

Starting Shortly! "THE BOYS WHO BEAT THE KAISER!"

# The BOYS' FRIEND 1<sup>d</sup> 1<sup>2</sup>

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THREE HALFPENCE.

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## THE HAUNTED CARAVAN!

A MAGNIFICENT NEW LONG COMPLETE TALE OF JIMMY SILVER & CO. AT ROOKWOOD SCHOOL.

By OWEN CONQUEST.

### The 1st Chapter. A Very Happy Meeting.

"I say, you fellows!" Jimmy Silver & Co. looked round quickly.

The Rookwood caravanners had halted on the long white road that wound over the Downs towards the sea.

Robinson Crusoe, the horse, was cropping contentedly at the grass by the roadside.

Tubby Muffin was seated on a sloping shaft, industriously extracting the last fragment of the contents of a condensed milk-tin with a spoon, and transferring it to his capacious mouth, and the Fistical Four were discussing bread and cheese.

The caravanners had been in luck. Lovell had found a farmhouse where cheese had been obtainable, and Raby had brought in a loaf which, although war-bread, was not quite so warlike as most war-bread.

Newcome had succeeded in purchasing a huge bundle of lettuces, and Jimmy Silver had bagged a big jug of milk.

So the Fistical Four were enjoying their lunch, with verdant fields stretching before their eyes to the deep blue of the Channel in the distance.

They heard a bicycle on the road, but did not heed it; bikes were many.

They heard it stop, but still did not heed, the bread and cheese and lettuces engrossing all their attention.

But they started when a fat voice addressed them, a voice they knew.

As the caravanners glanced round in surprise they saw the cyclist.

He was a fat fellow, with a rotundity of figure that far outclassed that of Tubby Muffin.

A pair of big glasses adorned his fat little nose, and he blinked through them at the Rookwooders with much affability.

"Hallo!" said Jimmy Silver.

"Fancy meeting you!" said the fat cyclist. "How do you do, old scout?"

"I've seen you before somewhere," remarked Arthur Edward Lovell.

"Oh, really, you know—"

"Lemme see," remarked Raby thoughtfully. "You're the butcher's boy, ain't you?"

"Oh, don't be funny, you know! You remember Bunter of Greyfriars—Billy Bunter, you know, of the Remove?" said the fat junior. "I came to see you at Rookwood in the term. Fancy meeting you here!"

"Fancy!" yawned Lovell.

Jimmy Silver & Co. did not look enthusiastic.

They remembered Billy Bunter of Greyfriars quite well.

In fact, they remembered him too well to feel any special satisfaction in meeting him again.

But Billy Bunter did not notice the absence of enthusiasm on the part of the Rookwood juniors. Possibly he was determined not to notice it.

"Caravanning?" he asked affably,

"How did you guess that?" asked Raby.

"Well, that thing is a caravan, isn't it?" asked Bunter, with a nod towards the van. "I say, you fellows, it's rather jolly caravanning, isn't it?"

"Topping!" said Jimmy Silver.

"We're staying at Beachcliff," said Bunter. "My people, you know. Having a tremendous time."

"Glad to hear it!" yawned Jimmy Silver.

"I haven't had my lunch," observed Bunter.

"Join us!" said Jimmy hospitably.

Tubby Muffin looked alarmed. His own performances at lunch were very creditable, but they were not a patch on what William George

Bunter of the Greyfriars Remove could do.

But the Fistical Four, though they did not yearn for Bunter's society, were hospitable, and they made him welcome.

"Well, as you're so pressing, I will," said Bunter. "How jolly lucky that I should happen on you fellows here, wasn't it?"

"Awfully."

"I thought I knew you as I came along," said Bunter. "Jolly glad to see you again. I say, this is ripping cheese. I haven't tasted cheese for a week. All right; I'll help myself, Jimmy, old chap."

"Do!" said Jimmy.

Bunter did.

Tubby Muffin's fat face grew longer, though the other caravanners only smiled.

Tubby wasn't inhospitable, but war-time was war-time, and it was only too painfully clear that there wouldn't be any cheese for supper now.

Bunter took a camp-stool, which creaked under his weight.

He blinked most affably at the Rookwooders as he started.

It was a very fortunate meeting, from Billy's point of view.

"Bit rough caravanning in war-time, I should think," he remarked. "Grub rather short sometimes—what?"

"Sometimes," agreed Jimmy.

"I suppose you manage to pick up rationed stuff without food-cards at times, though?" said Bunter, with a fat wink.

"Certainly not!"

"Don't get a chance, eh?"

"We're not looking for chances of that kind."

"Well, you must be a duffer, then!" said Bunter agreeably. "Got any butter?"

"Sorry—no."

"All serene; I can rough it," said Bunter. "I'll finish the cheese, if you don't mind."

"Not at all," said Jimmy Silver politely.

There was a faint sound from Tubby Muffin, a peculiar sound between a sigh and a groan. Bunter blinked round at him.

"Got a pain?" he asked sympathetically.



A BIFFING FOR BILLY BUNTER!

"Nunno!" gasped Tubby.

"I say, that's a good idea, finishing up with condensed milk," said Bunter. "You can get me a couple of tins if you like. I like it."

"I'm afraid we've only one tin left," said Lovell, with studied politeness.

"My dear chap, don't mention it! I'll manage with one."

"Oh!"

"I dare say one of you chaps will open it for me."

"C-c-certainly!"

"There's a lot of sustenance in condensed milk," Bunter confided to his hosts, as he started with a spoon. "I make it a point to get all I can. I say, you fellows, I'm really glad to see you again. How lucky that you stopped on this road for lunch!"

"Yes, wasn't it?"

"Now, that's what I call a decent lunch for war-time, you know," said Bunter, when he had finished the tin. "It will keep me going till I get home to lunch at Beachcliff."

"I—I hope it will."

"You should take some things in tins when you go caravanning," said Bunter. "They come in handy—pineapple and peaches, and things like that."

"We've got some," said Raby.

"Good! I could do with a little more, I admit."

Raby, with a peculiar expression on his face, fetched a tin of pineapple out of the caravan, and placed it before Bunter.

That cheery youth disposed of it in a very short space of time.

"Any more like that?" he asked.

"Yes; we've another."

"Trot it out, old nut. Don't mind me. I can put up with almost anything in war-time."

Tubby Muffin's expression was almost heartrending as Bunter started on the second and only pineapple. He finished it cheerfully.

"Anything else you'd like, Bunter?" asked Lovell.

Tubby Muffin gave Lovell an almost homicidal look.

"Oh, any old thing," said Bunter. "Anything in the way of chocolates.

You should always take chocolates in a caravan. They come in handy when grub runs short."

"Is there any chocolate left, Tubby?" asked Jimmy Silver.

"Nunno!"

"Sorry, Bunter!"

"Oh, don't mench!" said Bunter. "I say, you fellows, if you travel near my home when I'm at home you must camp in the park, and come up to the mansion for your meals."

"Certainly!" said Lovell. "Where do you live?"

Bunter was afflicted with a sudden deafness.

"Which way are you going on from here?" he asked.

"Down the road."

"Good! I'll come with you part of the way," said Bunter.

"You'll be late for lunch if you do," said Raby, with deep sarcasm.

"Oh, that's all right! I dare say you've got a snack in the caravan if I get peckish. You fellows lift my bike on the van, and I'll take a snooze inside for a bit—see?"

"Oh!"

Billy Bunter rolled into the caravan.

Jimmy Silver & Co. looked at one another.

But they did not speak.

Bunter's bike was lifted on the van, and the horse was put in, and the Rookwood caravanners resumed their route—Bunter snoozing in the van, and the Rookwooders feeling very pleased—perhaps—with that chance meeting which had bestowed upon them the entertaining company of the Owl of Greyfriars.

### The 2nd Chapter. Nice for the Caravanners.

Billy Bunter blinked out of the van about an hour later.

Apparently his nap had done him good, for he looked very cheery and bright.

"I say, you fellows!" he remarked. The Rookwood juniors were walking with the horse, and they did not seem to hear Bunter.

He jumped down, and joined the caravanners.

"You seem to do a lot of walking!" he remarked.

"Caravanners generally do."

"Well, I suppose so with a little van like that," agreed Bunter.

"When I go caravanning I have a whacking big van."

"How nice!" murmured Jimmy Silver.

"I suppose that old crock couldn't pull the lot of you?" remarked Bunter, with a disparaging blink at Robinson Crusoe.

"He isn't exactly a crock," said Jimmy mildly.

"Well, perhaps not; but nothing like the caravan horses I'm used to," said Bunter. "We do it rather in style."

"Oh!"

This agreeable and genial conversation did not have the effect of making the Rookwooders chatty.

They seemed to dry up somehow.

But Billy Bunter did not mind. He was quite able to keep up enough conversation for five.

"I say, you fellows, I've been thinking," he remarked. "I'm a bit fed up with Beachcliff. I'd like a change."

"So would we!" murmured Raby.

"I suppose we shall pass a post-office sooner or later?" Bunter remarked.

"Very likely."

"Then I could send a telegram."

"Eh?"

"The fact is, I'm thinking of joining you fellows for a few days," said Bunter kindly. "It would be a rather agreeable change."

"My hat!"

"I'm not a particular chap," continued Bunter. "You'll find me able to rough it. All I really want is plenty to eat and comfortable sleeping-quarters and no work to do."

"Really?"

"Yes, really, you know. I think I could give you till the end of the week," said Bunter thoughtfully. "After that I'm afraid I couldn't put off my social engagements any longer. But you can count on me till the end of the week."

(Continued on the next page.)





THE HAUNTED CARAVAN!

(Continued from the previous page.)

"Oh!" gasped Lovell. "Of course, I shall stand my whack in the expenses," added Bunter. "You see that that would be essential. When I leave you I shall send you a postal-order for the full amount. I must insist upon that."

Jimmy Silver wrinkled his brows. As a matter of fact, Lovell's suspicion was in Jimmy Silver's mind, too. He knew that Billy Bunter was a sticker, and that he was as thick-skinned as a rhinoceros.

When it stopped Billy Bunter blinked out of the caravan. Jimmy Silver & Co. had halted in a village street, outside a shop which was a grocer's and a post-office, and several other things.

There was no need for Bunter to phone or wire if he was going back to Beachcliff that day. Evidently that was not his intention.

It was too good a chance to get rid of Bunter to be missed. In a twinkling Bunter's bike was handed down and lodged against a tree outside the village post-office.

The 3rd Chapter. Bunter Sticks.

"Ha, ha, ha!" The Fistical Four laughed loud and long as they swung merrily along the white road.

An hour had passed, and they were quite comfortable in their minds, when there was the jingle of a bicycle on the road behind them, and Lovell glanced back apprehensively.

"Bunter!" he ejaculated. There he was! He came up with a rush, in a cloud of dust, and jumped off his machine.

"Well, not quite. We're in rather a nobby and exclusive circle there, and I should hardly care to be seen caravanning with a turnout like this. You don't mind my saying so, I'm sure."

"Don't worry; I can rough it." "We couldn't think of allowing you to rough it, for our sakes," said Lovell, with a shake of the head.

Even Jimmy Silver, who erred a little on the side of being easy-going, did not feel called upon to endure the infliction of Bunter's society.

"I-I say, you fellows, if you're joking—"

Jimmy Silver & Co. stared after him. They had put it to Bunter as politely as they could, but they had put it unmistakably, and they had expected the fat junior of Greyfriars to take his bike and his departure.

"I had to inquire twice of people after your caravan; no missing that," remarked Bunter. "I say, you fellows, when are you going to have tea?"

At the next village the caravanners stopped for such supplies as were to be had, and Bunter climbed into the van. He had had enough of walking.

"Oh, shove it on the van somewhere!" answered Bunter. "Rats!" Bunter coughed.

Under the westerly sun the caravanners pursued their way, chatting cheerily as they went, and forgetting the presence of Bunter, who was taking another snooze in the van.

His grim mood towards Billy Bunter relaxed a little. It really did seem a thoughtful suggestion on the part of the Owl.

"Wouldn't you like to come, too, Bunter?" asked Raby considerably. "Oh, I've seen the place!" said Bunter carelessly.

"The idea of William the Conqueror at the Battle of Majuba Hill tickled the Fistical Four.

"Sure you don't mean the Battle of the Somme?" inquired Lovell. "Oh, really, you fellows—"

Quite oblivious of Billy Bunter's occupation, Jimmy Silver & Co. strolled on cheerily through the pleasant-scented wood.

"I suppose the fathead was making a mistake. Hallo, here's a man! Let's ask him, anyhow."

"That unutterable fat idiot was pulling our leg!" he exclaimed. "He's sent us on a wild-goose chase."

"It may be the Greyfriars brand of humour. I'll squash him!" "I suppose he's made a mistake. He's idiot enough," said Jimmy.

The parcels of the late purchases made by the caravanners had been opened, and their contents were now the contents of Billy Bunter's capacious inside.

The caravan larder had been cleared, and several empty tins showed that Bunter had "done himself" not wisely but too well.

"The dismal howl awakened the Owl of Greyfriars. He sat up, set his spectacles straight on his fat, little nose, and blinked at the caravanners genially.

The 4th Chapter. Bunter is Indignant.

They understood now why the Owl of the Remove had sent them on a wild-goose chase in search of a non-existent Norman castle.

"You fat villain!" gasped Lovell, finding his voice. "You Hun!" wailed Tubby Muffin. "You horrid Prussian!"

"After all, he's a guest, in a way," murmured Jimmy Silver. "Don't kill him. Get his bike down, and let him go."

"I-I think I—I made a mistake," murmured Bunter. "Now I come to think of it, it—it's in a different part of the country."

"You were pulling our leg, you fat Hun! Now you're going to be scalped!" Lovell collared the Owl of Greyfriars, and bumped him out into the road.

"I-I say, you fellows—"

"I decline to remain in your company any longer than is absolutely unavoidable! I may say that I despise you! After pressing me to join you—"

"I told you plainly that I wasn't accustomed to travelling with a turnout of this sort!" said Bunter. "I mentioned that it would be awkward for me, if any of my nobby friends saw me with such a show. I may as well say plainly, too, that I don't think much of Rookwood manners! Not quite up to the Greyfriars' standard, I can assure you!"

"You fat owl!" yelled Newcome. "I was going to say—"

"You'll go now, late or not, or I'll squash you!" shouted Lovell. "Easy does it!" murmured Jimmy Silver. "I dare say the blind owl can't get home in the dark, Lovell."

THE MOST AMAZING STORY FOR BOYS EVER WRITTEN! THE BOYS WHO BEAT THE KAISER. STARTS IN THE "BOYS' FRIEND" IN TWO WEEKS' TIME!



And with that he climbed back into the van.  
The caravanners moved on.  
The sun was setting, and twilight reigned, and it was necessary to look for a camping-place.  
There was little hope of getting fresh supplies for supper.  
They had the happy prospect of going supperless to bed, and starting in the morning minus breakfast.  
Their feelings towards William George Bunter of Greyfriars were positively Hunnish. But they were not more Hunnish than Bunter's feelings towards them.

### The 5th Chapter. Mysterious!

"This will do," said Jimmy Silver at last.  
It was dark now, and stars were twinkling in the sky.  
A stretch of open grass by the roadside offered a camping-place, and the caravanners were tired, and ready to rest.  
They were hungry, too, but for that there was no remedy.  
Bunter had cleared out the caravan larder almost to the last crumb.  
Jimmy Silver led Robinson Crusoe from the road, and the caravan bumped on the grass.  
Billy Bunter blinked out of the van, his eyes gleaming behind his big spectacles.  
The ventriloquist of Greyfriars had a little scheme all ready for discomfiting the Rookwood caravanners.  
"Going to stop here, Silver?" he called out.  
"Yes," snapped Jimmy.  
"Got anything for supper?"  
"No."  
"Hadn't you better keep on, then?"  
"Rats!"  
"May come to a village, you know, or a farmhouse, and get something for supper," urged Bunter anxiously.  
"Oh, dry up!"  
"If you call that civil, Silver—"  
"Rats!"  
Even Jimmy Silver's patience was worn out, the fact that he was very hungry probably having something to do with it.

The van bumped on over the grass, and stopped not far from the road. Round the grass patch nothing was to be seen but trees and bushes.  
From the shadows a deep, gruff voice suddenly proceeded.  
"Now, then, you gipsy vagabonds, get out of this!"  
Jimmy Silver started, and looked round.  
"Hallo, who's that?"  
"I'll show you who I am if I have to come to you!" came the gruff reply.  
"You're on private land. Get off, or I'll fetch the police!"  
"Oh, what rotten luck!" groaned Lovell.  
"Look here, why can't we camp here?" exclaimed Jimmy Silver warmly. "Come out and show yourself, anyway."  
"I've warned you!" was the gruff reply.  
"Who are you?" demanded Lovell.  
There was no answer; the man apparently was gone. Billy Bunter drew his head back into the van, grinning.  
The caravanners looked at one another.  
"Let's stop here," said Lovell indignantly. "We're doing no harm. Why can't the man show himself if the place belongs to him?"  
"Better get off," said Raby uneasily. "He may be gone for the police. I suppose this is private land, as he says."  
"Some rotten land-hog!" grunted Lovell.  
"Well, we're not out to solve the land question," grinned Raby. "Let's get off before there's a row. Can't argue with bobbies."  
Jimmy Silver nodded.  
"Better!" he agreed.  
Lovell grunted, but he assented. The horse was led into the road again, and the caravan rumbled on. A fat chuckle was heard from within the vehicle.  
"That fat Greyfriars beast thinks it's funny!" muttered Lovell, breathing hard through his nose.  
"Oh, never mind him!"  
The tired caravanners marched on.  
Tubby Muffin was in the van with Bunter now, but the Fistical Four were walking.

The road ran on between dark woods, and there was no camping-place to be found for several weary miles.  
"I think this will do," Jimmy Silver said at last.  
It was a cross-roads, with a signpost standing in the centre, surrounded by a wide patch of grass.  
The caravan was turned from the road upon the grass-patch. There was plenty of room for it, and it was out of the way of traffic.  
It was not an ideal camping-place, by any means, but the caravanners were too tired to care much about that.  
Moreover, there was no need to light a fire, as there was no supper. They had nothing to do but to turn in.  
Bunter's big spectacles glimmered from the van.  
"I say, you fellows, ain't you going on?" he asked.  
"No!"  
"Suppose that bobby comes along?"  
"It wasn't a bobby; and I don't care a rap whether he comes back or not!" hooted Lovell.  
"I don't think you'd better stop here, Lovell. You see—"  
"You can think what you like, you fat toad! We're stopping!"  
"Oh, really, Lovell—"  
"Shut up!"  
Lovell dragged out the tent, and the juniors began to set it up beside the van.  
Billy Bunter watched them morosely. He would gladly have kept the caravan going all night in the faint hope of getting fresh supplies for supper.  
Marvellous to relate, Bunter was getting hungry again. But the caravanners were evidently resolved to halt there for the night.

"I say, you fellows, I suppose you don't want me to sleep in the tent?" said Bunter, as he watched the juniors at work. "This van isn't up to much, but I can manage with it."  
"You needn't sleep at all, for all I care!" snapped Lovell.  
"Well, I'm staying in the van."  
"Stay, and be blown!"  
"Move on, there, you vagabonds!" came a gruff voice from the shadows.  
Lovell glared round in great exasperation.

"There's that chap again!" he exclaimed. "By gad, if I could get near enough to hit him—"  
"It must be some blessed tramp having a lark with us," said Jimmy Silver, in perplexity. "If it was a bobby he'd show himself."  
"Bobby or not, I'll give him a prize nose if he comes near enough!" said Lovell, between his teeth.  
"Are you going to move on?" demanded the gruff voice.  
"No!" yelled Lovell.  
"Then I'll run you in!"  
"Come and do it!"

The owner of the gruff voice did not accept that invitation. He was heard no more, and the tent was erected.  
Tubby Muffin had already turned in, in one of the two bunks in the caravan, the other being left for Billy Bunter.  
But the Owl of Greyfriars seemed in no hurry to retire. He watched the Fistical Four through his big spectacles till the tent was finished, and they were ready to go to bed.  
"By Jove, I shall sleep like a top tonight, supper or no supper," yawned Jimmy Silver. "We'd better be up early, before folks begin to pass by. You can go to bed in the van, Bunter."  
"What about supper?"  
"There isn't any supper, you owl! You've scoffed all the grub, haven't you?"  
"If you call this hospitality, Jimmy Silver—"

Grr-r-r-r!  
Lovell sat up suddenly in his blankets. "What's that?" he exclaimed.  
"A blessed dog nosing about outside," yawned Jimmy Silver. "Let him nose! He can't get in here."  
Gerrrr!  
"Shoo!" shouted Lovell. "Get away, you beast! Shooooo!"  
A deep growl outside answered him.  
It was followed by a bark, and then another bark and a growl, and then growling went on incessantly.  
Lovell jumped up.  
"I can't sleep with that thumping row going on!" he exclaimed.  
"Drive him off!" murmured Raby sleepily.

Lovell grasped his pillow, and cautiously peered out of the tent.  
Arthur Edward was always kind to animals, but just then he wanted to give that dog a terrific "cosh" with the pillow.

But there was no dog to be seen. "The brute's gone!" growled Lovell. Gurrhr!  
"Oh, my hat! There he is again!" Lovell dashed out of the tent.  
The growling was going on in the deep gloom, and it seemed to recede towards the caravan, and Lovell followed it up, with the pillow ready.

Gurrhr!  
"He's under the van!" called out Bunter's voice. "I say, you fellows, you might drive that dog off. How's a fellow to sleep?"  
"I'm driving him off, you fat fool!" snorted Lovell.  
Gurrhr!  
Lovell peered under the van, where the dog had apparently taken refuge. It was dark there, too dark to see anything but the faint outline of the wheels.  
"Shoo! Gerraway! Shoo!"  
Gurrhr!  
"My hat! I'll simply smash the beast!" gasped Lovell. "Where's some-

"Jimmy Silver!" shouted Lovell.  
"Hallo!"  
"Bring your flash-lamp here. I—I'm afraid I've hurt the poor beast!" stammered Lovell.  
"Oh, dear!"  
Jimmy Silver emerged from the tent, with his electric lamp in his hand, followed by Raby and Newcome.  
Lovell's face was troubled.  
"I—I didn't really mean to hurt him," he faltered. "I just shoved under the van with the stick to clear him off. I—I must have hit him somewhere. Listen to him!"  
Jimmy Silver's face was very grave as he heard that low, miserable whine under the van.

Bunter's glasses glimmered down accusingly.  
"You've knocked his eye out, Lovell!" he said. "You've hurt him badly! It's too bad! This will have to be reported to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. I'm sorry, but it's my duty—"

Lovell hurled his pillow, and Bunter broke off with a yell.  
"I can't hear him now," said Jimmy Silver, flashing his light under the van. "Blest if I can see him, either! Where is he, Lovell?"  
"Blest if I know! He's there somewhere."

"Well, where?"  
The juniors stared under the van as the electric light showed up every dark recess, and showed it to be vacant.  
There was no dog to be seen.  
Lovell rubbed his eyes.  
"Is the blessed place haunted?" he muttered.

A gruff voice came from the darkness. "Shut off that light, you young rascal! Are you trying to signal to Zeppelins?"  
Jimmy Silver spun round.  
There was no one to be seen.  
Jimmy shut off the light.  
"Who is it—where is he—what the thump does it mean?" exclaimed Raby.



Lovell's face became fixed, and simply terrific in expression, as he caught sight of Billy Bunter. He could scarcely believe his eyes.

"Oh, dry up!"  
Jimmy Silver & Co. went into the tent. As the tent-flap fell into place the gruff voice was heard just outside.  
"Here they are, officer! Pull the tent down, and take the whole gang into custody!"

### The 6th Chapter. Haunted!

"My hat!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver. He tore open the tent-flap again. Lovell grasped a pillow and rushed out, breathing wrath.  
"Where are you, you rotter?" roared Lovell, staring about him.  
"Show yourself, you beast!" hooted Newcome.

But there was nobody to be seen. Billy Bunter blinked out of the caravan.  
"I say, you fellows, what's the row?" he asked.  
"Did you see anybody here?" asked Raby.  
"Eh? No."  
"There's somebody hanging about."  
"Hadn't you better move on?" suggested Bunter. "We may come to a place where we can get some grub—"  
"Shut up!" shrieked Lovell. "If you say another word about grub, I'll come and pillow you!"  
Jimmy Silver blinked round him into the darkness in utter perplexity.  
Unless the caravanners were being worried by some tramp with a misplaced sense of humour, Jimmy could not understand it at all.  
"Well, the fellow's gone," he said at last. "Let's get to bed."  
"Don't I wish I could catch him!" murmured Lovell. "I'd give a term's pocket-money to give him one good cosh!"  
But the desired "cosh" could not be given, and the caravanners went into the tent again.  
They turned in, and Jimmy Silver blew out the candle.

thing I can poke him with? Oh, thunder! I'll smash him!"  
Lovell snorted and threw down his pillow.  
"There's a stick in the van, Bunter; chuck it out!" he called out.  
"Certainly!" purred Bunter.  
"Buck up, lazybones!"  
"Here you are!"  
Whiz!

"Yaroooh!" roared Lovell, as he caught the stick—with his head. "You clumsy idiot! What are you bunging it at me for?"  
"You told me to chuck it out."  
Lovell grasped the stick and rushed towards the van. Bunter promptly backed out of sight.  
The growling under the caravan had ceased for some moments, but it recommenced now, and Lovell turned his attention to the unseen dog again.  
He leaned down by the wheels and thrust the stick savagely under the van.  
"There, you beast! There, you brute!" he gasped, as he prodded away fiercely into the darkness.  
The growling ceased, and there was a low whine, as of deep anguish.  
Lovell suddenly ceased to prod.

Whine!  
That sound of pain smote Lovell's conscience, and his wrath evaporated at once.  
He had not really meant to hurt the dog, but the agonised whine seemed to show that he had hurt it very much indeed.  
"Oh, I say, you brute!" exclaimed Bunter from above. "You've knocked his eye out, very likely."  
"Shut up!" panted Lovell.  
"Listen to the poor animal!" said Bunter, with virtuous indignation.  
Whine!  
"Oh, dear!" Lovell dropped the stick and peered under the van. "Good doggie! Good old doggie! Poor old doggie!"  
The whine, faint and agonised, answered him.

"Blest if I don't think we're haunted!" Jimmy Silver shook his head.  
The whole affair puzzled him utterly.  
"I can't make it out," he said. "It must be somebody having a lark with us, somehow. I'm going to bed."  
The Fistical Four, with a curiously uncanny feeling, returned to the tent. Barely had they turned in when a deep growl was heard outside.

Gurrhr!  
"That dog again!" shrieked Lovell.  
"Oh, let him rip!" growled Jimmy Silver. "I'm going to sleep."  
"He doesn't seem to be hurt now."  
"Oh, bother him!"  
The growling continued, but the Fistical Four did not heed it, and it ceased at last.

But it was close on midnight when the Rookwood caravanners were safe at last in the arms of Morpheus.

### The 7th Chapter. Light at Last!

"Wake up!"  
Bright and early in the morning, Jimmy Silver shouted into the caravan.  
Tubby Muffin yawned, and Billy Bunter snored on.

It had been late before Jimmy Silver & Co. slept the previous night, but they were up early enough in the sunny summer morning.  
They were conscious of an aching void within, and they wanted to get on the road and scout for breakfast.  
Tubby Muffin woke up hungry, too, and he turned out of the van.  
But Bunter was still sleeping when the tent was struck and Robinson Crusoe harnessed.

Lovell yanked Bunter's bike down, and stuck it against the sign-post.  
"Now that fat bounder's coming out!" he said. "Bunter! Bunter! Bunter!"  
"I say, you fellows, you can start!" came a sleepy voice from within the van. "I'm not accustomed to getting up as

early as this. Don't mind me! I can sleep while the van's moving!"  
"You may be able to, but you're jolly well not going to!" answered Lovell. "I give you two minutes to get out. Then I'm coming in for you!"  
"Oh, really, Lovell—"  
"Time's going!" said Lovell grimly.

Lovell's voice showed that he meant business, and Billy Bunter turned out. He looked very discontented.  
"I say, you fellows, what about breakfast?" he asked.  
"You've got our breakfast under your waistcoat!" growled Lovell. "There's your bike."  
"I can't start without breakfast!" hooted Bunter.

Lovell shrugged his shoulders.  
"Suit yourself!" he answered. "You can take root here if you like. We're going, anyhow!"

"I say, you fellows, I'd better come on with you, till you get some grub," said Bunter. "I know you ain't hospitable—I don't expect common decency from fellows like you, but—"  
"Come up!" said Lovell, addressing the horse.

"Am I coming with you for brekker?" hooted Bunter.  
"No!"  
"Well, of all the rotters—"  
"Good-bye!"  
"Look here, Silver, let Bunter come with us, and don't be a pig!"  
Jimmy Silver spun round towards Raby. "What's that, Raby?" he exclaimed.  
"What's what?" asked Raby.  
"If you want Bunter—"  
"I don't want Bunter!"  
"Then what do you mean by calling me a pig?" demanded Jimmy Silver wrathfully.

"Eh! Who called you a pig?"  
"You did."  
"I didn't! I heard somebody—"  
"I suppose I know your voice!" snorted Jimmy Silver. "And I jolly well think—"  
"I tell you I didn't speak!" shouted Raby.

"And I tell you you did!"  
"You howling ass, I didn't!" exclaimed Raby.  
"Oh, don't be an ass, I heard you!" said Newcome wamly.  
"So did I," said Tubby Muffin.

"You didn't!" yelled Raby. "I didn't! You silly asses, are you all potty? I never said a word!" Raby turned away to the horse, and as he did so his voice went on: "You're a set of liars!"  
Jimmy Silver jumped after him, and caught him by the collar.  
"Hallo! Leggo!"  
"Are you out of your senses?" shouted Jimmy angrily. "Liar, by Jove!"

"Do you mean to say I said that?" hooted Raby. "It was somebody else. I heard it, but I didn't speak."  
"You did!"  
"I didn't! Lovell, perhaps—"  
Arthur Edward Lovell uttered a sudden yell.

"I've got it!"  
"Eh! What have you got?" demanded Jimmy Silver gruffly.  
Lovell rushed at Bunter. He grasped the fat junior of Greyfriars by the collar and shook him forcibly.  
"Bunter!" he roared.  
"Yaroooh! Leggo! It wasn't—I didn't—Yaroooh—"  
"I've got it now!" raved Lovell. "That chap speaking last night, and never showing himself, and the dog, and the rest of it! It's Bunter!"

"Bunter!"  
"Yaroooh!"  
"Don't you remember?" howled Lovell. "He played tricks at Rookwood once. The beast is a ventriloquist!"  
"Oh!" exclaimed Jimmy Silver, a light breaking upon his mind.  
"Yow-ow-ow!" howled Bunter, as Lovell shook him like a fat jelly. "Leggo! Don't you shake me, you b-b-beast! Yow! If you make my glasses fall off—yooop—and they get bib-bib-broken—yarooop!—you'll have to pay for them! Yow-ow-woop!"

Shake! Shake! Shake!  
"Bunter all the time!" exclaimed Raby. "Of course! I'd forgotten—"  
"So had I!" said Jimmy Silver. "I remember now! The fat beast was going to make us quarrel before he left us, if he could!"  
"Squash him!"  
"Bump him!"  
"Slaughter him!"

"Yaroooh! I say, you fellows!" howled Bunter. "Can't you take a j-j-joke? I—I was only doing it—to amuse you, you know! Yaroooh! Leggo! Look here—Oh, my hat! Yooop!"  
"Bump!"

Billy Bunter descended upon the earth with a heavy concussion.  
Then he was rolled over in the grass, till there was no breath left in his fat carcass, and he was left sprawling and spluttering.

The caravan swung out into the road, and Billy Bunter sat up in the grass, groped for his glasses, and jammed them on his nose, and blinked after the caravan in speechless wrath.

By the time he had recovered breath sufficiently to limp to his bike the Rookwood caravan was out of sight.

"I don't think we shall see Bunter again!" smiled Jimmy Silver, as the caravanners sat down to breakfast at a wayside inn.  
And Jimmy was right!  
Even Billy Bunter did not feel inclined to join the Rookwood party again, and Jimmy Silver & Co. cheerfully reconciled themselves to the loss of his fascinating society.

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY.

THE CARAVANNERS' QUEST!  
By OWEN CONQUEST  
DON'T MISS IT!





# THE CLAIM ROBBER!

A Magnificent Long Complete Story, dealing with the Schooldays of Frank Richards, the Famous Author of the Tales of Harry Wharton & Co. By MARTIN CLIFFORD.

### The 1st Chapter. Under Suspicion.

"What's on?" Bob Lawless asked that question. Frank Richards & Co. had just arrived at school, and as they joined the group of Cedar Creek fellows in the playground there was a sudden silence. Kern Gunten, the Swiss schoolboy, had been speaking, and several other fellows, too. A discussion was going on, when the three chums came up. But the arrival of Frank and Bob and Vere Beauclerc had the effect of a cold douche. "What's on?" repeated Bob, looking at the group in surprised inquiry. "You were chewing the rag pretty lively a minute ago."

quietly. "I can't think of any other reason. The thief must have been a fellow who knew me and my name, and had a grudge against me. You are the only fellow here who answers to that description, Gunten." "What?" "Don't I speak plainly?" said Frank coolly. "That's what I suspect. I suspect that you are the claim-robber, Gunten, and that you gave my name when you were caught."

The 2nd Chapter. Frank Richards' Answer. There was a dead silence when Four Kings had spoken. Bob Lawless and Vere Beauclerc drew nearer to their chum, in anticipation of trouble. The other fellows looked on, wondering what was going to happen. Frank Richards set his lips hard. The ruffian evidently believed his own story, that Frank was the fellow he had caught on the claims at night. But that was no justification for his attempt to obtain money from the schoolboy. His duty was to make his statement to the sheriff of Thompson.

to the schoolmistress, and the Cedar Creek fellows went in to morning lessons in a state of great excitement. Meanwhile, Frank Richards & Co. were trotting along the Thompson trail, Four Kings following at the end of the trail-ropes. Half-way to Thompson the ruffian was panting breathlessly. The strong fire-water of the Red Dog did not conduce to physical fitness, and Four Kings was feeling the strain of the long run. And as they drew nearer and nearer to the sheriff's residence the ruffian's fury gave place more and more to uneasiness. He had no proof against Frank in the matter of the claim robbing, for his word was quite worthless, and his attempt at blackmail showed that his interest in the matter was only a rascally one.

we go to the sheriff and make a charge against you," said Frank. "I guess I'll vamoose instanter," said the ruffian. "I ain't no hog. I know when I've had enough." "You can clear, then!" said Frank contemptuously. He untied the trail-ropes, and the ruffian stood free. The run after the horses had exhausted him, and he staggered away in the direction of Thompson. Frank Richards & Co. wheeled their horses, and rode back to the lumber school. They arrived there an hour late for lessons. Miss Meadows quietly told them to go to their places, and nothing more was said just then, but after lessons the schoolmistress called the chums into her study, and Frank had to give an explanation of the whole affair.

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## THE CLAIM ROBBER!

(Continued from the previous page.)

from the shed and listening for the sound of footsteps.

### The 4th Chapter. Caught!

"Hark!" Bob Lawless whispered the word under his breath. It was just one o'clock now. The lights were out in the Red Dog now, away across the main street of Thompson, and only occasionally came an echo from the street of the footsteps of some belated citizen tramping home.

It was a sound closer at hand that had caught Bob's keen ear. Frank Richards and Beauclerc did not speak; they breathed hard, listening intently. There was a faint footfall close at hand. From the deep darkness of the shed they watched the moonlight without, and their eyes gleamed as a dark figure flitted by.

Dim as the light was they recognised Kern Gunten. He passed within six yards of the hidden schoolboys, and tramped on quietly and cautiously.

Had not the chums suspected Gunten before they would have suspected him now, so stealthy were his movements, and the glances he threw to right and left as he stole on.

"Follow on!" murmured Bob Lawless. "Keep in cover! He's bound to look back!"

"Right-ho!" breathed Frank. Silently the chums stepped from the shed and followed on Kern Gunten's track.

above as the clouds sailed slowly from under the moon.

The light strengthened. It glimmered on the shallow creek, and on the beds of sand exposed by the wooden dams built out into the stream.

Many of the cradles, mostly built of osiers from the woods, were full of "dirt," as the miners called the auriferous sand from the bed of the creek.

With long and laborious toil the pander had been gathered up for the golden grains to be washed out in the cradles.

All was as it had been left by the placer-miners when they knocked off work at sundown.

Faintly from the creek came the creaking of the cradle where the gold-thief was at work, reaping the fruit of the labour of others.

The chums watched till the figure of the claim-robber was clear to their view in the strengthening light.

Gunten had his back to them, standing ankle-deep in wet sand as he worked the cradle.

Bob Lawless grasped his lasso. He was almost near enough for a cast. Signaling to his comrades to remain where they were, Bob tiptoed towards the creek, lariat in hand.

He made no sound, but if he had done so the creaking of the cradle was sufficient to drown it.

Frank and Beauclerc watched him breathlessly.

They caught their breath as his right arm rose for the cast of the noosed rope. Whiz!

Gunten heard the sound as he bent at his nefarious occupation, and he sprang round, with a panting exclamation of alarm.

As he did so the noose descended upon him.

Before he knew what was happening the loop was over his shoulders, and Bob Lawless was dragging it taut.

It tightened round Gunten, pinning his arms to his sides, and holding him a helpless prisoner.

He made a terrific, desperate wrench at

panted Gunten. "Take me to the sheriff, if you like—not to the miners!"

Bob Lawless nodded.

"I guess that's so," he agreed. "I reckon they'd drown you in the creek like a mangy dog if they got their hands on you, Gunten. You can come along and see the sheriff."

"Let me loose!"

"No fear!" grinned Bob. "You mosey along with us, my pippin, just as you are—mud and sand and all. When you start telling lies you can explain how you got wet and sandy all over. Come on!"

Gunten quavered miserably as he followed the chums, the lasso still pinning his arms to his side.

He was glad, however, to get farther away from the miners' cabins by the creek.

It was only too possible that his life would have been in peril if he had been handed over to the hard-working placer-miners whom he had robbed.

With Gunten slinking in the rear, the chums of Cedar Creek drew nearer to the town.

Frank Richards was looking very bright now.

The dastardly suspicion Gunten had attempted to throw upon him was done with now; the guilt was coming home to roost on the right shoulders.

But Kern Gunten, as he slunk after his captors, was overwhelmed with despair. He was at the end of his tether.

### The 5th Chapter. Gunten Makes Amends.

"Richards!" Kern Gunten gasped out Frank's name as they reached the outskirts of Thompson. Frank glanced back at him.

Much as the wretched Swiss had injured him, Frank could not help feeling a little compassion as he looked at his white, terrified face.

"Let me off, Richards!" muttered Gunten. "For mercy's sake, don't take me to the sheriff. Think of my people—what they'll think!"



Had not the chums suspected Gunten before, they would have suspected him now, so stealthy were his movements and the glances he threw to right and left as he stole on.

They kept in the cover of the buildings till the latter were left behind, and then took advantage of trees and bushes to cover their movements.

Once or twice Gunten disappeared from sight, but they knew he was naking for the creek, and it was easy to pick up the track again.

Near the creek there was a bunch of miners' shacks, and Gunten made a wide detour to avoid them.

Bob dragged his comrades into the shadow of a cabin as Gunten stopped and looked round him.

The claim-robber did not suspect that he was followed, but he was cautious, and probably in a state of nerves.

But the three chums were not likely to let the rascal spot them.

Gunten moved on again, and disappeared into the shadows.

Frank Richards drew a deep breath. "There's no doubt about it now," he said in a low voice. "He's gone straight to the placer claims, Bob."

"Straight as a string!" murmured Bob, preparing his lasso for a cast, and seeing that it was in perfect order. "I guess that galoot is going to have the surprise of his life. Come on, and not a sound!"

The moon had disappeared behind a cloud, and darkness lay upon the scene.

As the chums crept on in the gloom, close now to the mining creek, a faint sound came to their ears from ahead.

It was the jarring of a cradle. The gold-thief was evidently at work.

Bob Lawless' hand tightened on the creek lasso as they crept closer on to the creek in the dark.

Their hearts were beating with excitement now.

Close by the bank, they were within a short distance of the claim-robber, but the darkness hid him from sight.

As soon as the moon emerged from the bank of clouds they would see him. He was near enough for them to hear his movements.

With tense feelings they waited for the light.

A dim, silvery glimmer came from

the rope, and Bob dragged on it harder, and Gunten went sprawling over in the wet sand.

"Caught!" shouted Bob.

Frank and Vere Beauclerc ran forward. From the bank the three chums looked down upon the wet sand, where Gunten lay sprawling helplessly in the grip of the lasso.

He was covered from head to foot with sand and mud, and panting with fear.

As yet he did not know who his captors were, and he was in deadly fear for his life.

Some, at least, of the placer-miners would not have hesitated to drive a bullet through the gold-thief if they had caught him at his work.

"Our game!" grinned Frank Richards. "Hurrah!"

Gunten ceased to struggle with the rope, and looked up at the trio on the bank, recognising Frank Richards' voice, and then the chums themselves.

"You!" he panted. "Frank Richards!"

"We've caught the claim-robber!" chuckled Bob.

Gunten staggered to his feet. "Don't try to loosen that rope, Gunten!" called out Bob. "I'll have you over if you do before you can say 'no sugar in mine'!"

"It—it's you, Lawless?"

"I guess so. Come out of the creek, you pesky rotter!" said Bob. "I'm going to walk you along to the cabins. The placer-men will be glad to see you."

Gunten panted as he clambered up the bank.

His face was white with terror. "You—you won't give me up?" he breathed.

"Won't we?" grinned Bob. "I reckon that's what we're here for, you thief! You're going to get your deserts now! Bring him along, you fellows!"

Gunten fell on his knees.

"Lawless," he muttered hoarsely, "stop! They'll murder me—you know they will!"

"What do you deserve?" said Frank.

"You don't want to see murder done!"

"Oh, Jerusalem!" murmured Bob Lawless.

"He's no right to ask anything of the kind," said Vere Beauclerc. "But—but there's his people, Bob. They would feel this. I don't think Gunten will try claim-robbering again, so far as that goes. He's rascal enough, but he hasn't courage enough—after this!"

"I swear I won't!" groaned Gunten. "I'm sorry I ever thought of it! I'd been losing money at cards, or I'd never have done it! I'll never go near the claims again!"

Bob Lawless hesitated. "I guess it means a night out for us," he said. "No reason why we should take so much trouble over a rotten thief!"

"Richards—" began Gunten.

"Oh, let Frank alone!" exclaimed Bob sharply. "He's a soft duffer, and he's going to let you off, if I let him. Look here, Gunten, we'll do it—you're not worth it—but we'll do it. But if you try to hedge at the school you go straight to Sheriff Henderson. If you don't own up to the whole story without beating about the bush, I'll yank you right away to the sheriff without giving you another chance. Savvy?"

"I mean business!" faltered Gunten.

"Mind you keep to that, then!"

Gunten almost sobbed with relief as the chums turned from the road into Thompson.

The disgrace and shame at the school he could face, so long as he escaped the worse fate of being taken by the strong arm of the law and punished as he deserved.

"You cut off and get the hosses, Franky," said Bob. "I'll keep this pilgrim in charge, and I'll take care he don't get loose."

Bob and Beauclerc walked along the trail towards Cedar Creek with the captured claim-robber, while Frank went for the horses.

He overlooked them an hour later, riding his own pony and leading the other two.

Then the chums kept on towards Cedar Creek.

There was a glimmer of dawn in the sky when they reached the school, but no sign of life yet about the place.

They had a long wait before them ere the earliest scholars arrived at Cedar Creek.

They halted a hundred yards from the gates, in the timber.

Gunten was still securely confined by the lasso.

The wretched rogue of the lumber school threw himself wearily at the foot of a tree to rest.

Bob took another turn of the lasso round him, and knotted it.

He did not mean to give the cunning Swiss the hair's-breadth of a chance for

Then the chums threw themselves in the grass, to rest in the growing warmth of the rising sun.

Frank Richards sat up, rubbing his eyes, as there was a clatter of hoofs on the trail.

Tom Lawrence and his sister Molly came in sight, riding towards the school, with Chunky Todgers and Keller and Dick Dawson.

Frank Richards & Co. jumped up, and Gunten struggled to his feet, his face crimson.

The riders halted in astonishment at the sight of the strange group.

"What the thunder's this game?" exclaimed Lawrence.

"Wait a bit!" grinned Bob. "Gunten's got a yarn to tell as soon as there's enough to hear it. Take a little rest."

In great curiosity the schoolboys dismounted, and soon there was a good crowd on the spot, as more and more of the scholars of Cedar Creek came along the trail.

As soon as the gathering numbered fifteen or sixteen—all in a state of great amazement—Bob Lawless judged that it was time for the climax.

He gave the lasso a jerk.

"Go ahead, Gunten!" he said. "And remember that, at the first lie, straight you go to the sheriff!"

But the rogue of Cedar Creek was not thinking of lying now, and he faltered out his confession.

He did not look up once.

"By gum," said Tom Lawrence, in utter disgust, "so Gunten's the gold-thief! And he was trying to make us think—"

"He tried to make us think it was Frank!" exclaimed Molly Lawrence, her eyes flashing. "He ought to be sent to prison!"

"I guess so!" said Chunky Todgers emphatically.

Gunten gave the chums a haggard look. Bob untied the lasso, and the Swiss stood free.

"You can vamoose!" said Bob contemptuously.

Without a word more Kern Gunten tramped up the trail for home.

Even the thick-skinned Swiss felt that he could not face his schoolfellows at Cedar Creek that day.

Frank Richards received a good many congratulations that day.

No one had really believed anything against him, but his friends were very glad when the matter was put beyond the shadow of a doubt.

As for Gunten, he found some pretext for remaining away from school for the last few days before the holidays, hoping, perhaps, that when Cedar Creek gathered again after the vacation the matter would have been forgotten.

But before the holidays ended Frank Richards & Co. were destined to see the rogue of the lumber school again.

THE END.

NEXT MONDAY:

"Frank Richards & Co.'s Holiday!"  
By MARTIN CLIFFORD.  
DON'T MISS IT!