wha-a-t?"

The Famous Five blinked. They were prepared to race anybody, but they were surprised to hear that challenge from a venerable baronet with silvery hair. Wibley, perhaps, was tired of being venerable, having been venerable ever since he had turned out in the morning!

"Come on!" he trilled cheerily.

And he started!

The Famous Five trotted after him, not expecting to have to exert themselves.

"I say, you fellows!" yelled Bunter.

But Bunter was unheeded. Sir William, no doubt, had heard enough

from that fat member of the Easter party

To the amazement of the Famous Five, Sir William covered the ground at a great rate. They had politely intended to put on a gentle trot, to humour a venerable old bean who fancied that he could run! But Sir William shot ahead at such a rate that they found that they had to sprint to keep pace.

"Well, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry in astonishment.

It was a good distance up the avenue from the cliffs to the house. Sir William covered it almost like a hare, his pink face glowing, the astonished juniors keeping pace with him and leaving the fat Owl of the Remove far in the rear.

But they did not keep pace all the way; only Bob Cherry was level when they arrived at the portico of the Lodge.

Sir William gave him a grin, and ambled in; and Bob's chums came up rather breathlessly and joined him.

"Some sprinter!" gasped Nugent.

"The sprintfulness of the esteemed old bean is terrific."

"Sir William's some lad, and no mistake!" said Bob Cherry. "Who'd have thought a man rising seventy could sprint like that?"

It was quite a surprise to the Famous Five. Sir William Bird, they knew, was at least sixty-five, and well over sprinting age. Yet he had almost run them off their legs. They were still discussing that surprising occurrence, when Billy Bunter rolled up.

Bunter gave a grunt as he heard them.

"What about it?" he asked. "Wibley can run! He did the school hundred yards once."

"Wibley!" repeated Bob. "We're not talking about Wibley, fathead—we're talking about the old Bird!"

"Oh! Yes! He, he, he!" gurgled Bunter. "But I say, you fellows, about Soames—don't walk off while a fellow's talking, you beasts!"

But Harry Wharton & Co. had heard enough about Soames, and they did walk off—leaving Billy Bunter to waste his sweetness on the desert air.

THE MAN IN THE CHALK CAVE!

"COMING, Bunter?"

"No!" said Billy Bunter emphatically. Then he added: "Yes!"

Which was not very lucid.

After lunch at Eastcliff Lodge, Billy Bunter's natural inclination was to roll to the nearest armchair, curl up in it, and go to sleep.

Harry Wharton & Co. had rather more active ideas—perhaps because they had less lunch to carry about than Bunter had.

They were going back to the beach to explore a cave under the chalk cliffs which they had spotted that morning. Sir William was going with them—a little to their surprise, as the venerable baronet did not look quite equal to the task of scrambling over rugged and slippery rocks. But

after his sprinting performance that morning, they realised that there was a good deal more agility in the old Bird than his silvery locks indicated.

The Co. would have been quite satisfied to leave Billy Bunter snoozing in an armchair; still, he was one of the Easter party, and something was due to politeness. So they inquired whether he was coming. To which Billy Bunter answered with an emphatic negative—immediately contradicted by a hasty affirmative.

"Both?" asked Bob Cherry. "No and yes, old fat man?"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" grunted Bunter. "I don't want to be left here alone with that villain Soames hanging about."

"Oh, bless Soames!" said Bob. "You fat ass, even if Soames butted in last night, which he certainly did not do, do you think he's hanging about the place in the day-time?"

"Well, you never know!" argued Bunter. "Blump says there wasn't any burglary, so why did Soames come? He must have come for something. I know he got into the house."

"He's got Soames on the brain now, instead of Wibley!" remarked Bob. "It's a change! Well, if you're coming, old fat porpoise, get a move on!"

"I suppose you can wait for me!" said Bunter. "If I'm ready in an hour, I suppose that will do!"

"Oh, fine!" said Johnny Bull, with deep sarcasm. "We'll all sit round for an hour, waiting, and doing nothing—shall we?"

"Yes, that's all right!" said Bunter. He plumped into an armchair before the fire in the hall. "If I don't wake up in an hour, you can call me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Don't make a row, anyhow, when a fellow wants to go to sleep!" said Bunter. "You can call me in an hour—or say an hour and a half."

"We're going now, fathead!" said Harry Wharton.

"If you go now, I shan't come!" declared Bunter. "I'm not going scrambling about just after lunch! You can't expect it."

At which the Famous Five chuckled again. Really and truly, they felt that they could manage to bear Bunter's absence for a time.

"Well, I mean it!" said Bunter. "If you go now, you go without me. That's all!" And Billy Bunter closed his eyes behind his spectacles. Even if—as Bunter seemed to suspect—Soames was hanging about the place somewhere, the fat junior realised that he was not likely to turn up in the afternoon, in the hall of Eastcliff Lodge.

So Bunter went to sleep, leaving the Famous Five to get on the best they could without his attractive company. They looked as if they thought they would get on fairly well!

Sir William joined them in the hall.

"I've told Blump to pack a

basket," he said. "Might have tea in the cave or on the beach, what?"

"Jolly good idea, sir!" said Bob.

"Jermyn can come along and carry the basket," went on Sir William. "He can also—hem—give me the assistance of his arm, if I should need it! I am not so young as I once was, my boys. Have you seen Jermyn yet?"

"No!" answered Bob. "Bunter may have seen him last night—he fancies that he saw somebody."

"I will send for him!" Sir William glanced round at a footman in the hall. "John! Please tell Jermyn I want him."

"Yes, Sir William."

John went up the stairs. He came back in a few minutes, alone. The juniors, who had not yet seen the baronet's man, expected to see him come back with John. But Jermyn did not appear on the staircase.

"If you please, Sir William, Jermyn has 'urt his leg!" said John. "He asks if you will kindly excuse him as he slipped on the stairs and 'urt his leg."

"Dear me! Where is he now?" asked Sir William.

"In his room, sir, lying down, with his leg bandaged."

"In that case, we will not trouble him," said Sir William. "Go and tell Jermyn to take all the rest he requires, John."

"I'll carry the basket, sir!" said Bob Cherry, as Blump came into the hall with the picnic-basket, and he took it from the butler.

"Very good," said Sir William. "If I should need the assistance of an arm—hem—one of you lads—"

"Yes, rather, sir!"

And the party started.

Sir William did not seem in need of the assistance of an arm as he walked down the avenue with the schoolboys. Indeed, he swung along as easily and cheerily as if he had been a schoolboy himself!

It was, as a matter of fact, a little difficult for William Wibley to keep on remembering that he was supposed to have reached a ripe age.

He was enjoying his holiday, his spirits were high, and he was more inclined to skip and jump than to amble along in the sedate manner that became his years!

At the end of the grounds of Eastcliff Lodge was an open path, along the top of the cliffs. From that path a deep and steep gully descended to the beach, the chalk rocks gleaming in the sunshine of spring. It was an easy way down to the Famous Five—but they had their doubts about the old Bird, and were dutifully prepared to tender him any assistance he might need.

Sir William plodded downward, tapping with a stick, for the first dozen yards or so. Then Wibley forgot his part again, ceased to tap with the stick, and descended the gully by jumping from one rock to another—as if he had been no older than the juniors themselves!

"By gum! The old bean's pretty fit, for his time of life!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"The fitfulness is truly terrific!" agreed Hurre Jamset Ram Singh.

It was a surprise to the juniors, but an agreeable one. Sir William, evidently, was not going to be a handicap. Billy Bunter would have wanted a lot of help down that steep gully—and still more when he came up again. Sir William, venerable as he looked, needed none.

The tide was going out when the juniors reached the beach. A wide stretch of sand was left uncovered along the foot of the range of chalk cliffs—dotted here and there with rugged chalk boulders, trailing masses of seaweed, and fragments of wreckage cast up by the sea.

The wreckage told its own tale of ships sunk by mines in the North Sea. Farther along the shore, towards Broadstairs, the juniors had heard of quantities of coal having been washed ashore and carried off by local inhabitants in bags and trucks and perambulators—flotsam and jetsam of which they had probably been very glad in the cold winter days.

At some distance from the gully the juniors came to a halt at a gap in the high cliffs.

There were dozens of such gaps along the cliffs, hollowed out by the wash of the sea, and little to distinguish one from another. But this particular cave seemed to extend deeper into the rock than the others they had looked into, and it was an attractive idea to schoolboys on a sea-side holiday to explore it to its full extent. Bob Cherry had put a flash-lamp into his pocket for the purpose.

"Here we are, sir!" said Bob. "Looks a jolly place—what? Might have been jolly old smugglers here once. But I suppose you know all about it."

"No, I don't think I have seen this cave before," said Sir William. He stared into the cave through his eyeglass and shook his silvery head. "No—this is quite new to me."

Which was another surprise to the juniors, who naturally supposed that Sir William knew all about the locality so near to his home.

"Come, on, then!" said Bob. "We—Hullo, hallo, hallo! Here's somebody before us!"

The sunlight gleamed into the cave for some distance; beyond that was blackness. From the blackness a figure emerged, coming towards the opening.

The juniors glanced at him without much interest, supposing that it was someone who, like themselves, had a fancy for exploring caves.

But as their eyes fixed on him their expressions changed. He was a man of stocky figure, with a stubby nose and blond eyebrows. They had seen that man before—when he had attempted to snatch a document from the hand of Sir William Bird, on Courtfield Common, near Greyfrairs School, little more than a week ago.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "That man!"

"Know him again?" grinned Bob.

"The knowfulness is terrific!"

The man in the cave caught sight of the schoolboys standing at the entrance.

His first glance, like their own, was careless; but the next moment recognition came into his small, sharp eyes. Evidently he had noticed them that day near Greyfriars and remembered them. He came to a sudden halt and stood staring at them, gripping hard the stick he carried in his hand. The beady eyes, under the thick, blond eyebrows, gleamed like those of a cornered rat.

There was a pause, the blond browed man watching the schoolboys, the schoolboys watching him, and Sir William glancing from one party to the other in obvious surprise.

"What is this?" asked Sir William. "Who is he—do you know the man?"

BROWN OR BRAUN?

"**W**HO?" stuttered Harry Wharton.

He stared blankly at the little baronet.

Sir William Bird was, or had been, a big gun in the Secret Service. He had nearly had an official document snatched from his hand by that very man the week before. He might have been expected to remember the man better than the juniors did. Evidently, however, he did not!

"It's the man, sir," said Frank Nugent.

"Eh! Yes! What man?" asked Sir William.

"The man on Courtfield Common," said Johnny Bull.

"Don't you remember, sir?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in astonishment. "It was the day we met you—"

"The—the day you met me—"

"The day you walked from the station to the school to see Loder of the Sixth—"

"Oh! Yes! Quite! I—I remember—" stammered Wibley. "My—my nephew, Loder. Oh! Yes!"

"That man snatched at a document in your hand on the common."

"Oh! He—he did, did he?"

"And we called out a warning to you—don't you remember?" exclaimed Harry, more and more astonished, as were his chums.

So far as they knew, it was on account of that little service that Sir William had asked them for Easter; so it was really amazing to find that he did not remember it!

But it was clear that the old Bird had forgotten the man completely—though that really was not very surprising, as Wibley of the Remove had never met him till now!

But Wibley was quick to realise how the matter stood. He turned his eyeglass on the man again.

"Oh! Yes—no doubt the same man!" he said. "The—the same rascal! You feel sure of it, my boys?"

"The surefulness is terrific, honoured sahib!"

"He knows us, too!" said Johnny Bull. "You can see that!"

"Yes—he certainly seems to remember you!" said Sir William.

The man was still at a halt in the cave, at a distance of a dozen yards

or so. He seemed uncertain what to do—cornered in the chalk cave, with the Greyfriars party bunched at the entrance.

That he knew them was plain enough—his beady eyes glittered at them under his blond eyebrows with angry malevolence.

"Better bag that blighter while we've got the chance!" said Johnny Bull. "He can't cut off here as he did before."

"He's up to no good here, sir," said Bob. "He was after your jolly old private papers last time—may be after them again! He can be run in for trying to pinch that giddy document last week."

Wibley nodded slowly. He could guess, if the juniors could not, what the man was in that vicinity for. The old baronet had told him that certain parties were having a watch kept, to learn whether Sir William Bird left his place or not, suspecting his secret mission.

That was why Wibley was there in his guise. The man with the blond eyebrows was, plainly enough, a spy, working for those certain parties!

"Shall we bag him, sir?" asked Nugent. "There's enough of us to handle him, stick and all."

"Yes, rather!" said Bob. "Say the word, sir, and we'll collar him, and he can tell the police who he is and what he's up to!"

"Quite!" said Sir William. He took a grip on his walking-stick. "Stop him if he attempts to get away!"

"What-ho!" The whole party moved farther into the cave.

Up to that moment the man who had come out of the darkness had not moved, standing where he had halted, watching them like a cat. But as they advanced into the cave he could not doubt their intention—and he moved quickly.

"Look out!" shouted Bob.

The man came with a sudden, swift rush, whirling his stick round his

head, and almost in a moment he reached the juniors, slashing savagely.

They had nothing in their hands and the savage slashes of the stick knocked them right and left. Then there was a crash as Sir William weighed in with his walking-stick.

The two sticks met with a terrific crash, that in the hands of the blond man flying from his grasp and spinning across the cave.

"Oh, good man!" panted Bob. "Come on, you chaps!"

Bob's head was spinning from a sharp crack; but he rushed at the man and his comrades rushed with him.

Spitting like a cat with rage, the blond man leaped back and eluded their grasp. But Sir William rushed on, swiping with his walking-stick, and it came down with a loud crack on the blond man's bullet head.

The man gave a yell and staggered, and the next moment Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull had grasped his arms. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh gripped him by the collar.

"Got him!" gasped Harry. "Hold him, you fellows!"

The man was struggling savagely to release himself.

"Stop that!" rapped Sir William. He lifted his walking-stick. "Keep quiet, my man, or I'll crack your nut!"

The blond man's struggles ceased. Evidently he did not want his nut cracked!

"Ow!" murmured Bob. He rubbed a bruise under his mop of flaxen hair. "Well, we've got the sweep!"

"Release me!" The man had, the juniors thought, a foreign look, but he spoke English like a native. "How dare you handle me?"

"Who are you?" demanded Sir William.

"That is no business of yours!" came the answer in a snarl. "But my name is Brown, if you are curious!"

"I expect you spell it B-r-a-u-n when you're at home!" remarked Johnny Bull.

Brown—if his name was Brown—gave him a black look.

On his looks, all the juniors thought that he was a good deal more likely to be named Braun than to rejoice in the good old English name of Brown.

"Brown or Braun, he's the man of Courtfield Common," said Harry Wharton, "and they can ask him how he spells his name at the police station!"

"Quite!" said Sir William. "You are the man who attempted to rob me—hem!—of a document on Courtfield Common one day last week!"

"I do not know Courtfield—I have never been there!" snarled Mr. Brown. "You are making a foolish mistake, and I will make you pay for it!"

Sir William scanned him.

"You boys are quite sure?" he asked.

"Perfectly sure!" said Harry. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,677.

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"But don't you know him yourself, sir, now that you look at him?"

Wibley coughed.

"He had better be taken to the station," he said. "He must give an account of himself—that is our duty, with a war on. We will take him back to the lodge, and I will have him sent to Broadstairs in safe hands. Bring him along!"

"I have no objection!" sneered Mr. Brown. "You will be sorry for this later!"

"We'll chance that!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Come on! Mind he doesn't dodge, you fellows, when we get him outside!"

Mr. Brown walked quietly with the juniors. They were on their guard against any attempt on his part to get away when they emerged from the cave. But Mr. Brown did not wait till they reached the cave-mouth. Suddenly he made a spring backwards—so suddenly, and so forcefully, that he dragged himself from the hands that were holding him.

In the twinkling of an eye, he turned and raced up the cave, disappearing into the darkness from which he had emerged ten minutes ago.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. "After him!"

The juniors ran a few yards, and then stopped. Out of the radius of the sunlight from without all was dark, and the cave floor was rugged and broken. Ahead of them, from the darkness, they could hear the running feet of the blond-browed man, proof that he was well acquainted with the interior of the chalk cave, or he could never have ventured to put on such speed in the dark.

"Hold on a minute!" exclaimed Bob. "Lucky I brought a flash-lamp!"

He grabbed it from his pocket and flashed on the light. It gleamed on rugged walls of chalk, broken into innumerable fissures and crevices.

"We'll get him all right!" said Harry Wharton. "He can't get out of the cave without passing us. Come on!"

The schoolboys pressed on up the cave.

The sound of running feet had died away and all was silent before them. The cave narrowed as they advanced, till it was less than ten feet in width—and, save where the gleam of the lamp fell, black as a hat. There was no chance of the man dodging past them, and they had only to follow him till they ran him down—and they pushed on, quite determined that they were not losing Mr. Brown till they handed him over to official hands.

WHERE IS MR. BROWN?

"OH!" ejaculated Bob Cherry. He flashed the light before him, staring at a solid wall of chalk.

The Greyfriars party had reached the end of the cave.

It extended more than five hundred

yards into the chalk cliff, narrowing more and more towards the extremity, where it was barely six feet wide.

Bob flashed the light to and fro over the rugged chalk. The juniors were all ready to grab Mr. Brown as soon as he was run down, and Sir William had his stout walking-stick ready for use.

But there was no sign to be seen of Mr. Brown. The man with the blond eyebrows had vanished.

"Where the dickens is he?" exclaimed Harry Wharton blankly.

"The wherefulness is terrific!" remarked the Nabob of Bhanipur, staring round him with puzzled eyes.

"He never dodged back past us," said Nugent.

"But where the thump—"

"This beats Banagher!" exclaimed Wibley. Then, remembering that he was Sir William, he went on hastily: "This is extraordinary! Where can the man have got to?"

It was quite a puzzle. The cave walls, here and there, were broken in fissures and crevices, but the juniors had glanced into them as they came to root out Mr. Brown, if he was in hiding. Nothing had been seen of him on the way up. Nothing was to be seen of him now. Mr. Brown seemed to have vanished like an unsubstantial spectre.

Bob flashed the light upward. The chalk roof of the cave was low at the upper end; the rugged sides could be seen to the top.

"Let's get back!" said Bob. "We've passed him, that's a cert! Bet you he's legging it for the beach. Come on!"

The Greyfriars fellows retraced their steps, puzzled and disappointed. They had felt absolutely certain of bagging Mr. Brown, cornered in the chalk cave; but that slippery gentleman seemed to have slipped through their fingers.

"Climbed up somewhere, you bet," said Bob. He flashed the light up again.

Except at the extremity, the roof of the cavern was high, out of reach of the light from the flashlamp. In places, the rugged chalk of the walls was accessible to a climber.

"I suppose that's it," said Harry, with a nod.

It seemed the only way of accounting for Mr. Brown's disappearance. If he had clambered up one of the rugged walls of the cave, where the broken chalk gave hand-hold and foot-hold high up out of reach of the light, he could have hung on there while the party passed below, unseen.

In that case, they had no doubt that he had slithered down again when they were past, and had made for the open beach.

"Blow him!" said Bob.

He flashed the light up and around as the party tramped back down the cave, in the faint hope of still spotting the elusive Mr. Brown.

But that hope was very faint; for if they had passed him and left him behind, it seemed certain that he would have lost no time in making his escape.

They reached the daylight at last, and Bob shut off the lamp.

From the cave-mouth they scanned the open beach and the blue sea rolling beyond.

"He's gone all right!" grunted Bob. "Well, we came here to explore the jolly old cave, and we've ex-



Sir William weighed in with his walking-stick.

"Oh, good man!" panted Bob.

explored it. But I wish we'd got that blighter!"

"Oh, my only hat and umbrella!" exclaimed Sir William.

"Eh—what?" ejaculated Bob.

The juniors stared round at the little baronet, surprised by such an ejaculation from so venerable an old bean. Wibley had forgotten himself once more! It was not always easy for a schoolboy of fifteen to remember that he was sixty-five!

"Good gad!" exclaimed Wibley—getting into his stride again, as it were; and he pointed with his walking-stick to the sand, heaped up at the cave-mouth by the last tide. "Look! He's not gone!"

"What—"

"Look at those jolly old foot-prints!" exclaimed Wibley.

The juniors looked. Outside the cave was a wide, thick stretch of the softest sand. In the sand their

footprints, leading into the cave, were plainly marked. There were, of course, no outgoing tracks of the schoolboy party.

But what had struck Sir William—and what struck the Famous Five now that they looked—was the strange fact that there were no outgoing tracks at all.

"My only summer bonnet!" exclaimed Bob. "He's not gone, after all—he's still in the cave!"

"Great pip!"

The juniors scanned the sand with eager eyes. It was soft and yielding, retaining the lightest tread. Every track in it was distinctly outlined, and every track led inwards,

tea here and wait for the rascal to drop into our hands like a ripe apple."

"Good egg!" chuckled Bob.

It was a surprise to the juniors to discover that the mysterious Mr. Brown was still in the cave. But there could be no doubt of it; only a bird could have passed that stretch of soft sand without leaving traces. The man with the blond eyebrows was still there, that was a certainty.

The picnic basket was unpacked, and the party sat down to tea on the chalk boulders round the cave-mouth.

They had only to wait. They could hardly doubt that the hidden man would emerge before the tide turned.

When the tide came in the cave, now open to the beach, would be choked with roaring water, surging deep into the cliff, and washing up to the very end.

Even the full flood tide did not reach to the roof of the cave, where it was high, and a man could cling to the chalk wall over the height of the water; but it did not seem likely that Mr. Brown would think of doing so. He would be a prisoner of the tide till it flowed out again, after dark, and in danger of slipping down and drowning during the long hours that he would have to wait.

Harry Wharton & Co. had no doubt that he would attempt to escape from the cave before the turn of the tide, and they fully expected him to come with a sudden rush. So, while they picnicked, they kept their eyes on the cave, ready to put paid to any such attempt on the part of Mr. Brown.

Tea on the beach was a leisurely meal, but it ended at last, and Mr. Brown had not appeared. The tide had turned by that time, and was creeping up the sand towards the cliffs.

"Now we shan't be long!" remarked Bob Cherry. "Mind he doesn't get past when he comes bolting, you men!"

"We'll get him all right!" said Johnny Bull.

The juniors gathered in a group at the mouth of the cave. The tide splashed and murmured over the shelving beach, gurgling among the chalk boulders and the scattered, trailing seaweed, approaching nearer and nearer to the line of cliffs.

Harry Wharton glanced rather anxiously seaward.

They were at some little distance from the gully that led up to Eastcliff Lodge, and they had to cut along between the cliffs and the tide to reach it. If it was left too late they would indubitably be cut off by the incoming sea.

"Blow the man!" exclaimed Bob at last. "He can't mean to stick in there and make a night of it, with the tide washing round him."

"Bother him!"

"Bless him!"

"Suffering cats!" ejaculated Sir William, as a wash of water came round his feet. "I—I mean, bless my soul! We can't stay here much longer, old things!"

The juniors looked at the sea and looked then at one another. The tide was rolling in fast, and already streams of water were running up as far as the cliffs and receding again. It was now a matter of only minutes before return to the gully would be cut off by flooding water.

"Hook it!" said Johnny Bull. "That blighter isn't coming out! We shan't get back at all if we don't go now!"

Harry Wharton gave a last look into the cave. There was no sign of Mr. Brown to be seen; he was not coming out. Evidently he preferred the cave, with the tide flowing in, to an interview with the police.

"He may have found some nook high up where he can sit it out," remarked Bob. "Anyhow, we can't stop here any longer."

That was quite clear now.

Unwilling as they were to lose Mr. Brown, the Greyfriars fellows had to go. The surf was washing round their feet, and they had left it late enough.

"Come on!" said Sir William.

He cut off along the base of the cliffs, with the Famous Five at his heels. They had to run to get clear, the water surging up to their knees as they ran. It was rather fortunate that Sir William was not so old as he looked—and that he could sprint as swiftly as Wibley of the Remove!

They panted breathlessly into the gully at last and tramped up, out of reach of the tide that roared behind them.

There they paused, to take breath and look back at the sea. It was now flooding right up to the cliffs and surging into the lower end of the gully, and by that time there was no doubt that it was flooding the chalk cave and closing the entrance.

"By gum!" said Bob. "I don't envy Mr. Brown his night out!"

And the Greyfriars party tramped up the gully in the sunset—very far indeed from envying Mr. Brown in the tide-flooded chalk cave under the cliffs.

FLOTSAM AND JETSAM!

"DON'T tell Bunter!"

"No fear!"

"Not a word!"

Billy Bunter pricked up his fat ears.

"Not a syllable to Bunter!" said Bob Cherry impressively.

Billy Bunter grinned.

It was a sunny Monday morning in April. It was, in fact, the first day of that merry month, a circumstance to which Billy Bunter had given no attention. Dates did not interest Bunter—except the kind that were sold in boxes at the grocers'.

After breakfast that bright morning the Owl of the Remove was curled up in a big, deep armchair before the log fire in the hall at Eastcliff Lodge.

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sent the man's stick flying from his grasp. "Come on, you chaps!"

the toes towards the cave—not a single footprint leading out to the beach.

"That does it!" said Nugent. "He never cleared off—a fly could hardly crawl over that without leaving sign. He never went."

"Blessed if I make it out," said Harry. "If he climbed out of sight in the cave he could have dropped after we passed, and cut off."

"We might have heard him and cut back," said Bob. "He didn't risk it! Anyhow, he never went—we should pick up his jolly old hoof-marks if he had."

"Yes, that's clear enough."

"We've got him!" said Johnny Bull. "All we've got to do is to wait for him here."

"Exactly!" said Sir William. "Unpack the basket, old beans—I—I mean, my dear boys! We'll squat down here—I mean, we'll sit down to

Harry Wharton & Co. had gone out, now they had come in again. Bunter was still resting after his exertions at the breakfast-table.

In days of war rations Billy Bunter could not park his usual provender to the usual extent. He sighed in vain for the thick butter of old and the succulent rashers of the dear dead days beyond recall. But there were many good things that were not rationed, and of these good things there seemed to be an ample supply in the hospitable home of Sir William Bird. So Bunter's meals were on the same scale, and, on the whole, Bunter found life still worth living.

The fat Owl was rather glad that he was on the spot when the chums of the Remove came in and started talking quite close at hand, though the high back of the armchair screened Bunter from their sight.

Evidently there was a secret which they were not going to tell Bunter! So Bunter's fat ears, naturally, were on the stretch at once—and he was not going to miss a word of this!

"You know Bunter!" went on Bob Cherry's voice. "If he knew that a chest of gold had been washed ashore from a wreck he would make tracks for it at once!"

"Trust him!" said Johnny Bull.

"That sort of thing is called flotsam and jetsam," remarked Harry Wharton. "I believe we can claim what we find."

"Flotsam if it's found floating and jetsam if it's found cast ashore, I think!" said Nugent. "In either case the finder claims it—but, of course, it has to be reported to the authorities."

"Gold is rather special, too," said Bob. "I don't know how the law stands about gold which is called in by the Government for the jolly old war, but we can ask them at the police station."

"Well, it stands to reason that the finder gets something," said Harry Wharton. "Still, we can't be too careful, and it will be safer not to say anything to Bunter."

Billy Bunter sat breathless.

Was Bunter interested? He was!

Bunter had heard of all sorts of things coming ashore from ships sunk by mines in the North Sea. Somewhere along by Margate no end of coal had come up, and people in need of the same had walked it off. Somewhere in Scotland kegs of butter had washed up—somewhere else, lots of silk stockings. Bunter had not heard, so far, of any chests of gold being washed up by the sea; he was now hearing that thrilling news for the first time!

Of course, it might happen any day. Almost anything might be washed up by the sea in the war days with ships under every flag sunk indiscriminately by the ruthless enemy. A chest of gold, certainly, was a very unusual catch, and Billy Bunter's little round eyes glistened behind his big, round spectacles at the idea of it.

If a chest of gold washed up anywhere near Bunter, Bunter knew what he was going to do with it.

And those beasts weren't going to tell him!

"Well, what about a walk along to Broadstairs?" asked Bob. "I suppose that chest is safe enough in the chalk cave, but—"

"Oh, safe as houses!" said Frank Nugent. "It's a private beach here, and hardly anybody ever comes along."

"That's so!" agreed Harry Wharton. "We should never have seen it ourselves if we hadn't been rooting in the cave."

"All the same, a chest of gold isn't the sort of thing to be left lying around loose," said Bob Cherry. "I don't suppose there's more than a thousand pounds in it—"

"Less, very likely," said Harry.

"Well, whatever's in it, there it is, and anybody who spotted it could snoop it, if he liked, and then, where should we come in?" asked Bob. "Let's get off to Broadstairs. Not a word to Bunter!"

"Not a whisper," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Speechfulness is silvery, but silence is the bird in hand that goes longest to the bush, as the English proverb remarks."

"Where's Bunter now?" asked Nugent. "I can't see him about?"

"Sleeping off brekker somewhere, I expect," said Bob. "He parked enough at brekker to see him through to the end of the war."

"Beast!" breathed Billy Bunter.

"Well, let's get off before he turns up and begins asking questions," said Harry Wharton.

Billy Bunter's fat grin extended almost from ear to ear as he heard a sound of receding footsteps! The Famous Five were going out again.

"He, he, he!" gurgled Bunter, when they were gone.

The fat Owl heaved his weight out of the armchair. He grinned round the hall, which he now had to himself.

The Famous Five had gone to Broadstairs, Bunter supposed, to report that wonderful discovery—leaving Bunter out of it! Bunter was going—not to Broadstairs but to the chalk cave under the cliffs.

Bunter had heard all about that cave. It was three or four days since the affair of Mr. Brown, and Bunter had heard the juniors discussing Mr. Brown more than once.

They had revisited the cave the day after seeing him there, but had found no sign of Mr. Brown, and concluded that he had cleared off in the night after the tide had gone down. Bunter had not visited the cave, but from the juniors' talk he knew just where it was! He was going to visit it now.

Chests of gold, even if they contained less than a thousand pounds, were altogether too rare to be left lying about. That chest of gold was going to find an owner on the spot! If fellows who spotted it were fools enough to leave it where it was that was their own look-out. Bunter, certainly, was not going to leave it where it was when he spotted it.

Bunter jammed a cap on his fat head, and rolled out into the sunshine of the first sunny morning of April. He gave the Famous Five ten minutes

to get clear, so he was rather surprised to see them standing in a cheery and smiling group in the avenue.

He blinked at them in annoyance through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows, ain't you going to Broadstairs?" he squeaked.

"Broadstairs!" repeated Harry Wharton. "No! What put that into your head, old fat man?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"We're going nowhere near Broadstairs," said Nugent. "We're going to get a spot of tennis on a fine morning like this."

"Well, of all the fibbers!" ejaculated Bunter. "Talk about telling whoppers! You fellows are the limit, and no mistake!"

"If you want a walk to Broadstairs, we'll come, old fat man!" said Harry. "It's only a few miles—"

"Oh! No! I—I'm going to—to look at the sea!" said Bunter hastily. "I'm not going down to the beach, you know!"

"Not?" asked Bob.

"Nothing of the kind. Too jolly steep going down that gully," said Bunter, shaking his head. "Besides, there's nothing special to see on the beach—I'm certainly not thinking of going along to that chalk cave. Why should I?"

"Keep clear of that cave, Bunter," said Harry Wharton. "It's frightfully rocky and rugged, and if you tumbled over—"

"You might burst, old chap," said Bob. "Think of losing all those breakfasts you put away this morning."

"Yah! Look here, you fellows, hadn't you better start?" asked Bunter anxiously. He did not want eyes on him when he started for the chalk cave. He preferred the Famous Five to be well on their way to Broadstairs before he rolled down the gully in search of the treasure cast up by the sea. "The sooner you report it the better, you know."

"Report what?" asked Bob.

"Oh, nothing!" said Bunter hastily. "I don't know anything about it, of course. I never heard what you fellows were saying!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I—I'm just going to have a squint at the sea," said Bunter. "Not down on the beach, you know—up on the cliffs. I never heard you fellows saying you were going to Broadstairs, of course—how could I when I wasn't there? Still, if you're going, you'd better start, hadn't you? They can tell you all about flotsam and jetsam and things at the police station."

"Flotsam and jetsam!" repeated Bob. "We haven't found anything valuable, Bunter. What's put that into your head?"

"Oh crikey! And you fellows have called me a fibber!" gasped Bunter. "Talk about fibbing!"

"Well, what do you think we've found, then?"

"Oh, nothing. I never heard you talking about it—I wasn't in that armchair in front of the fire when you came in. I was speaking to Blump in the dining-room. But I say, hadn't you better start?"

"But we're not going——"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter gave it up and rolled away down the avenue.

The Famous Five exchanged a grin and walked after him.

A fat head was turned, at the sound of footsteps.

Bunter gave the smiling five a ferocious glare through his big spectacles.

"What are you after me for?" he demanded.

"Don't you like our company?" asked Bob.

"No; I jolly well don't!" yapped Bunter.

"But we want yours—it's so nice!"

"Yah! You just leave a fellow alone, see?" snorted Bunter. "You walk off every day and leave a fellow on his own! Now you can jolly well do without my company, see? Go and eat coke, the lot of you!"

And Bunter rolled onward again. After about a dozen yards he blinked back over a fat shoulder to make sure that the juniors were not following. They were standing in a group where he had left them, gazing after him.

The fat Owl rolled on again, relieved and satisfied. He rolled out of sight of the Famous Five. But from the distance, on the wind, a sound of laughter came to Billy Bunter's fat ears.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter wondered what the dickens they were laughing at. He was to learn as soon as he arrived in the chalk cave!

FIRST OF APRIL!

"O H, blow!" gasped Billy Bunter.

The first day of April was sunny and warm. Bright sunshine streamed down on the cliffs and the sea and the sandy beach, and on the rugged, rocky gully that led down. The weather was all right, and the scenery was all right; but the rugged, steep and rocky way to the beach was far from all right.

Billy Bunter panted and puffed and blew as he went.

Such gullies split the solid cliffs at intervals all the way up and down the shore. Some of them, close by seaside resorts, had been cut into steps, and could be descended like an out-size staircase. But Sir William Bird preferred his surroundings in a natural state, and only here and there had the rugged way been made a little easier. So Bunter toiled from rock to rock, and boulder to boulder, slipped over slopes and slants, and tripped over gaps and ridges, and really began to feel as if he would have earned all that gold by the time he got it.

It was a fatigued, perspiring, and damp Owl who rolled down on the soft sand of the beach at last.

There he blinked round him through his big spectacles, while he pumped in breath.

The sea was a good distance out, beyond a wide tract of sand, and not a soul was to be seen along the shore.

Out at sea, Bunter could discern the smoke of a distant steamer, and

the brown sail of a fishing ketch. And his eyes and spectacles fixed on a broken mast and mass of torn rigging that lay amid seaweed on the beach. It was wreckage that had been left by the last tide; and Bunter did not doubt that that tide had also stranded the chest of gold in the chalk cave.

He plugged along the sand, rounding the base of the high cliffs. Bunter was no scout, but in the soft sand he could pick up a good many tracks, which he guessed were left by the schoolboys who had visited the cave that morning. There was, so far as Bunter could discern, no sign of strangers' feet on the spot.

That was satisfactory to the fat Owl. It was a lonely beach; still, somebody might have happened along, and it would have been simply awful if that chest of gold had been snooped before the Owl of the Remove reached it.

He arrived at the cave at last.

The perspiring fat Owl was rather glad to roll in under the shade of the high arch of rock, out of the glare of April sunshine.

In the cave-mouth he mopped a damp brow and blinked round him eagerly for the treasure.

Sand and seaweed were heaped thickly before the cave and strewn some distance up. Among it lay several broken spars, a shattered hen-coop, and other fragments of wreckage. And Bunter's eyes suddenly landed on a wooden chest that lay a little farther up the cave.

His eyes almost popped through his spectacles at it.

This was the chest the juniors had found that morning—there could be no doubt about that!

Billy Bunter was not very bright, but even Bunter was surprised to see that so heavy an article as a chest of gold had been tossed by the water a farther distance than lighter articles. So weighty an article might have been expected to be found on the beach, if it came ashore at all.

But there it was—well up the cave, as if it had floated lightly in on the tide. The receding tide had left it quite a distance from the cave-mouth. From those circumstances, Bunter would have fancied that it was an empty chest—had he not known otherwise!

But he did, of course, know otherwise—after what he had overheard from the juniors in the hall at East-cliff Lodge.

"Oh, good!" gasped Bunter.

He was tired with clambering over rocks and plugging along with his feet sinking in soft sand. But he was not too tired to roll onward, with the prospect of filling his pockets with gold from the chest. A chest of gold had as powerful an attraction for Billy Bunter as a dish of jam tarts!

Even if there was, as Harry Wharton had said, less than a thousand pounds in it, it was a tremendous catch. The quantity of tuck that could be had for half that sum, or a quarter, was positively dazzling.

Bunter panted on to the chest and came to a halt, his spectacles fixed on it, his eyes gloating over it,

"Mum-mum-mine!" he gasped.

It was Bunter's! He had found it! If the other fellows had seen it, and left it there, it was left for the next finder. Bunter was satisfied on that point. Anybody else who had come along would have snooped it! Bunter had come along, and he was going to snoop it! That was that!

There was a lock on the chest, but it was broken, doubtless by a crash on some rock. Obviously, the Famous Five had looked into it, or they could not have known what was inside. It did not, for the moment, occur to Bunter that, with the lock broken, the lid must have swung open while the chest was tossing in the sea—in which case, it was really remarkable if the contents had remained inside.

He grabbed the lid and dragged it open, and his gloating gaze fixed on the interior in happy anticipation of piles of yellow, precious, glittering gold!

Then he jumped.

No gleam of gold met his eyes. The chest was empty. In utter perplexity the fat Owl stared into it.

"Oh crikey!" he gasped. "Gone!"

That was Bunter's first thought. If that chest had contained gold, not a spot of the precious metal remained! Somebody must have come along since the juniors had been there, and cleared it out! They had left it unguarded—for perhaps an hour or more! The treasure had been lifted!

Then, as the fat Owl scanned the interior, his eyes fell on the inside of the lid standing wide open.

Something was written on the inside of the lid. Bunter had not noticed it at first, being too keen on the gold. But he noticed it now.

What was written, in chalk—probably by some fragment of chalk from the beach—was a date; merely that and nothing more!

FIRST OF APRIL!

Bunter blinked at it.

He blinked, and blinked! Then it dawned on him. Crimson wrath suffused his fat face.

"Beasts!" he roared.

The chalk cave echoed to his roar.

"Beasts! Rotters! Pulling a fellow's leg! First of April! Beasts! They jolly well knew I was in that armchair—rotters! They jolly well meant me to hear—cads! They—they've given me this tramp for nothing! Beasts! Rotters! Swabs!"

Billy Bunter brandished a fat fist in the air. He would have liked, at the moment, to land that fat fist on five noses, one after another.

Bunter had not been thinking about the First of April. He had been thinking about a chest of gold! And there wasn't any chest of gold! There was only a First of April!

There was a chest, certainly! No doubt the Famous Five had spotted that empty chest while rambling in the cave, and it had put the idea into their heads of pulling the fat Owl's leg. Perhaps they even thought that it would do him good to get out of an armchair on a fine morning, and take a little run in the fresh air by

the sea—they were beasts enough! Anyhow, there was the chest—and nothing therein but a date!

"Beasts! Rotters! Swabs!" hissed Bunter.

He was tired. He had covered nearly a quarter of a mile, most of it over rocks and sand. In a quarter of a mile there were four hundred and forty yards too many for Billy Bunter's comfort.

And it was all for nothing. No wonder that beast Wharton had said that there was very likely less than a thousand pounds in that chest—as there was nothing at all! Nothing but a date—which Billy Bunter really might have remembered a little earlier—but hadn't!

"Beasts!" groaned Bunter.

He slammed the lid of the chest shut and sat on it. That was all the use he had, after all, for this flotsam and jetsam. He was tired, and it came in handy to sit on. Billy Bunter sat on it, mopped a fat brow, blinked out over the sea through his big spectacles, and breathed wrath.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING!

"MASTER BUNTER, I think!"
"Yaroooh!"
Bunter fairly bounded, and yelled as he bounded.

He knew that voice, though it was long since he had heard it! It was a smooth, almost silky voice, that came over his fat shoulder—but the roar of a lion could not have startled Bunter more.

The Owl of Greyfriars had been sitting on the chest for about half an hour. By that time, he was beginning to think that he was almost equal to plugging back to the gully, clambering up it again, and getting back to the house—where he was rather anxious to tell five leg-pulling beasts what he thought of them and their First-of-April jests.

With his fat back to the interior of the cave, facing the sea, Bunter had not seen anyone approach him from the interior; he had heard nothing, and it had not occurred to his fat mind that there might be anyone in the cave unheard and unseen.

That smooth voice over his shoulder from behind was the first hint he had of anyone in the offing, and it fairly electrified him.

He bounded up from the chest and spun round, his eyes nearly bulging through his spectacles in alarm.

"Sus-sus-sus-Soames!" he stuttered.

His eyes popped at the man who had once been valet to Mr. Vernon-Smith, the father of the Bounder of Greyfriars.

The ghost of James Soames could hardly have startled him more.

During the past few days Bunter had forgotten Soames. He was as positive as ever that he had seen him in Eastcliff Lodge on the night when he had turned out to carry the doctored cake to the juniors' room. But even Bunter, much as he dreaded the one-time valet of Smith's father, could not suppose that Soames was still in the mansion, day after day, unknown to the dwellers therein.

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Certainly it never occurred to him to think of Soames in connection with the fact that Sir William's man, Jermyn, was laid up in his room with a sprained leg. He had not given Jermyn a thought—he had never seen the baronet's man, did not want to see him, and did not think about him at all.

For whatever reason Soames had entered the house that night, it seemed that he must have gone again, and Bunter had ceased to bother his fat head on the subject. And now he saw him again.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Sus-sus-sus-Soames! Oh! Oh crikey!"

Soames smiled—a bleak smile over his smooth face. It was not a reassuring smile. There was something cat-like in the man's silent, stealthy ways, and in the look on his smooth face.

Bunter stood with his fat knees knocking together. But he tried to pull himself together, and backed away a step, with the idea of turning and taking to his heels.

"Don't go, Master Bunter!" said Soames softly.

A stride, and he was between Bunter and the cave-mouth. The fat junior came to a halt, watching him with terrified eyes through his big spectacles. He sat down with a bump on the chest again, as if his fat legs refused him their support.

"What a pleasure to meet you again, sir!" said Soames. His manner and tone were those of Mr. Vernon-Smith's respectful and deferential manservant that Bunter remembered so well.

But Bunter remembered, too, how Soames had thrown off his manservant manner like a cloak in those wild days of the Greyfriars chums' South Sea cruise with Smithy and his father. He had seen Soames, automatic in hand, dominating the ship he had seized single-handed—hardy, desperate, a man of iron nerve and iron ruthlessness.

Bunter sat and blinked at Soames like a fat rabbit fascinated by a serpent.

"You do not seem pleased by this happy meeting, Master Bunter," remarked Soames, with pleasant irony.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Yes, I—I'm awfully glad to see you, Soames! I—I don't think there's anybody I'd rather see, really. But—but I've got to get back for lunch, if—if you don't mind."

"I do," said Soames.

"Oh lor'!"

"I remember you, Master Bunter," said Soames. "I remember, on that cruise in the South Seas that you were always in the way. Fool as you are, you did more mischief than anyone else in the party. You were always where you were least wanted—always a meddler. And you have not changed. It was you, and not one of the others, who saw me at Eastcliff Lodge in the night."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

Evidently Soames knew that Bunter had seen him that night.

On the night itself, he certainly had not seen Bunter in the dark gallery. He had learned since—how, Bunter could not guess.

Everybody in Eastcliff Lodge certainly had heard Bunter's tale of alarm. But how had Soames heard? It was clear, at all events, that he had.

"It was always your way to see too much, hear too much, and talk too much," went on Soames' smooth voice. "That is rather dangerous, Master Bunter, when you are dealing with a man of my character. Matters might have gone very differently on that South Sea cruise if I had tipped you into the sea."

Bunter shuddered.

He was alone in the cave—at the man's mercy. The sea rolled in his sight. No one was likely to come to that solitary spot. The cold, hard glitter in Soames' eyes struck him like a chill of ice.

"What are you doing in this cave?" rapped Soames suddenly, his eyes fixed piercingly on Bunter's fat face. "What was it you expected to spy into here, you fat fool?"

Bunter blinked at him.

He realised that Soames was displeased, somehow, by his presence in the chalk cave. Why, Bunter could not guess.

Soames, he supposed, must have been in the cave all the time he was there; but he did not seem to care whether Bunter saw him or not. He need not have shown up, had he not chosen to do so.

"I—I nothing!" stammered Bunter. "Jig-jig-just sitting on this box, Soames."

Soames' eyes glinted.

"That will not do for me," he said. "You had better explain at once why you are here, Master Bunter. Otherwise, I may be tempted to twist your fat neck!"

"You—you see, I—I——"

"I know you, you fat fool!" said Soames. "You are utterly dense, but you have a way of spying out what does not concern you. Tell me at once why you came to this cave?"

He made a step nearer to the fat junior, his brows dark and lowering.

For some reason which Bunter could not begin to understand, Soames was deeply irritated, perhaps alarmed, by his presence there. Obviously he suspected that Bunter had been spying on something in the cave—though what there could possibly be to spy on, the fat Owl could not guess. There was nothing to be discovered, so far as he knew, but chalk rocks, seaweed, and wreckage.

"Tell me the truth!" Soames' smooth voice changed into a deep, threatening growl that sent a thrill of terror through Bunter.

"I—I came——" stuttered Bunter. "I—I never knew you were here. Catch me coming here if I had. I—I came to look into this box——"

"That box!" Soames stared. "You lying young rascal! If you do not tell me the truth at once——"

"But I did!" gasped Bunter. "Those beasts made me think it was stacked with gold. Pulling my leg—First of April!"

"What?"

Bunter heaved himself off the chest, and lifted the lid. He could see that Soames did not believe him.

But as Soames' eyes fell on the

chalked inscription, "First of April." on the inside of the lid, his expression changed. He stared at it, and smiled faintly.

"Are you really such a fool?" he exclaimed.

"I—I thought, from what they said—"

"You fat clown!"

Soames stood silent for a minute or two. Whatever it was that he had feared that Bunter might have discovered in the cave, he knew now that the fat junior had made no discovery, except of that empty chest.

His face expressed little, but Bunter could see that he was relieved. The fat Owl broke the silence.

"I—I say, I—I don't want to be late for lunch," he mumbled. "I—I ought to be getting back."

"I am afraid, Master Bunter, that you will have to miss your lunch," said Soames. "Since you have chosen to come here, you may stay here. I advise you, if you value your health, to leave this neighbourhood at an early date, and spend your Easter holidays elsewhere. But for the present, you will remain in this cave."

"I'm—I'm getting hungry."

"That, from what I remember of you, is a very serious matter," said Soames, with grim sarcasm. "Nevertheless, you had better remain here. I think you saw me handle an automatic in those days in the South Seas. You may remember that I never miss my aim!"

"Oh lor'!"

"I am going to the beach," said Soames, quietly and deliberately, "and if I see you put your head out of this cave, I shall put a bullet through it."

"Ow!"

"Remain here, if you do not want your brains, such as they are, scattered over these rocks!" said Soames. Billy Bunter sat, or rather fell, on the chest again. Soames gave him one grim look, turned, and walked out of the cave. He disappeared from Bunter's sight round the rocks at the opening.

Bunter remained sitting on the chest. He did not think of stirring. It was getting near lunch-time, but a dozen lunches rolled into one would not have tempted Bunter to put his head out of the cave, so long as Soames was on the beach. That Soames was going, and that he wished to go without the fat junior's eyes on him, did not occur to Bunter. He pictured Soames lurking on the beach, automatic in hand, and wild horses would not have dragged him out of the chalk cave. He sat on the empty chest, groaning, and did not stir.

THE TRACK IN THE SAND.

"WHERE'S that fat chump?"

"The wherefulness is terrific!"

"The howling ass!"

Harry Wharton & Co. had had their spot of tennis.

The tennis court at Eastcliff Lodge was in view of the avenue that led

down to the cliffs, and if Billy Bunter had returned they would have spotted the fat figure rolling into view. But they had not seen him. And now that lunch was almost due, they were wondering what had become of the fat Owl of the Remove.

Bunter was likely to take plenty of time on the trip; but even Bunter had had plenty of time to make the trip two or three times over. And Bunter was the last man in the world to be late for a meal.

"Better go and look for him, I think," said Harry Wharton. "He can't have forgotten lunch."

"Impossible!" grinned Bob.

"And even Bunter can't be idiot enough to stay in the cave till the tide comes in," remarked Nugent.

"He may have taken a tumble," said Johnny Bull. "He's idiot enough for that. Better round him up."

The Famous Five walked down the gully. Unless Billy Bunter had taken a tumble, they could hardly account for his prolonged absence. That would have been rather a disastrous outcome to their First-of-April joke on the fat Owl. But Bunter really was the fellow to take a tumble, if it was humanly possible to take one.

"Not on view," remarked Bob Cherry, as they came out on the beach.

Nobody was in sight in the wide stretch of sand between the cliffs and the sea.

"He must be still in the cave, then," said Harry. "But what the thump he's sticking there for—"

"Gone to sleep, perhaps."

"Oh, my hat! Well, Bunter will go to sleep anywhere. Let's go and see."

They tramped along the base of the cliffs to the chalk cave. It was unlikely that even Billy Bunter had

gone to sleep in the morning in a cave that would be flooded when the tide came rolling in. Still, as he was not in sight, it was clear that he must be in the cave. Why, was a mystery.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! There he is!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as the juniors tramped in under the chalk arch over the cave-mouth.

The stared at Bunter.

There he was, sitting on the chest, a little distance up the cave. He was blinking dolefully seaward through his big spectacles. Evidently nothing had happened to him. He was just sitting there, apparently as an ornament to the seascape.

His doleful, fat face brightened at the sight of the juniors, and he heaved himself off the chest.

"I say, you fellows!" he gasped.

"Making a day of it?" asked Nugent.

"Filled your pockets with gold?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! I say, you fellows, is he still there? Did he fire at you?" gasped Bunter.

"Eh?"

"What?"

"Is he gone?" howled Bunter.

"He! Who?"

"Sus-sus-us-sus-sus—" stuttered the fat Owl.

"Which?"

"Sus-sus-us-Soames!"

"Soames!" yelled the Famous Five. "Haven't you seen him?" gasped Bunter. "Isn't he on the beach? I say, you fellows, look out—he's got an automatic!"

The Famous Five blinked at Bunter. They had wondered why he remained in the cave; but certainly they had never dreamed that Soames had anything to do with it.

"Potty?" asked Johnny Bull

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"Have you got Soames on the brain again?"

"He was here——"

"Soames was!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Yes—Soames! He was in the cave when I got here!" quavered Bunter. "I was taking a rest when he spoke. He made me jump out of my skin. He said he would blow my brains out if I came out of the cave!"

"You howling ass, have you gone to sleep in there and had another nightmare?"

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "I tell you Soames was here! He's hanging about here for something, the beast! Didn't you see him on the beach?"

"There's nobody on the beach."

"Then he's gone!" mumbled Bunter. "I—I thought he was watching for me all the time! Fat lot he cares if I miss my lunch! I say, you fellows, I'm fearfully hungry! That beast Wibley will have to do something about Soames—it ain't safe having him about——"

"Wibley?"

"I—I—I mean——"

"You mean you've just woke up, and you've been dreaming?"

"No!" roared Bunter. "I tell you Soames was here, and I can jolly well tell you that I ain't going to have my brains blown out to please you, or Wibley, either——"

"Wibley again! Have you got Wibley on the brain now?" asked Bob. "Is the fat chump wandering in his mind, or what?"

"I tell you, Soames was here, and he said he would blow my brains out if I put my head out of the cave!" roared Bunter.

"Rot!" said Bob. "If it was Soames, he knows you, and he jolly well knows there's no brains in your head!"

"Beast!"

"This is the second time that blithering ass has fancied that he's seen Soames!" said Bob Cherry. "Nobody was here, of course."

"I tell you——" shrieked Bunter.

"You fat Owl, nobody was here!" hooted Johnny Bull. "You've been dreaming again!"

"He was here, and he went out——"

"Well, if he was here, and he went out, he must have left tracks in the sand," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Let's look!"

The Famous Five left the cave again, Billy Bunter rolling after them, much relieved to get out at last. They glanced along the sand before the cave, though with no expectation of picking up tracks there.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob suddenly.

At a little distance from the juniors' own tracks Bob spotted footprints. Clearly marked in the soft sand, they led away from the cave.

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

The juniors gathered round the spot, examining the footprints. The track led across the sand to a spot where chalk cropped up from the beach. On the rough chalk the trail was lost.

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"Well, my only hat!" said Bob Cherry. "Somebody was in the cave—Bunter may have seen somebody!"

The track in the sand told its own tale. Somebody had come out of the cave since the last tide, that was clear.

Harry Wharton's face was grave.

"Is it possible that Soames is about?" he asked.

"Might be anybody's tracks!" said Johnny Bull.

"Yes, but—they're small tracks for a man!" said the captain of the Remove. "You fellows remember that Mr. Vernon-Smith's valet had small hands and feet. We saw enough of him on that cruise to notice what he was like! Whoever left this trail had small feet for a man."

Bob Cherry whistled.

"By gum! That's so!" he agreed.

"It was Soames!" howled Bunter. "Think I don't know Soames when I see him? I tell you it was Soames—same as it was the other night in the house."

The juniors looked at one another. So far, they had disregarded Billy Bunter's tale of alarm. But it was clear that someone had been in the cave—and that it was someone who, like Soames, had small feet.

"But if it's Soames, what the dickens is he up to here?" asked Nugent.

"No good, at any rate!" said Johnny Bull.

"Goodness knows!" said Harry Wharton slowly. "It's a long time since we've seen Soames, and we know nothing about him, or what he may be doing. He may be up to some game in these parts—perhaps employed somewhere as a valet—as he was with Mr. Vernon-Smith—under another name, of course."

"Phew!" murmured Bob. "If that's the case, it must have given him a jump for a lot of fellows who know him by sight to blow along."

Harry Wharton nodded.

"We haven't seen him—but he may have seen us!" he said. "If Bunter wasn't dreaming the other night——"

"I wasn't, you beast!"

"If he wasn't, that may be why Soames came into our room—to make sure whether it was us!" said Harry. "He certainly can't want us about, if he's in these parts, and up to some of his games."

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"If it's Soames, we must be giving him a lot of worry!" he said. "We might spot him any time, if he's trickling about these parts. Bet you he'd give a good deal to see us clear off from Sir William's place."

"Well, we're here for Easter!" said Harry. "He can't get shut of us. We'll jolly well keep an eye open for him, after this——"

"I say, you fellows, you've forgotten lunch!"

"What?"

"Lunch!" said Bunter. "Come on! I'm not going back alone, with that beast Soames hanging about. Do come on!"

"Not much good trying to follow that trail!" said Bob. "Looks as if

he walked on the chalk as much as possible, not to leave tracks."

"I say, you fellows——"

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"I'm hungry!" roared Bunter.

"May as well go back," said Harry.

"I should jolly well think so, when we're late for lunch already!" howled Bunter indignantly.

The party returned up the gully with thoughtful faces, Billy Bunter thinking of lunch, the Famous Five thinking of Soames, and wondering whether, after all, the one-time free-booter of the South Seas was in the offing again.

COSH!

"WHERE'S Wibley?"

"What?"

"Oh! I—I mean—I don't mean Wibley!"

Bunter was putting his foot in it again.

After lunch that day, Billy Bunter did not seem to be thinking, as usual, of a nap in an armchair after his exertions at the table. He was in the armchair, but he was not napping.

He was thinking, but not of naps! Every now and then he glanced towards the Famous Five, who were chatting in a group by the hall window, and there was a sly twinkle in his little round eyes behind his big round spectacles.

Billy Bunter's fat intellect was at work! Harry Wharton & Co. had already forgotten that First-of-April jape in the morning, or almost forgotten it! Billy Bunter hadn't! Bunter was thinking deep thoughts—on the subject of making beasts sit up for pulling a fellow's leg.

He sat up in the armchair suddenly and popped that surprising question at the juniors by the window. They looked round at him.

Billy Bunter was not, of course, ever expected to be anything but an ass. He was not expected to talk sense. Nobody paid any great heed to his burblings on any subject. But really there was something surprising and perplexing in his constant references to Wibley, the schoolboy actor of Greyfriars. From the way Bunter continually popped out that name one might really have supposed that Wibley was at hand.

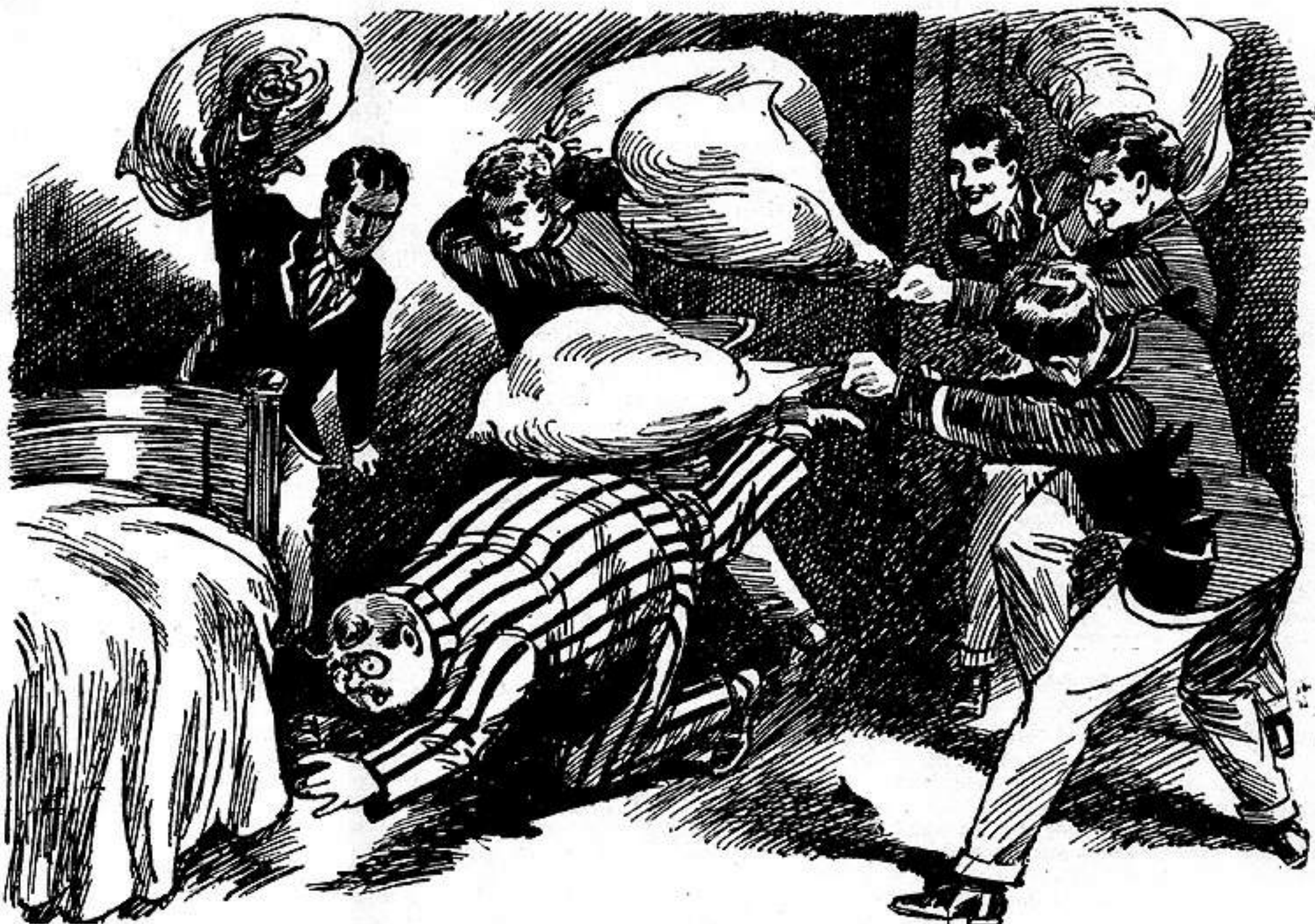
So far as Harry Wharton & Co. knew, William Wibley was at his aunt's in Derbyshire. Certainly not the remotest suspicion occurred to their minds that Wib was an unrecognised resident in Eastcliff Lodge. Bunter, so far, had not let out the secret—though he was constantly hovering on the very edge of it.

"I don't mean Wibley, of course!" said Bunter, blinking at the juniors as they stared at him. "Wibley ain't here, of course!"

"We know that, fathead!" answered Harry Wharton. "What the thump do you keep on burbling about Wibley for?"

"Oh! Nothing! I say, you fellows, where's Sir William?"

Apparently it was Sir William that Bunter wanted.



Billy Bunter fled back to his room, yelling, and after him rushed five chortling juniors, still swiping with pillows.

"Gone up for his usual forty winks, I believe!" answered Bob Cherry.

"He, he he!" chortled Bunter.

"What is there to cackle at in that?" demanded Bob. "Old beans like Sir William generally take a rest after lunch!"

"He, he, he!"

Billy Bunter gurgled. It had been the custom of Sir William Bird to take a rest after lunch, as was natural in a gentleman of his ripe years. Wibley had to keep up all the customs of the little baronet whom he was impersonating. But it was not likely that so lively a youth as William Wibley went to sleep in the afternoon. He was more likely to be reading the "Holiday Annual," while the household supposed that he was snoozing.

Bunter heaved himself out of the armchair.

The Famous Five looked at him as he rolled to the staircase.

"What the dickens do you want Sir William for?" asked Bob.

"Oh! I just want to speak to him!" said Bunter. "I don't want to ask him for anything," he added cautiously. "If I wanted anything, I could ask one of the servants. It wouldn't matter if you heard me."

The juniors gazed at him.

From that reply, they could only deduce that Bunter wanted something and did not want them to hear what it was.

"Don't go and wake the old bean, Bunter!" called out Harry Wharton.

"Old beans don't like being woke up out of naps!"

"Oh, he won't be asleep!" grinned Bunter. "Catch him going to sleep after lunch! I like a nap after lunch myself, but Wibley never went to sleep in the afternoon that I know of."

"Sir William's about fifty years older than Wibley——"

"Eh? Oh, yes! He, he, he!"

Bunter proceeded to negotiate the stairs. He disliked stairs and took them slowly.

The chums of the Remove gave him disapproving looks, which did not worry Bunter. To their minds it was sheer cheek on Bunter's part to think of disturbing the old baronet, whatever he wanted. Bunter, however, had no hesitation in disturbing Wibley of the Remove.

He arrived in the oak gallery, and rolled along it to the passage on which Sir William's rooms opened. He tapped at Sir William's door. There was no reply from within.

Bunter tapped again.

Still there was no answer.

It was very improbable that Wibley was asleep; but he was careful to keep up appearances as Sir William.

Bunter turned the handle and opened the door.

"I say!" he squeaked.

There was still no answer.

The fat Owl blinked into the room. A figure was stretched on an ottoman by the window; a silvery head rested on a cushion; an eyeglass dangled at the end of its cord, and

the eyes in the pink old face were closed. Sir William was, to all appearance, asleep!

Bunter grinned! He could see the edge of a book peeping out from under the cushion; and he had no doubt that Sir William had hastily shoved it there and closed his eyes as the door opened.

He rolled in and shut the door.

"I say, Wibley!" he squeaked.

Sir William's eyes opened quite suddenly. He sat up on the ottoman and glared at Billy Bunter. Evidently, he had not been slumbering.

"Oh! It's you!" he snapped.

"Yes, old chap!"

"What have you come up here for, you fat idiot?"

"Oh really, Wibley——"

The imitation baronet jerked the book out from under his cushion. It was a rather thick volume; in fact, a "Holiday Annual." Wibley had been passing a happy hour with that fascinating publication while he was supposed to be taking Sir William's usual forty winks.

"You burbling blitherer!" said Wibley, in concentrated tones. "Haven't you sense enough to call me Sir William?"

"Well, nobody can hear us here, I suppose?" said Bunter.

"Jermyn's room opens off this, chump!"

"Does it? Well, it doesn't matter if Jermyn hears—he's in the secret, from what I heard the old Bird telling you at Greyfriars."

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"Somebody might be in his room, blitherer! Jermyn's gone out to-day for the first time since he had his accident on the stairs."

"Well, I'll look!"

Bunter rolled to the communicating floor, opened it, and blinked into the valet's room.

No one was there, and he rolled back again.

"It's all right," he said. "Now, I say, Wibley—"

"Say Wibley again and I'll let you have this 'Holiday Annual'—cosh!" snorted the schoolboy actor.

"Oh really, Wibley—"

Whiz!

Crash!

Bump!

"Yarooooooh!"

William Wibley was as good as his word! The "Holiday Annual" crashed on the best-filled waistcoat in Eastcliff Lodge, and Billy Bunter sat down on the floor of Sir William Bird's apartment, and roared.

KEEPING IT DARK!

"Ow!" roared Bunter. "Beast!" Wibley sat up on the ottoman, glaring at him.

The fat Owl sat on the floor and glared back.

"Now, you fat freak!" snapped Wibley. He reached out, fielded the "Holiday Annual," and held it ready for another whiz. "Say Wibley again—"

"Ow! Beast!"

Bunter tottered to his feet. He

rubbed his waistcoat, where the cosh from the "Holiday Annual" seemed to have had rather a disturbing effect on an extensive lunch. His eyes and his spectacles gleamed with wrath.

"You cheeky rotter!" he gasped. "I've a jolly good mind to ring for Blump and tell him that you ain't the old Bird at all. I've a jolly good mind—"

"Gammon!" said Wibley. "You haven't a mind at all, let alone a jolly good one! What did you barge in here for, fathead? Did you mistake my room for the larder, or what?"

"Look here, you cheeky beast!"

"Cough it up and clear!" snapped Wibley. "What the thump do you want?"

"I want an alarm clock!" yapped Bunter.

"A-a-a what?" ejaculated Wibley. An alarm clock was about the last thing that anybody who knew Bunter would have expected him to want. Early rising was not in Bunter's line at all.

"An alarm clock, see? You can ring for Blump, and tell him you want it. Then you can hand it to me."

"What the merry thump do you want an alarm clock for, you burbling ass? Getting up early to-morrow for the first time in your life?"

"Yes—exactly!" said Bunter. "I'm turning out early to go down for a— a bathe! I'm not going to set the clock to wake me up to-night, or any-

thing like that, you know. Why should I?"

"What on earth do you want to get up in the night for?" asked Wibley, staring at him blankly.

"Haven't I just said I don't?" hooted Bunter.

"Yes; that's how I know you do!" "Beast!"

"Well, you can go and ask Blump without fetching his sixteen stone up the stairs," said Wibley. "I dare say there's one to be found, if you want one. No need to come up to me, you fat ass!"

"Well, those fellows might hear me—"

"Why shouldn't they?"

"Oh! No reason why they shouldn't, of course," said Bunter hastily. "Still, I'd rather they didn't! They might think I was going to turn out in the night for something. Of course, I'm not! I'm not thinking of paying them out for pulling my leg this morning, or anything of the kind. I'd forgotten all about that."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Wibley.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Look here, you jolly well tell the butler to get an alarm clock and bring it up to you here! See?"

"You fat foozler!"

"Mind, you're not to mention it to those beasts!" added Bunter. "They might smell a rat! Not that I'm going to pull their leg to-night, you know! If anybody butts into their room in the middle of the night and says 'Hands up!' it won't be me—it will be Soames."

"Oh, my only hat and parasol!"

"Just the sort of thing that Soames might do, you know," said Bunter, blinking at Wibley. "He got in once, and he might get in again. They make out that I'm afraid of Soames. Well, perhaps somebody else will be afraid of him to-night if— He, he, he!"

"You blithering burbling bloater! I'll—"

"I want that alarm clock!" said Bunter. "I'll ring the bell, and you can tell Blump when he comes up. Don't tell him it's for me. I'd rather nobody knew that I wanted an alarm clock."

Bunter touched a bell.

Wibley sat on the ottoman and grinned. Evidently Billy Bunter had a dramatic scheme of vengeance in his fat head. He was going to scare the Famous Five out of their wits in the middle of the night by making them believe that Soames had got in with an automatic.

For any stunt timed for the middle of the night Bunter needed an alarm clock. And it was, of course, essential that it should be kept very dark from the Famous Five; it was only too probable that they would guess that the fatuous fat Owl was up to something if they heard about that alarm clock.

There was a discreet tap at the door, and the portly Blump entered.

"You rang, Sir William?"

Wibley's grin vanished as the butler tapped. He was Sir William Bird again, to meet the butler's eyes.

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"Can you find me an alarm clock, Blump?" asked Sir William.

"An alarm clock? Certainly, Sir William!"

"Send it up to me, please!" said Sir William.

"Very good, Sir William!"

"It's not for me, Blump," said Bunter. "I don't want an alarm clock for anything. It ain't for me at all." Bunter wanted to make this quite clear.

Blump blinked at him.

"Oh!" he gasped. "Yes, sir! Quite so, sir!"

Blump departed, wondering why the dickens that fat guest at Eastcliff Lodge had gone up to Sir William's room to ask him for an alarm clock.

"Just as well not to let the butler know," remarked Bunter, as the door closed on Blump. "If you're keeping anything dark, you can't be too careful about it, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!" gurgled Wibley.

"Mind, don't you get saying anything to those fellows!" added Bunter. "I don't want them to know. I—I'm going to—to surprise them by turning out first in the morning, that's all—see?"

"I see!" grinned Wibley.

John, the footman, came up a few minutes later with a small alarm clock, which he handed to Sir William, and departed in his turn.

"That's all right," said Bunter, when John was gone. "Nobody knows it's for me, so that's all right. Hand it over, old chap."

"Better see if it's in good order first," said Wibley gravely. "I'll give it the once-over, Bunt. Alarm clocks ain't always reliable, and you don't want it to let you down."

Wibley proceeded to examine that alarm clock.

"Where are the other fellows now?" he asked.

"Down in the hall, jawing," answered Bunter.

Wibley's eyes glimmered.

The clock indicated half-past two. Wibley set the alarm for twenty-five minutes to three. In five minutes that alarm clock was destined to wake the echoes—if the alarm was wound up.

"Is it all right?" asked the Owl of the Remove, blinking at him.

"Right as rain!" said Wibley. "Don't forget to wind the alarm when you go to bed, old fat man."

"I'll watch it!" agreed Bunter.

"Like to sample those chocs, old fat bean?" asked Wibley, with a gesture towards a box of chocolate creams that lay on a table a little distance from the ottoman where he sat.

"Yes, rather!" answered Bunter promptly.

"Go ahead, then!"

Bunter rolled across to the table. As soon as his fat back was turned Wibley wound the alarm.

Crunch, crunch, crunch! came from Bunter at the table. It was two or three minutes before he looked round.

"I say, shall I finish them?" he asked. "There's only about a dozen."

"Do!" said Wibley.

Bunter finished them. Then he

rolled back to the ottoman, and stretched out a fat and sticky paw for the clock.

Wibley glanced at it as he handed it over. Bunter was happily unaware that it was wound or set. But it was both, and it indicated twenty-six minutes to three as Wibley handed it over. The alarm was due in exactly one minute.

Bunter put the clock under his arm and rolled to the door.

Wibley grinned after him as he went.

Bunter had to go down the passage to the gallery over the hall, and roll along the gallery to get to his room with that clock. He would, Wibley calculated, be about half-way along the oak gallery in a minute's time. And then—

Wibley chuckled, and listened. Bunter was keeping that alarm clock fearfully dark; but when sixty seconds had elapsed, Wibley had an idea that there were few inhabitants of Eastcliff Lodge who would remain in ignorance of the fact that the fat Owl was in possession of an alarm clock.

PLOT AND COUNTER-PLOT!

B UZZZZZZZZZZ!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry, looking up.

Buzzzzzz!

"What the dickens—"

"Oh crikey!" came a startled ejaculation, mingling with the loud, raucous buzz of the alarm clock.

The Famous Five, in astonishment, stared up at the oaken gallery over the hall of Eastcliff Lodge.

The sound of a buzzing alarm clock would not have been surprising at an early hour in the morning, but it was quite startling at twenty-five minutes to three in the afternoon.

"That fat ass—" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Bunter—"

Buzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz!

Through the interstices of the carved oak balustrade of the gallery, high up at the back of the hall, the surprised Co. could glimpse a fat figure.

They had not noticed Bunter, on his way from Sir William's room to his own, till the alarm clock sounded its loud and reverberating note. But that, naturally, drew their attention at once.

Bunter was half-way along the gallery when the alarm started. It made him jump.

The clock slipped from under a fat arm and dropped to the floor of the gallery with a bang.

But that bang did not stop the alarm. The alarm buzzed on, loud and unmelodious. It echoed far and wide. It reached Sir William's ears in his room; it reached five pairs of ears down in the hall; it reached many other ears. It buzzed and echoed and reverberated. It filled the air with sound.

"Blow the thing!" gasped Bunter.

He stooped and grabbed up the alarm clock. It buzzed and buzzed in his fat hands. He groped for the knob to turn off the alarm. His fat

fingers did not seem to find it. The alarm clock buzzed on merrily.

"What the thump are you up to, Bunter?" called out Bob Cherry.

"Nothing!" gasped Bunter. "It's all right. I—I haven't got an alarm clock here, you fellows!"

"What?" yelled Bob.

"I—I mean, I'm not taking it to my room. Blow the beastly thing! It must have been wound up! Blow it!"

Buzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz!

"What is that howling ass doing with an alarm clock?" asked Nugent blankly.

"Not going to get up early, at any rate!" grinned Bob.

Buzzzzzzzz!

The alarm faded out at last. The echoing buzz died away.

Billy Bunter, intensely exasperated, jammed it under his arm again. It was most unfortunate—for Bunter's deep-laid scheme—that that beastly alarm clock should have gone off just then. It had not occurred to Bunter that it was wound up—still less that it was set to go off at that precise moment. It was a surprise, and a most annoying one.

The fat junior blinked down over the balustrade.

"I say, you fellows," he squeaked, "I ain't going to take this alarm clock to my room! I've got no use for it, you know. The—the fact is, I'm going to lend it to Blump; he wants to get up early in the morning—see?"

"Oh, my hat!"

Blump had come out into the hall by the service door, and was staring up, the buzz having reached his portly ears.

The Owl of the Remove did not see him there as he blinked down at the Famous Five.

Having thus thrown the dust into their eyes, Bunter rolled onward with the alarm clock to his room, satisfied that he had allayed suspicion—if any.

"Dear me!" murmured Blump.

The Famous Five chuckled.

"So you're borrowing an alarm clock to turn out early, Blump?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Not at all, sir!" answered the butler. "I really fail to understand Master Bunter's remark. That must be the alarm clock that Sir William sent for a short time ago, as Master Bunter was with him. But it is certainly not for my use, sir!"

Blump went back by the service doorway, puzzled.

The Famous Five, however, were not puzzled. It was obvious to them that Bunter was up to something, which required the assistance of an alarm clock.

"What's that blithering idiot's game?" asked Bob Cherry. "He can't want to get up early in the morning—that's impossible! What has he got in his fat head now? When does he want to be woke up, and why?"

"That's what he wanted to see the old Bird for—getting an alarm clock, and we weren't to know!" chuckled Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter came rolling down the

stairs—minus the alarm clock, now safely parked in his room. He blinked anxiously at the Famous Five. He was very anxious that they should not suspect anything.

"I say, you fellows, I'm not going to use that alarm clock to-night," he said. "I got it from Wibley, you know, to lend to the butler—"

"You got it from Wibley—before the hols?"

"Oh! No! I—I mean, I—I unpacked it, to lend to the butler! I've had it all the time, you know! I haven't been to the old Bird's room about it, or anything of that sort."

"Oh crikey!"

"Blump happened to ask me if I'd an alarm clock, and I said I had, and I'd lend it to him, and that's all about it!" said Bunter, in an off-hand way. "See?"

"The seefulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"You're not getting up in the night for anything?" asked Bob Cherry gravely. "Not thinking of a lark of any kind?"

"Oh! No! I've just left that clock in my room for the butler to take when he goes up!"

"You haven't wound it for to-night?"

"Not at all, old chap! I haven't wound it, and I haven't set it for twelve o'clock, either! Why should I?"

"Oh scissors!" gasped Bob.

"Nothing of the kind," said Bunter. "If you hear anything in the night, it won't be me. I shall be fast asleep."

I don't suppose Soames will butt in again to-night. It's not likely, is it?"

"Soames?"

"I mean to say, I expect he's cleared off, you know," said Bunter, blinking at the Famous Five. "Don't you fellows lock your door to-night, or anything of that kind, because of Soames. I expect he's a hundred miles away by this time."

The Famous Five gazed at Bunter—suppressing their emotions with difficulty. They were getting an inkling of what was scheduled to occur that night at twelve o'clock!

"It's all right, you know!" assured Bunter. "You fellows go to sleep to-night as usual, and don't worry about Soames! He ain't anywhere about here now, and I don't suppose for a moment that he will butt into your room in the middle of the night and say 'Hands up!'"

"Oh, my Aunt Jemima!" gasped Bob.

"Not likely to happen, is it?" said Bunter breezily. "Don't you fellows worry! Of course, if it did happen, you'd jolly well be frightened out of your seven senses! He, he, he! But it's all right—don't you worry!"

And Bunter rolled back to his arm-chair by the fire and settled down there, satisfied that suspicion, if any, had been completely obliterated, and that all was set fair for his jape on the Famous Five in the hours of darkness.

"Let's get out!" gasped Bob Cherry. "I shall go off like that alarm clock in a tick."

The chums of the Remove restrained their mirth till they were out on the terrace. Then they roared.

"Ain't he deep?" gurgled Bob. "Ain't he a jolly old Machiavelli? Ain't he a schemer? Ain't he a plotter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He doesn't know that Blump heard him say he was lending that jolly old alarm clock to the butler—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he hasn't set it for twelve o'clock—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And he ain't going to sneak into our room in the middle of the night and say 'Hands up!' and frighten us out of our seven senses—"

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

"He ain't!" went on Bob, gurgling. "He thinks he is—but he ain't! When he comes rolling along the gallery at midnight, he's going to find five fellows sitting up for him—on that settee near our door—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"With pillows ready," said Bob, "and I don't think he will bother about saying 'Hands up!'—after we get going with the pillows!"

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

Billy Bunter was looking forward to that night with happy anticipation. So were the Famous Five. There was a counter-plot as well as a plot—and it remained to be seen which party was going to get the surprise!

CAUGHT IN THE DARK!

"ANYBODY sleepy?" murmured Johnny Bull.

"Yaw-aw-aw!"

Five fellows were fearfully sleepy. Three of them, in fact, were half-asleep. The other two were half-awake!

It was half-past eleven.

At that hour, all was dark and silent in Eastcliff Lodge. A considerable time ago the last door had shut, the last light had been turned off.

Black darkness filled the well of the great hall, and the old gallery above it. The five juniors, sitting in a row on the settee near the door of their room, could not see one another.

All the Co. had agreed that it was a bright idea to let Billy Bunter get on with his deep-laid plot—and to catch him in the act! When the plotting Owl ran into five swiping pillows, they had no doubt that he would be tired of nocturnal stunts and would cease to lay schemes for japing fellows in the middle of the night.

But that idea, which had seemed quite bright when they chuckled over it in the afternoon, did not seem quite so bright as the witching hour of midnight drew nigh.

At half-past ten they were sleepy. At eleven they were fearfully sleepy! At half-past eleven they could hardly keep awake. A whirring chime from the clock in the hall warned them that they had yet another half-hour to wait for Bunter. It seemed an awfully long time.

However, having started, they were not going to give in. They yawned, they nodded, they dropped off drowsily every now and then—but they were determined to sit it out.

Bunter, all that time, was enjoying balmy slumber. He was going on enjoying it, till the alarm clock roused him out. He had put that alarm clock close to his pillow to make sure that it would wake him. Meanwhile, he slept and snored contentedly—much more contentedly than the Famous Five, who sat in the dark gallery and waited for him.

"Bother him!" murmured Bob Cherry, after a long silence.

"Your idea, old man!" murmured Nugent, with a drowsy chuckle.

"Won't I jolly well swipe him when he comes!" breathed Johnny Bull. "I'm as sleepy as anything."

"The sleepiness is truly terrific! What is the ridiculous time now?" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Goodness knows, till the clock chimes again!" said Harry Wharton. "But it must be getting towards twelve—better shut up or that fat chump will hear us when he turns out! We don't want to lose him, after sitting up for him."

"By gum—no!" said Bob. "Quiet—it can't be much longer!"

And the sleepy five sat in sleepy silence.

Harry Wharton grinned as he heard a sound of regular breathing on either side of him. Nugent on one side, and Hurree Singh on the other, had nodded off to sleep on the settee.

The captain of the Greyfriars Remove rubbed his eyes to keep awake,

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He listened longingly for the sound of twelve chiming from the clock in the hall. But it seemed long in coming.

"Any of you awake?" he whispered at last.

No reply.

Four fellows had nodded off. Wharton was very near it himself. But he kept awake, and listened for the chime that was so long in coming.

A sound came to his ears from the stillness, and he started into wide wakefulness. It was not the chime—it was not yet twelve!

But there was a sound in the old oak gallery.

Wharton listened intently.

Bunter, so far as the juniors knew, had intended to set his alarm for midnight. But it would be like Bunter to set it a little wrong. He might, after all, come earlier! Harry Wharton hoped that he would! He was more than tired of sitting there in the dark, waiting for the fat Owl.

Certainly, there was a sound. It sounded like a soft footfall.

It seemed to Wharton to come from the direction of the staircase; but it was not easy to spot the direction of that faint sound in the stillness. It could hardly be anybody but Bunter.

Faintly, from the darkness in front of him, he caught the sound, and realised that the unseen walker in the dark was going to pass on. That was Bunter all over—to miss his objective in the dark and have to grope back for it!

The captain of the Remove grinned, and stepped silently forward.

Bunter—if it was Bunter!—was passing, but he was not going to pass! A swiping pillow was going to stop that!

He heard a quick breath in the dark. He was not seen or heard, but the unseen prowler had sensed his presence. But it was too late—the pillow was swiping.

Swipe!

There was a startled howl as the pillow established contact with an unseen head, and an unseen figure went staggering.

Bump!

"Got him!" gasped Wharton.

The bump on the floor instantly awakened four fellows who had nodded off.

The four bounded up, pillows in hand.

Swipe! went Wharton's pillow again, landing on the unseen figure sprawling at his feet. That figure seemed to be in the act of scrambling up, and the second swipe floored it again, and there was another bump on the hard oak.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Where—"

"This way!"

"Show a light—you've got the light, Bob!" called Wharton.

There was a gleam of brightness from Bob Cherry's flashlamp as he turned it on! Now that the raider was in the toils, a light could be shown—and was needed for the pillowing.

The light from the flashlamp streamed on the sprawling figure on the floor of the oak gallery. It lighted up a startled, furious face.

Then there was a yell of surprise from the juniors.

They expected to see a fat figure sprawling there, and a pair of big spectacles flashing back the light. But they saw nothing of the kind. It was not—as they had never dreamed of doubting—Billy Bunter.

What they saw was a clear-cut face—a face they knew—though at the moment it was convulsed with surprise and rage. From all the Famous Five came a yell of amazement.

"Soames!"

VANISHED!

"SOAMES!"

Harry Wharton & Co. stood staring blankly at the man sprawling before their eyes. It was James Soames, panting breathless, pale with rage.

Had it been Bunter, the pillows would have been swiping at once. But the juniors forgot Bunter now, and forgot the pillows. They stared almost in stupefaction at Soames.

But it was only for a moment that he sprawled there, panting, the light streaming on his furious face. Then he bounded to his feet with the activity of a cat.

"It—it's Soames!" panted Bob.

"Collar him!" exclaimed Wharton. He leaped at the man, even as Soames got on his feet.

It was Soames—prowling at midnight in Sir William Bird's mansion! Why he was there, what his game was, the juniors had no idea. But, obviously, his game, whatever it was, was a rascally one—and he had to be secured. The captain of the Remove leaped at him, dropping his pillow, and grasping at the rascal with both hands. And only a swift backward leap saved Soames from that swift grasp.

He backed against the balustrade, panting. His eyes glinted in the light as Bob kept it on his face. His lips were drawn back in a snarl, showing his teeth like a savage animal's.

"Bag him!" breathed Johnny Bull.

The five juniors rushed together.

Soames did not wait for the rush; he dodged along the balustrade, towards the stairs. But this time Wharton's gasp fastened on his arm and dragged him round.

The next moment Soames was struggling in the midst of the five schoolboys. The flashlamp went with a crash to the floor, and went out, leaving them in dense darkness.

"Look out!"

"Hold him!"

"Is that you?"

"What—"

It was a wild, blind struggle in the dark, in which Soames had one advantage—the juniors, unable to see him, grasped at one another as much as at Soames.

The whole bunch went sprawling on the floor, and Wharton's grasp on the man was lost. He grasped again and grabbed a head of hair, and there was a yell—from Bob Cherry!

"Ow!"

"I've got him!" panted Johnny Bull. "I've got hold of his ear—"

"Leggo!" came a howl from Nugent. "That's my ear!"

"Oh!"

Harry Wharton scrambled up and groped for the lighting-switch at the stairhead. It was impossible to know which was which in the dark—and Soames might be already getting away.

He found the switch and flashed on the light. The oak gallery was suddenly illuminated. Wharton stared round—at four gasping schoolboys. Soames was not to be seen.

"Gone!" panted Bob, staring round. "He's got away!"

Soames was not in the gallery. Evidently, he had not lost a second after wrenching himself loose. The instant he was free he had darted away in the darkness, leaving the schoolboys grasping at one another.

"Come on!" exclaimed Harry breathlessly.

He ran to the stairs.

Soames had vanished, but Wharton had no doubt that he had cut down the stairs to escape. He could hardly be thinking of anything but escape now.

The captain of the Remove ran down the stairs, his comrades at his heels, all keen to get hold of Soames before he could escape from the building. It seemed hardly possible that he could have got out yet in those few moments.

In the hall, Wharton switched on another light. It gleamed on armoured figures that adorned the hall, on armchairs and other furniture, on curtained windows; but there was no sign of Soames.

The juniors stared round breathlessly.

"He can't have got away—yet!" panted Bob.

They hunted through the wide hall, peering into corners.

The service door opened, and Blump, half-dressed and astonished, came in, rubbing his eyes and blinking at the excited juniors.

"What—" gasped the butler.

Harry Wharton hastily explained. Blump promptly called up John and Thomas and Charles, lights flashed on all over the ground floor of East-cliff Lodge, and there was a search in every room and corridor.

"Had we better call Sir William?" asked Bob.

Wharton shook his head.

"No need to disturb the old bean—he couldn't do anything! Looks as if Soames has done the vanishing trick."

There seemed no doubt on that point, for the search was quite fruitless. There was no sign or sound of Soames, and it was clear that he had got away, wherever he was.

Butler and footmen gave it up at last, and went back to bed, and the Famous Five returned to their own quarters.

Certainly they did not dream of suspecting that, in the valet's room adjoining Sir William's, a man was listening breathlessly within a locked door, listening in dread lest the search might take that direction. But

no one thought, or dreamed, of looking in Jermyn's room for Soames—the baronet's man was safe from discovery!

"BUNTER!"

"Oh, my hat!"
"The esteemed and idiotic Bunter!"

Harry Wharton & Co. had completely forgotten Bunter—the cause of their vigil that night, which had

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FRANK RICHARDS and I have something really good for you all next week—a rattling yarn which opens with a big thrill. Harry Wharton & Co. find themselves, for tense minutes, entirely at the mercy of a ruthless enemy. In deadly peril as they are, they keep their heads, and the situation is saved by the quick-witted action of that cool customer Hurree Singh. Thrills continue as the story unfolds, and there is a lot of fun as well. You will find in

"THE UNSEEN ENEMY!"

just the story to thrill and amuse you—to take you out of yourself and put you in a good humour with the world.

A WORD TO THE WISE!

I want to draw your attention to the grand opportunity offered to you all by the publication in this month's "Schoolboys' Own Library" of two full book-length stories by your favourite author, Frank Richards. Both these stories rank with Mr. Richards' best, and should not be missed by any keen Magnetite. The titles are "The Man From The Sky," and "The Secret of the Silver Box."

The third of this month's "Schoolboys' Own" volumes is "The St. Frank's Caravanners," one of Edwy Searles' Brooks' brightest and breeziest yarns. There are hours of enjoyable reading in these fine books. Make a note to ask your newsagent to-day to get these for you! Wartime price, 4d. per volume.

YOUR EDITOR.

led to the discovery of Soames. The clock in the hall had chimed midnight, unheeded, during the search. But now, as they gathered at the door of their room, they were reminded of the fat Owl by the sight of a rotund figure rolling out of Bunter's doorway, and heading in their direction.

The alarm clock had done its appointed task in Bunter's room. The fat Owl had turned out. Now he was coming.

The Famous Five grinned, and grabbed up their pillows. They had lost Soames, but they were not going to lose Bunter.

They rushed, all together.

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

"Ow! Yaroooh! Stoppit!" roared Bunter, as the pillows smote. "I tell you I wasn't going to— Yoo-hoo-hoo!"

Swipe, swipe!

"Wow! Beasts! Oh crikey! Yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter fled. Somehow—Bunter could not guess how—the beasts knew that he was coming! It was really extraordinary, as Bunter had kept it dark so very carefully. Still, it was clear that, somehow, they knew! They had their pillows all ready for him, and they were swiping with those pillows—hard!

Yelling, the fat Owl fled back to his room. After him rushed five chortling juniors, still swiping with the pillows.

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

"Oh, scissors! Oh crikey! Wow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Give him a few more!"

Swipe, swipe, swipe!

"Yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter bolted into his room and dived under the bed.

Bunter had had all he wanted, and a little over, and he was fed-up with midnight japes!

Billy Bunter did not always know when he had had enough, but on this occasion he had no doubt about it, and he was quite sure that he did not want any more!

THE END.

(Don't miss "THE UNSEEN ENEMY," next week's thriller in this great holiday series. Order it in advance!)

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