BUNTER TO THE RESCUE!

BUNTER AT HAWKSCLIFF!

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A Magnificent New Long Complete Tale of Harry Wharton & Co. at Greyfriars School.

BUNTER TO THE RESCUE!

By Frank Richards.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.
A Glorious Prospect!

"HEAPS of grub!" said Skinner.

Billy Bunter stopped, and pricked up his fat ears.

The mere mention of grub was enough to make Bunter prick up his ears. For even in the piping times of peace grub was generally the subject of Bunter's thoughts and dreams. And in a time of war-rations grub was the single, solitary thing in which William George Bunter could really take interest.

Skinner and Snoop were chatting at the window in the Remove passage. They had their backs to Bunter, and apparently had not heard his heavy footsteps, which had now suddenly ceased.

Bunter blinked at them through his big glasses. He wanted to know more about those "heaps of grub."

"Where do you think he got it, Snoopey?" asked Skinner.

"Got it a bit at a time, I should say," replied Snoop. "A jar here, and a tin there, you know, before the rations came in—that's the way food-hoarders do it."

"He really ought to be shown up."

"Oh, 'tain't our business!"

"I suppose not."

"Still, it's a shame," continued Snoop. "A dozen jars of jam, you know——"

Bunter's eyes glistened.

"And three or four big cakes," said Skinner, shaking his head.

Bunter's mouth opened instinctively.

"And no end of potted meats——"

"And pounds and pounds of biscuits ——"

"Yes, it's really too thick!"

"I say, you fellows!" Bunter could contain himself no longer. "I say, where is it? Who's got it?"

Skinner looked round with a start.

"I—I didn't see you, Bunter!" he exclaimed.

"Who's that hoarder you're speaking of?" asked Bunter breathlessly. "Somebody at Greyfriars?"

"Oh, no!"

"Where is he, then?"

"Oh, it's nothing!" said Skinner carelessly. "No business of ours, or of yours, either, Bunter."

"But he ought to be shown up!" exclaimed Bunter excitedly. "The grub ought to be confiscated. Look here! Tell me who it is, and leave it to me! I'll take all the trouble off your hands."

Snoop grinned, and Skinner shook his head. Sidney James Snoop strolled away, whistling; and Skinner made as if to follow him, when Bunter caught him eagerly by the sleeve. The dozen jars of jam were fairly dancing before Billy Bunter's excited vision.

"Skinner, old chap, you might tell a pal!" he pleaded.

"You'd scoff the grub," said Skinner. "I know you! It's in a lonely place, where anybody could scoff it."

Bunter's eyes danced.

"Where?" he gasped.

"I'm not going to tell you," said Skinner loftily. "Besides, Hawkscliff's a long way from here."

"Is it at Hawkscliff?" exclaimed Bunter.

"Find out!"

"Hallo! What's that about Hawkscliff?"

Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, came along the passage with Harry Wharton, and he stopped and fixed a rather grim look on Skinner.

"Nothing!" replied Skinner hastily.

The Bounder compressed his lips.

"Tom Redwing is coming here from Hawkscliff this afternoon, Skinner," he said. "You know that. It's his day for lessons with Mr. Quelch. If you are thinking of playing a new trick on Redwing——"

"My dear man, I'd forgotten Redwing's existence," yawned Skinner. "I haven't time to bother my head about your longshoreman pal."

"Mind you don't!" said Vernon-Smith. "If you do, I shall find time to give you a thumping you won't get over in a hurry!"

"And I'll find time to give you another!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "There's been enough of your rotten tricks in that direction, Skinner."

"Oh, rats!" answered Skinner sulkily.

Vernon-Smith and Wharton passed on down the stairs, and Skinner turned to the window, his hands driven deep into his pockets, and a moody scowl on his face.

Skinner's feud against Tom Redwing, the sailorman's son of Hawkscliff, had not prospered. Redwing came regularly to Greyfriars twice a week for tuition with Mr. Quelch, the Remove-master. His name was down for the Memorial Scholarship, and the Remove fellows considered that he had an excellent chance of getting it. If he succeeded he would come into the Remove; and only a few mean fellows like Skinner had any objection to raise to that.

"I say, Skinner——"

"Oh, dry up!" growled Skinner.

"About that hoard, you know——" persisted Bunter.

"Bow-wow!"

"Is it Redwing?" asked Bunter eagerly. "He's the only fellow you know at Hawkscliff, I know. You were over at his place a week or two ago, ragging him. Did you find the hoard then?"

Skinner seemed to hesitate.

"I say, what a chance to lift it!" went on Bunter, his eyes gleaming behind his spectacles. "Redwing's coming here this afternoon, and he'll be a couple of hours with Mr. Quelch. There's nobody in his cabin while he's away."

"I haven't said it's Redwing," said Skinner sourly.

"You might tell a pal!" urged Bunter. "I—I say, Skinney, I'm—I'm sorry about—about what happened the other day."

"You fat rotter!" grunted Skinner. "I shut Smithy up in the old tower so that the Highcliffe fellows could rag Redwing on his way here—and you let him out, and told Smithy all about it!" Skinner rubbed his nose reminiscently. "You got me a licking, you fat toad!"

"I—I really, you know——" Billy Bunter searched his fat brain for an excuse. "I—I—if I hadn't let Smithy out, he wouldn't have got there in time to save Redwing and Ponsonby when they went over the cliff, you know. It was really all for the best, wasn't it?"

Skinner snorted.

"You fat idiot! Now Redwing's showing up as a hero; they're telling a yarn that he risked his life to save Ponsonby, who was ragging him."

"Well, he did," said Bunter. "Bob Cherry says so."

"Oh, rot! Spoof!" said Skinner sourly. "I'll bet you Ponsonby doesn't feel very grateful to him!"

"Well, Pon wouldn't," said Bunter. "Pon's an ungrateful beast! But Redwing did save his life, and Smithy saved both of them—Wharton says so."

"Hang Wharton!"

"But about that hoard?"

Bunter came back to the important point—important from his point of view. The "heaps of grub" haunted him.

"You see, he oughtn't to be allowed to keep it, Skinner," urged Bunter. "It's really against the law. It's caddish, too. Mean! I'm down on anything of that sort. It ought to be taken away from him."

"I'm not going to say anything against Redwing," answered Skinner. "He's too jolly popular here."

"Then it is Redwing?"

"Suppose it is?" said Skinner impatiently. "Suppose we found a hoard of food there, when we went over to Hawkscliff to rag his cabin? Suppose there was a dozen jars of jam, and lots of other things? They're his, I suppose? I'm not going to say a word about it!"

And with that Skinner walked away.

But Billy Bunter had heard enough. He did not follow Skinner. He rolled away downstairs, with a fat grin. If there was a food-hoard at Tom Redwing's cabin at Hawkscliff, it was pretty certain that very little would remain of it when Tom Redwing came home that evening.

Skinner strolled into Snoop's study.

Sidney James greeted him with a grin.

"Well?" he asked.

"Oh, he's caught on!" chuckled Skinner, crossing to the window and watching the quadrangle. "I knew he would when he heard us speak of grub."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The fat rotter!" said Skinner. "That beast Smithy hammered me like thunder last week for shutting him up in the tower when he was going to meet Redwing. Bunter told him Pon & Co. were going to rag the cad on his way here." Skinner rubbed his nose again. "The fat beast! I'd skin him for letting Smithy out, only—only——"

"Only Smithy's undertaken to lick you if you do!" grinned Snoop.

"Oh, rats!"

Skinner stared from the window.

A fat figure came into view, crossing towards the gates. It was the rotund

figure of the Owl of the Remove. Bunter was starting.

"He's off!" grinned Skinner.

Snoop joined him at the window, grinning.

"I'm not going to skin the fat beast," said Skinner, "but he's got a ten-mile tramp to Hawkscliff, and a ten-mile tramp back. And if Redwing should come in and find him nosing over his cabin he'll get a licking as well. And if he finds a food-hoard at the place, I'm blessed if I know where he'll find it, for I saw no sign of one when I was there."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Snoop.

And Skinner roared, too. The idea of the fattest and laziest junior at Greyfriars fagging a distance of ten miles in search of a food-hoard that had no existence tickled Skinner and Snoop immensely. If Bunter could have heard the remarks in Snoop's study he certainly would not have set forth with such glowing anticipations.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.
Bunter Wants a Bike!

"I SAY, you fellows——"

Six juniors were standing outside the gates of Greyfriars with their bicycles when Billy Bunter rolled out.

They were the Famous Five of the Remove and Vernon-Smith.

Harry Wharton & Co. were about to start for Highcliffe School, to call for their friends there—Frank Courtenay and the Caterpillar. Vernon-Smith was going in the other direction, to meet Tom Redwing, who was walking to Greyfriars from Hawkscliff.

Billy Bunter joined them.

"Will you lend me your bike, Wharton?" he asked.

The captain of the Remove stared at him. As he was about to start upon a spin the request was cool, even for William George Bunter.

"No, I won't!" was his terse answer.

"Will you lend me yours, Bob?"

"Ask me again after the war!" answered Bob Cherry.

"I say, Nugent, you're not so selfish as those chaps," said Bunter. "You ——"

"My dear chap, I am, and a heap more!" answered Frank Nugent, laughing. "You're not going to have my bike, at any rate!"

"I say, Bull——"

"Oh, scat!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Smithy——"

"Like to borrow my bike?" asked the Bounder sarcastically.

"Well, if you wouldn't mind, Smithy. You see, I've got a long way to go," said Bunter. "If you're only going to meet Redwing on the road you can walk, you know. It doesn't much matter where you meet him."

"It seems to me that it does, though," said Vernon-Smith, with a grin. "Ta-ta, you fellows! I'm off!"

The Bounder threw his leg over his machine and started for Friardale.

Billy Bunter turned to Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, the dusky member of the Co., his last hope for borrowing a bike. Hurree Singh was good nature and politeness itself, but it was doubtful whether his polite good nature would extend to the length of handing over his bicycle to the Owl of the Remove. Billy Bunter would have tired out the politeness of a saint.

"Inky, old chap——" began Bunter.

The dusky junior smiled.

"I've got a jolly long way to go," said Bunter. "It's about ten miles to Hawkscliff——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "What are you going to Hawkscliff for, Fatty?"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

Harry Wharton's brow became stern. Billy Bunter had always been more or less associated with Skinner & Co. in their persecution of Redwing, being as stupid as Skinner was rascally. The captain of the Remove dropped his hand rather heavily on Bunter's shoulder.

"What are you up to now, Bunter?" he demanded.

"N-n-nothing, you know," stammered Bunter.

"I know that Skinner went to Hawkscliff once to rag Redwing's place," said Harry. "Is there another game on of that sort?"

"Nunno!"

"You've no business at Hawkscliff!" said Bob.

"D-d-did I say Hawkscliff?" stammered Bunter. "I—I really meant to say Canterbury."

"Canterbury!" yelled Bob. "You're going to ride to Canterbury?"

"I—I mean Dover!"

"Sure you don't mean Dublin?" inquired Nugent, with sarcasm.

"Oh, really, Nugent! It's a long way, you know, to—to Ramsgate, and I really must have a bike!"

"Can't you use your own bike?" demanded Johnny Bull.

"How can I use it when it's got three or four punctures, and it's simply jammed up with mud, and one of the pedals is twisted?" said Bunter, in an injured tone.

"And that's how you'd treat any machine you borrowed!" grunted Johnny. "Keep your jigger in order, you fat slacker!"

"I've asked Bob to mend those punctures for me lots of times!" said Bunter. "You can't deny it, Bob Cherry!"

"I don't want to!" chuckled Bob. "You can mend your own punctures yourself, you Owl! I'm not a bike-mender!"

"You jolly well mended a puncture for Marjorie Hazeldene, and made yourself as black as a sweep over it!"

"You're not quite so interesting a person as Marjorie, Bunter," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Well, look here, I've got to have a bike. Put your saddle a bit lower for me, will you, Inky"

The Nabob of Bhanipur shook his head.

"My esteemed Bunter——"

"I haven't got such thundering long legs as you fellows!" hooted Bunter peevishly. "I shall want the saddle lowered. You don't mean to say that you're not lending me the bike, Inky?"

"My esteemed and idiotic Bunter, that is the exact thusfulness of my intendful statement."

"Well, of all the selfish beasts!" said Bunter, in utter disgust.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I call it disgusting!" hooted Bunter. "Selfishness is a thing I never could stand! Don't ride away when I'm talking to you, you beasts!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Apparently the Famous Five were not disconcerted by Bunter's unfavourable opinion. They mounted their machines and rode away towards Highcliffe.

Billy Bunter stood in the road and blinked after them, with a glare that really looked like cracking his big glasses.

"Beasts!" he growled.

Bolsover major came out with Bulstrode, both wheeling machines. Bunter turned to them in despair.

"I say, Bolsover, I want a bike very particularly this afternoon."

"Then I'm sure I hope you'll get one!" said Bolsover major genially.

"Will you lend me yours?"

"Well, I can't lend you my bike," said Bolsover major. "But I don't want to be disobliging. I'll lend you my boot!"

And he did.

Billy Bunter yelled, and fled in at the gateway. He fairly snorted with wrath as he made his way to the bike-shed. The amount of selfishness at Greyfriars was really staggering. His bike had been in a hopeless state for a whole term, and no one had offered to mend it for him. And now nobody would lend him a bike when he wanted one particularly. Bunter was really shocked. Worst of all; there was the food-hoard at Hawkscliff, which had to be lifted during Tom Redwing's absence, if at all. The mere thought of it made Bunter's mouth water, and he was even prepared to walk the distance rather than lose such a chance of a feed.

Several fellows were taking their machines out that afternoon. It was a half-holiday, and a sunny spring day. Bunter addressed himself to Peter Todd and Tom Dutton, his study-mates. He felt that he had a claim on them.

"You don't want you bike this afternoon, Peter?" he said.

"No," answered Peter Todd humorously. "I'm wheeling it out because I don't want it, naturally."

"I mean, will you lend it to me?"

"And I mean, I'll see you blowed first!" answered Peter cheerfully.

"I say, Dutton!" shouted Bunter.

Tom Dutton was deaf, but he heard that, and looked at Bunter inquiringly.

"Eh?"

"Will you lend me your jigger?"

"What figure?"

"Not figure, ass! Jigger—bike, you know! Lend me your bike!"

"What a queer question!" said Dutton, staring at him. "You can't expect anybody to like your figure, Bunter."

"Wha-at?"

"I don't want to be personal, but since you ask me, I'll tell you. No, I don't like your figure—too much like a porpoise!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You deaf dummy!" yelled Bunter.

"Eh?"

"I want your bike this afternoon."

"I don't see why I should like it this afternoon more than any other time. But don't worry; you'll have a better figure when you've been on rations for a term or two."

Tom Dutton wheeled his bike away after Peter, and Bunter shook a fat fist after him.

"I say, Squiff, can I have your bike——"

"Here it is," answered Sampson Quincy Iffley Field, and he wheeled his bike into Bunter. "That's the best I can do for you, Bunter!"

"Yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter sat down, with a roar, and the Australian junior grinned, and wheeled his machine on. Bunter gasped, and scrambled up, and went into the shed. His own bike was there, but it was a wreck. There was only one other machine in the place, and that was turned up, and Ogilvy was at work on the tyre. Ogilvy was generally a good-tempered fellow, but he was having a tussle with a bad puncture, and he looked a trifle Hunnish now.

"Mending a puncture, old chap?" asked Bunter, blinking at him.

"Can't you see?" asked Ogilvy gruffly.

"Ahem! Yes. Will you be long over it?"

"About a month, at this rate!" groaned Ogilvy. "This new solution's simply muck, blow it!"

"Quarter of an hour, perhaps?" inquired Bunter.

"Oh, yes!"

"Will you lend me the bike when you've finished?"

Ogilvy turned round, and fixed a look

upon Bunter which rivalled that of the fabled basilisk.

"Will I—what?" demanded Robert Donald Ogilvy, in measured tones.

"Lend it to me," said Bunter cheerfully. "You finish mending the puncture; I don't mind waiting."

"Oh!" gasped Ogilvy. "You don't mind waiting?"

"No; only buck up!"

Ogilvy said no more. He made a rush at Bunter, and dabbed the solution on his fat face. He felt that that was the only adequate reply to William George's cool request.

"Groooch!" shrieked Bunter. "Wharrer you at? Oh, crumbs! Beast! Grooh!"

He dodged out of the doorway in hot haste.

"Come here again, you fat slug, and I'll swamp you with it!" roared Ogilvy.

"Groooh!"

Billy Bunter did not come there again. He departed in search of a wash—which he needed badly. He was still rather sticky when he rolled out of the gates of Greyfriars once more—bikeless! There was no help for it; he had to walk, selfishness being so rampant in Greyfriars that afternoon.

And, with many grunts and groans, Billy Bunter started on that long tramp—cheered on, however, by the glorious prospect of a terrific feed at the end of it.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.
Ponsonby Causes Surprise!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. rode away cheerfully to Highcliffe.

They were going for a spin that bright spring afternoon, and were calling first at Highcliffe for their two chums there—Courtenay and De Courcy of the Fourth Form.

As they came in sight of Highcliffe they spotted Courtenay and the Caterpillar standing by their machines outside the gates.

The two were not alone.

Ponsonby and Gadsby of the Fourth were lounging by the gates, and chatting with Frank Courtenay.

The Greyfriars fellows were rather surprised to see them together

Ponsonby was Courtenay's cousin, but the two had been on fighting terms ever since Frank had come to Highcliffe.

He was on the worst of terms, too, with Harry Wharton & Co., and they were not overjoyed to see him there.

But Ponsonby's look was very agreeable as he glanced towards the Greyfriars juniors. They jumped down from their machines.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here we are!" hailed Bob Cherry, in his powerful tones.

"An' we're ready," drawled the Caterpillar.

"Quite," said Courtenay. He turned from Ponsonby with a rather puzzled look to Harry Wharton. "Ponsonby wants to speak to you, Wharton."

"He can go ahead!" said Harry, rather drily.

He did not like Cecil Ponsonby, and some recent happenings had not diminished his dislike. But he was civil.

Ponsonby did not appear to notice the lack of cordiality in the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

"I won't keep you long," he said. "But I really must mention the matter, Wharton. It's about that chap Redwing."

Wharton compressed his lips a little. He was well aware of Ponsonby's enmity towards the sailorman's son, but he was not there to listen to the gibes of the dandy of Highcliffe.

"The less said on that subject the better, if you don't mind," he said abruptly. "I can't listen to a friend being run down, Ponsonby, and you can't expect it."

"That isn't it at all," said Ponsonby. "I admit that I used to run him down. I had a prejudice against him. Class prejudice, if you like. I dare say I was an ass."

"No dare saying about it," grunted Johnny Bull. "You were!"

"You are always so pleasantly candid, Bull," remarked Ponsonby, with a smile. "But I admit the soft impeachment. I was an ass—perhaps worse. I'm sorry. Redwing, by all accounts, saved my life the other day."

"He did," said Bob, "and a jolly close shave it was for both of you, too!"

Ponsonby nodded.

"Of course, that makes a difference," he said. "I shouldn't have expected it of him. He did it. I wasn't conscious at the time, but the fellows say he did it. Well, I'm bound to be grateful. I'm sorry I've been down on him. A fellow can't do more than own up, can he?"

"I suppose not," said Harry, rather puzzled.

"I want to thank him personally," continued Ponsonby blandly. "If he chooses to let bygones be bygones, I'm his friend. I'd like to speak to him and tell him so. It's a bit of a way over to Hawkscliff, but I understand that he comes to Greyfriars sometimes."

"He comes twice a week, for tuition with Mr. Quelch," said Harry.

"Yes. He's after a scholarship or somethin', Skinner told me."

"Quite right."

"Well, I'd like to drop in at Greyfriars an' see him, an' tell him I'm sorry about some things," said Ponsonby. "When can I catch him there?"

"He's there this afternoon," said Harry. "I think he leaves Mr. Quelch's study at half-past four."

"Oh, good! Then I'll bike over. Thanks awf'lly!"

Ponsonby raised his hat slightly, and sauntered away with Gadsby. The latter was looking surprised — in fact, astonished. Evidently Pon's friend had not expected him to be overwhelmed with gratitude in this way. Fellows who knew Pon well never regarded him as a fellow likely to be troubled with feelings of gratitude.

He left the Famous Five astonished, too. They looked at one another, and at Courtenay and De Courcy.

"The esteemed Pon is playing gamefully," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "As Poet Shakespeare remarks, 'There is some soul of goodness in things evil.'"

"What on earth does all this mean?" exclaimed the Caterpillar, in amazement. "Is this a little joke of Pon's?"

"I think not," said Harry. "I hope not."

"But what's this about a chap savin' his life? Who's Redwing, anyway?"

"A sailor chap who lives at Hawkscliff," explained Wharton. "He's a great pal of Vernon-Smith, of our Form. He's entered for a scholarship at Greyfriars, and Mr. Quelch gives him some lessons on half-holidays."

"Oh, gad! Fancy workin' on a half-holiday! One of those chaps who lead the strenuous life—what?" yawned the Caterpillar.

"Yes," said Harry, with a smile.

"And he saved Pon's life?" asked Frank Courtenay, in perplexity.

"No doubt about that. Pon fell foul of him a long time ago, and Redwing handled him rather severely," said Harry. "Last week Skinner seems to have put up Pon and his friends to laying for Redwing as he was coming over to Greyfriars. They were duffers enough to tackle him on the cliff-path, and Pon and Redwing pitched over together, scrapping. Redwing caught hold on the cliff, and held Pon, who had fainted. It's a miracle he didn't go down with him. Pon's friends didn't even try to help; they were too scared of the cliff."

"Nice pals!" murmured the Caterpillar.

"Skinner had shut Smithy up in the old tower, to keep him away from the place, but he got out, and came up after they were over the cliff. Luckily, we were on the beach, and saw them from a distance. We got there with a rope, and they were brought up safely," said Harry. "It was touch and go. Pon came to afterwards, but I thought at the time he was more ratty than grateful."

"That would be like our dear Pon!" grinned the Caterpillar.

"I'm glad he's thought it over," concluded Wharton. "There's no doubt that Redwing saved his life, and very nearly lost his own in doing it. It was Pon's fault they went over the cliff, but Redwing risked everything to save him. He's a good chap."

"He must be," said Courtenay. "I'm not surprised that Pon's feelings have changed towards him."

"Good old Franky!" murmured the Caterpillar, winking at the blue sky.

Courtenay gave him a sharp look.

"Well, I suppose even Pon must have some decency about him somewhere," remarked Johnny Bull. "I'm rather glad he's going over to make it up with Redwing. It's only decent."

"The decentfulness is terrific," observed Hurree Singh. "The esteemed Pon has risen in my worthy estimation."

There was a sardonic look on the Caterpillar's face, but he did not speak. The juniors noticed it, however, and Wharton frowned a little.

"You don't believe Ponsonby was speaking the truth, De Courcy?" asked the captain of the Remove, rather sharply.

"My dear man, if you believe him, I wouldn't disturb your agreeable state of innocent satisfaction for worlds," drawled the Caterpillar.

"Dash it all, Rupert, give the chap credit for a little common decency!" exclaimed Courtenay warmly. "I suppose he's decent enough to thank a chap who risked a lot to save his neck. A chap he's treated badly, too!"

"Dear old Franky!" was the Caterpillar's affectionate reply.

Courtenay frowned.

"Look here, Rupert, supposing that Pon was cad enough to go on feeling enmity towards the chap, after what he's done, why should he come to us and tell us lies? There's no reason why he should."

"None whatever," said Wharton.

"None at all," said Bob Cherry, with emphasis.

"He might be pullin' somebody's leg," yawned the Caterpillar. "He might be goin' to play some trick on Redwing, an' might think of squeezin' into his confidence to make it more easy. He might, you know."

"Rupert!"

"Now I've shocked Franky!" groaned the Caterpillar, with a comical look of despair. "Dear old Franky! Franky was brought up better than I was, you know. He had the advantage of bein' trained among the workin' classes, an' he imbibed their stern morality, an' he's never lost it. I keep on shockin' Franky!"

"I should really be shocked if I thought you meant what you said," answered Courtenay quietly. "But I know you don't, Rupert. It's only your

joke. But these fellows might take you seriously."

"My dear chaps, I beg an' beseech you not to take me seriously," said the Caterpillar imploringly. "Life's a worry if taken seriously. Let's get on our jiggers and bolt. Franky's goin' to deliver a sermon. I can see it in his eye."

"Rupert, you ass!" exclaimed Courtenay, half laughing and half vexed.

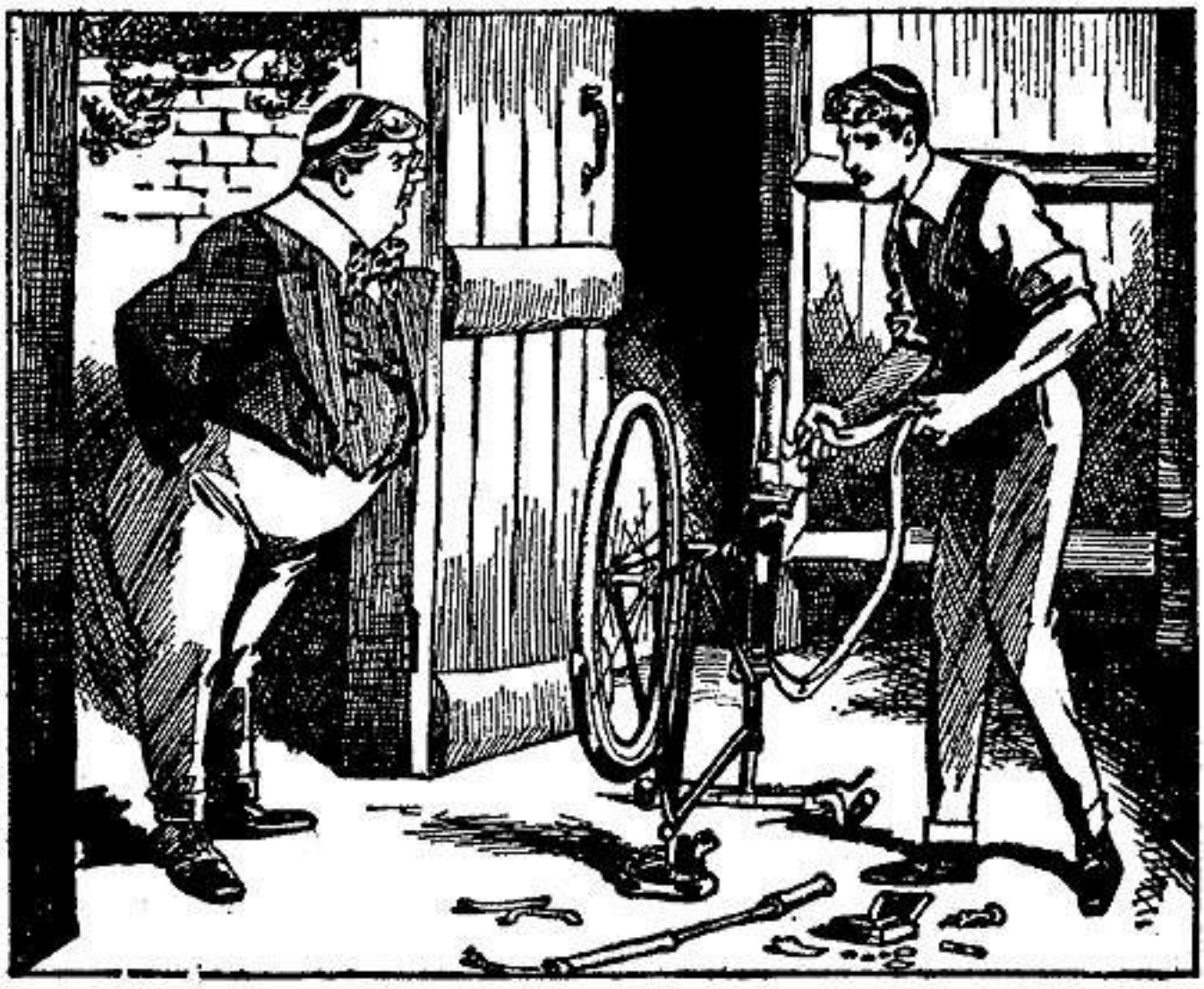
"I'm off!" replied the Caterpillar promptly.

And he put a leg over his machine and started.

"Come on!" said Bob Cherry, grinning.

The rest of the cyclists followed the Caterpillar. Whether he had been joking or not the Greyfriars fellows could not decide; but certainly they did not suspect Ponsonby of such duplicity as the Caterpillar suggested. Pon was a shady rascal, but there were limits, even for Pon.

The Caterpillar did not mention the subject again. But during the afternoon there was often a thoughtful shade on his brow, and he did not communicate the subject of his thoughts to his companions. Perhaps he was thinking of Cecil Ponsonby, and his unexpected outburst of good feeling; and perhaps he was trying to fathom what Pon's game might possibly be. But, if so, he did not say so.



Bunter tries to borrow a bike! *(See Chapter 2.)*

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.
Pon's Plot!

"LOOKIN' for you, Pon!"

Vavasour made that observation in the quadrangle of Highcliffe as Ponsonby and Gadsby strolled in from the gates.

Monson was with him, and he chimed in:

"Where on earth have you been hidin' yourself, Pon? It's all ready in the study. Mobby's gone out—not that Mobby matters much—an' Langley's got a party in his study, an' won't be lookin' into our quarters. Come on!"

Ponsonby looked at his watch.

"I've got a bit of time yet," he remarked.

His chums regarded him inquiringly.

"Engagement this afternoon?" asked Monson. "You haven't said anythin' about it."

"Yes."

"Goin' out?"

"Yes."

"If you're goin' down to the Three Fishers for a game, we'll come along, absolutely," remarked Vavasour.

"I'm not. Let's get to the study," said Pon.

Somewhat puzzled, Ponsonby's friends followed him into the house. Gadsby was looking rather uneasy. He did not like the look in Pon's eyes. Gadsby knew Pon best, and he know what that expression meant. There was trouble in store for somebody.

"You're jolly mysterious this afternoon, Pon, absolutely," said Vavasour. "I say, is there anythin' on?"

"Lots!" answered Ponsonby, sinking into an armchair and lighting a cigarette. "Shut the door, Gaddy!"

"Bridge?" asked Monson.

"Never mind bridge just now. I've got a wheeze."

"Look here, Pon, I don't half like your wheezes," said Gadsby uneasily. "Let's have a game, and blow your wheezes!"

Cecil Ponsonby did not heed.

"It's got to be kept dark, deadly dark," he said. "Take the numbers of those notes, will you, Gaddy?"

Ponsonby threw half a dozen pound notes on the table.

"Take the numbers!" repeated Gadsby, staring at him. "What's the good of takin' numbers of currency notes?"

"In case they are stolen, of course."

"Stolen!" ejaculated all Ponsonby's pals together.

"Yes."

"Do you mean to say there's a thief in Highcliffe?" gasped Gaddy.

"Not at present. I'm goin' to bring one here."

"You're—goin'—to—bring—a—thief—here?" stuttered Gadsby, hardly able to get the words out, in his astonishment.

"You've got it!"

"Did you have anythin' in your ginger-beer this afternoon, Pon?" inquired Monson.

"Take the numbers," answered Ponsonby, unheeding.

Gadsby, with quite a dazed look, took down the numbers of the half-dozen currency notes on a half-sheet of notepaper. Ponsonby took the sheet, looked at it, and placed it in his pocket-book.

"Now put the notes on the mantelpiece, under the statuette," he said.

"There you are!"

"Good! You fellows are all witnesses that the notes are there."

"We are all witnesses that you ought to be in a dashed lunatic asylum, absolutely!" ejaculated Vavasour. "What the thump are you drivin' at?"

Ponsonby smiled an evil smile.

"I told you I'd got a wheeze. I'm goin' to make that longshore cad of Hawkscliff repent that he laid his low paws on us, my infants!"

"Redwing?"

"Exactly. You know all the cad's done. Pitched into us when we were ragging Bunter. Laid his hands on us, by gad! A common longshore lout! I had a blue eye for a week afterwards; an that isn't all. He——"

"Oh, we know how you feel towards Redwing," chuckled Monson. "Don't sing it all over again. We've heard you on that topic often enough."

"We have, absolutely!" concurred Vavasour.

"But—but he fished you up the other day, Pon, over the cliff," said Gadsby hesitatingly. "I've just heard you tellin' Wharton you're goin' over to thank him."

"So I am," answered Ponsonby, his eyes glittering. "I know what he did. He fought with me on the cliff-path, the cheeky hound, an' we fell over together! We jammed on a spur of the rock, and those Greyfriars louts pulled us up with a rope. I don't owe the cad anythin'!"

"He held you up, Pon. You'd have gone straight down to the beach an' been smashed if he hadn't held you."

"Oh, rot!"

"Well, you would, you know," Gadsby said.

"He did nothin'—nothin' at all. It was his fault I was over the cliff, anyway. I shouldn't have fallen over if the low cad hadn't been fightin' me—layin' his low paws on a gentleman, by gad! He got me over the cliff——"

"Well, you got him over."

"He got me over, I say, and it was up to him to hold me—if he did hold me. As I wasn't conscious, I don't know. I know it was Greyfriars fellows who pulled me up, and my own friends didn't come near the edge!" sneered Ponsonby.

"It was too jolly risky! We warned you."

"Absolutely!" said Vavasour.

"Well, I don't consider that I owe any thanks to the cad. He's swankin' now about havin' saved my life, and cuttin' no end of a figure as a hero!"

"I don't think he's swankin', Pon," said Monson doubtfully.

"He would, of course—a low cad like that! He's jolly glad to make out that I'm under an obligation to him!" said Ponsonby savagely. "Well, I don't owe him any thanks, an' I don't feel any gratitude. I hate the low hound more than I ever did before!"

"Oh!"

"He's simply glorvin' in it now," said Ponsonby, his brows darkening and his eyes glittering. "Playin' the hero—the brave chap who risked a lot to save a chap who was raggin' him, an' all that. Accordin' to Skinner, he's got a regular halo round his head at Greyfriars. That's all the good we did by chippin' in—set him up on a dashed pedestal to be admired!"

"Well, Pon——"

"Oh, don't talk so much, Gaddy! I'm goin' to have him down off his pedestal, an' in a way that he won't recover from, either. He won't get that

scholarship to Greyfriars; he won't show his nose in the school again—he won't dare to show it anywhere where he's known after I've done with him!" said Ponsonby between his teeth.

"I don't see how you can hurt him," said Gadsby. "I don't think you really ought to want to, either, Pon, if you ask me."

"Well, I don't ask you, Gaddy."

"I—I say, I've got to speak to Drury, now I think of it," stammered Vavasour, and he left the study without waiting for a reply.

Ponsonby laughed scornfully.

"That's one funk!" he said. "Anybody else got cold feet?"

Gadsby looked at him long and hard.

"I don't like it, Pon," he said. "There's a limit, y'know. I don't, an' that's a fact. The fellow's a cheeky cad, if you like, but he saved your life——"

"Bosh!"

"Well, he did. If you want to rag the cad, I'm your man; but I'm not takin' a hand in anythin' more than that. That's plain."

"Shut the door after you, then," said Ponsonby coolly.

"Look here, Pon, old chap——"

"Oh, ring off!"

Gadsby strode out of the study, and closed the door after him with a slam. He was considerably ruffled. Ponsonby smiled contemptuously.

"You're game, Monson?" he asked.

"I'm game," answered Monson stolidly. "If it's safe, of course. I'd give a good deal to bring that cheeky cad to his knees."

Ponsonby rose and took the currency notes from the mantelpiece and replaced them in his pocket-book, a proceeding that Monson watched in some surprise.

"Come on!" he said.

"Where are we goin'?"

"Hawkscliff."

"Oh!"

"Redwing's at Greyfriars this afternoon," said Ponsonby in a low voice. "His cabin will be empty—he lives alone there. Anybody can get into it. I've seen the place. Come an' get your bike."

"But—but what are we goin' to do in Redwing's cabin?" faltered Monson.

"You're goin' to do nothin'. You're goin' to keep watch on the road while I go into the cabin."

Monson looked relieved.

"All right, Pon."

Five minutes later the precious pair were on their bicycles on the long road to Hawkscliff. Gadsby and Vavasour played nap in the study by themselves that afternoon, but neither of them seemed to enjoy the game very much. They were thinking of Cecil Ponsonby, and wondering uneasily what new wickedness was being carried out by that elegant youth.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.
No Hoard!

"OH, crikey!"

That extremely inelegant exclamation escaped Billy Bunter as he sat down, gasping, on a rock by the wayside.

Walking was not much in Bunter's line.

Nothing that smacked of exertion was in his line. And a ten-mile tramp was a horror of horrors to Bunter. Nothing but the prospect of a terrific feed could have induced him even to contemplate it, and even then he contemplated it with a shudder.

Luckily, he had got a lift in a market-cart for a mile past Friardale, and later on he had hung behind a waggon till the waggoner spotted him and touched him up with his whip. But for these two extensive lifts Bunter would probably never have held out to the finish.

Now Hawkscliff was nearly in sight, and Bunter was nearly at the last gasp. He sat down, and gasped and gasped and gasped. Perspiration was streaming down his fat face, and his spectacles persisted in sliding down his fat little nose. He had an uncomfortable dampness all over him. And he was warm—very warm. His collar felt tight and horribly sticky. And Bunter was dismally reflecting that even a terrific feed might be too dearly bought.

How long the tramp had taken him he did not know, but the afternoon was getting on. Still, he had plenty of time, for Tom Redwing would be engaged in Mr. Quelch's study till half-past four, and after that he had his long walk before him to get home. There was no danger of Bunter's depredations in the cabin being interrupted by Redwing.

For a good quarter of an hour Bunter sat on the rock beside the rough path, and mopped his steaming brow and fanned himself.

Then he dragged himself up once more and plodded on.

"Beast!" murmured Bunter disconsolately. "Beast! What does he want to live in such an out-of-the-way hole for—without even a dashed railway-station? Beast! I'll give him food-hoarding, the cad!"

The thought of the food-hoard cheered Bunter on, and he plodded a little more briskly.

Had Skinner told Bunter that there was a food-hoard in Redwing's cabin, Bunter would probably have taken the statement with a grain of salt. But the fact that he had overheard the statement accidentally left him in no doubt. It did not occur to his obtuse mind that Skinner and Snoop had planned that he should overhear them.

Neither did he reflect on the utter improbability of a fellow like Tom Redwing hoarding food. Bunter did not give any fellow credit for being better than he was himself, and Bunter was a food-hog of the most pronounced kind.

If Bunter had known that that awful tramp on a rocky road was a punishment for the trick he had played on Skinner his feelings would really have been inexpressible.

Fortunately, he did not know it yet.

Hawkscliff was now in sight—a solitary little place. There were not more than ten or a dozen buildings there, mostly scattered. Only a couple of the inhabitants were to be seen—a man on the beach mending a boat, and a woman in a little garden hanging out clothes.

Billy Bunter tramped on into the rugged little irregular street, panting.

He found Tom Redwing's cabin easily enough, having heard all about it from Skinner & Co., who had been there.

He blinked about him very cautiously through his big spectacles as he stopped before the little cottage. The street was deserted. Only at the far end could a couple of ancient fishermen be seen, sitting on a wall smoking. Every young man who had belonged to Hawkscliff was away on the mine-sweepers.

Bunter turned the handle of the cottage door, and it opened to his touch. That was usual enough in the tiny village—nobody locked his door. Billy Bunter rolled in, closed the door behind him, and sank down in Tom Redwing's chair, and snorted.

He sat there, gasping and snorting like a grampus, for a good time.

But his walk had made him hungry as well as fatigued. He gathered enough energy at last to rise and commence his search for the supposed hoard.

First he examined the little cupboard. He found nothing there but half a loaf of war-bread and two cold potatoes. Bunter sniggered—a knowing snigger.

"Deep," he murmured — "awfully deep! That's for show if anybody comes in! Now, where's the cad's hoard? Sneaking cad to hoard food in war-time! Serve him jolly well right to find it gone!"

Growing quite keen on the search now, Billy Bunter scouted all about the little room, looking into every corner and recess and receptacle.

But no hoard came to light.

"Must be upstairs!" murmured Bunter. "Of course, the sly cad would keep it in his bed-room!"

He tramped up the narrow, creaking little stairs. There was a large cupboard in the angle of the crooked little staircase, and Bunter blinked into it, and struck a match to blink again. But there was nothing in the cupboard save a heap of firewood. He grunted, and went on up into the little bed-room, the only apartment in the cottage beside the sitting-room below.

The bed-room was small, and very neat and tidy. It contained little in the way of furniture, and only one recess, where a few rough clothes were hanging. Billy Bunter blinked round it, and looked under the bed, and even into the pockets of the hanging clothes, but in vain.

There was no hoard.

He sat down on the bed at last, in great dismay.

He had spent more than an hour in searching through the cottage. Hardly an inch of it had escaped his peering eyes.

Where was the hoard?

If Skinner had seen it there, it was unlikely that Redwing had got rid of it since. Why should he? If Skinner had seen it—— And as he put it like that the truth began to dawn on Billy Bunter.

It was a very big "if."

"Oh, dear!" murmured the Owl dolefully. "Suppose—suppose the beast was pulling my leg, and there isn't any hoard at all?"

He groaned.

If there was a hoard, where was it? It certainly wasn't in the cottage. Buried in the garden, perhaps—under the potatoes. But, if so, Skinner couldn't have seen it.

He realised at last that there was no hoard; and that that little scene between Skinner and Snoop in the Remove passage, and Skinner's reluctance to tell him anything, had been a comedy arranged for his especial benefit.

"Beast!" groaned Bunter. "Rotter! This is to pay me out for letting Smithy out of the tower the other day, and telling him about Skinner. Yow-ow-ow! I—I've come here for nothing, and—and it's ten miles home!"

Billy Bunter groaned in anguish of spirit.

The punishment meted out by Skinner was more severe than a licking could have been. Bunter would rather have had half a dozen lickings than that awful long tramp home to Greyfriars on an empty stomach!

He was ravenously hungry now. He generally was hungry; and now he had had a long walk in the keen sea-air. He could have eaten German war-bread with a good appetite just then.

And there was nothing but the chunk of bread and cold potatoes downstairs. That glorious feed—the dozen jars of jam, the cakes, the other things—all had vanished into thin air; gone from his gaze like a beautiful dream!

No wonder Bunter groaned.

He was almost too dispirited to crawl

downstairs to annex the bread and potatoes. But he reflected that Redwing might return, and that he would be safer off the premises.

He rolled dismally to the little staircase again.

He had just stepped on the stairs when a sound below made him jump.

It was the sound of the cottage door opening.

Bunter stood quite still, his heart thumping.

Redwing!

It was not likely to be anybody else. And he was fairly caught! What was Tom Redwing likely to do if he caught him there, with so many signs about of the cottage having been rummaged from end to end?

Bunter shook like a jelly.

But, after all, Redwing could scarcely have got back from Greyfriars by this time. His time with Mr. Quelch was not up yet. More likely it was a neighbour who had looked in to speak to him.

Bunter took courage, and listened.

He heard footsteps below, and the door closing. The stair cupboard was just behind him, and the door half open. Acting instinctively, Bunter backed quietly into the cupboard, and drew the door shut after him.

From below, a voice called up the little stair:

"Anybody at home?"

Bunter heard the call, but the door deadened the voice and made it faint. Even so, there seemed something familiar to Bunter in the tones.

He crouched low behind the heap of firewood in the stair cupboard.

Footsteps creaked on the stair, and passed the cupboard, and went on into the bed-room. Surely it must be Redwing, or what business had he there? Bunter was debating whether to make a dash for it, when the footsteps returned and passed down into the sitting-room again.

Then there was silence.

Was he gone?

Bunter was curious by this time. There was something rather mysterious in the movements of this unseen visitor.

The fat junior pushed the cupboard door open softly and peered out. From the staircase he could see only a part of the lower room, part being shut off from view. No one was in sight.

But there came a movement.

A form came into view, crossing towards the fireplace. And Billy Bunter almost gasped aloud as he recognised the elegant figure of Cecil Ponsonby of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.
What Bunter Saw!

PONSONBY stood silent, evidently in thought.

His face was partly turned away; he was not looking towards the staircase. But from what Bunter could see of his face he saw that Cecil Ponsonby was very pale.

Bunter was as quiet as a mouse. There was a fat grin on his face now.

He could guess Ponsonby's object in being there—a rag on Redwing, such as Skinner & Co. had once perpetrated. And if he came on Bunter, no doubt Bunter would get his share of the ragging. It was in rescuing Bunter from the brutality of Ponsonby & Co. that Redwing had first earned the enmity of the dandy of Highcliffe.

"You rotter!" Bunter did not speak aloud. "You sneak! Redwing will think it's Skinner again; but I'll jolly well tell Smithy I saw you here, you cad, and you'll get another licking, you rotter! Yah!"

Only Bunter's spectacles showed round the cupboard door, as he watched the junior below; and he was ready to pop back if Ponsonby looked round.

But Ponsonby did not.

He had satisfied himself that the cottage was empty by going upstairs. Bunter understood that now. Empty, naturally, it would have been while the owner was absent at Greyfriars, but for Bunter's wild-goose chase in search of a fictitious food-hoard.

Ponsonby did not move for some minutes, and Bunter's curiosity grew keener. He naturally concluded that Pon was there for a rag. But this did not look much like a rag.

The Highcliffe junior stirred at last.

To Bunter's utter amazement, he took a pocket-book out from inside his jacket and opened it.

Bunter's little round eyes grew larger and rounder as Cecil Ponsonby extracted six currency notes from his pocket-book and examined each in turn. He was looking at the numbers, and comparing them with a list on a sheet of paper, evidently to make absolutely sure that he had the right ones.

This proceeding was so utterly astounding that Bunter stood with his mouth wide open as he watched, like a fish out of water.

Ponsonby moved, and Bunter popped back.

But irresistible curiosity drew his head forward again. Ponsonby had his back to the little staircase now.

Bunter could watch him in perfect security.

What was the Highcliffe junior doing?

It seemed to Bunter that he must be dreaming. Ponsonby had opened a little wooden box that lay on the wooden mantelshelf. The box contained dominoes. He removed the dominoes, and flattened down the six currency notes in the bottom of the box.

That done, he replaced the dominoes, packing them in carefully.

The notes were quite hidden from sight when he had finished.

He slid the lid of the box on again, and replaced it on the mantelshelf. He moved, and Bunter popped back.

The fat junior was quivering with excitement now. What Ponsonby's next mysterious proceeding might be he could not even guess. But there were no more mysterious proceedings. Ponsonby's footsteps crossed to the door. Bunter heard it open and close.

The dandy of Highcliffe was gone.

Bunter gasped.

Satisfied that Ponsonby was out of the cottage, Billy Bunter crept from the stair cupboard, and tiptoed to the little bed-room window. He peered out from behind the curtain, and caught sight of Pon's head and shoulders in the street.

Ponsonby was walking away very quickly, and yet with an assumed air of carelessness.

Bunter watched him, his eyes glistening behind his spectacles. Pon disappeared for a few moments past some cottages, but came into view again in the lane beyond the village.

At that distance Bunter's short sight prevented him from seeing clearly; but he made out a fellow who moved two bicycles from behind a fence.

Evidently it was another Highcliffe fellow.

Ponsonby took one of the machines, and the two mounted quickly and rode away, and disappeared from Bunter's sight.

The Owl of the Remove turned from the window.

He was too astonished to think clearly. What it all meant he could not guess.

Ponsonby of Highcliffe had paid a secret, surreptitious visit to Redwing's cabin, and hidden six pounds there. That was the astounding fact. Why had he done it—he who was Redwing's enemy?

Billy Bunter rolled downstairs. He opened the domino-box at once, and uncovered the currency notes.

Six notes for a pound each! Six quids! He blinked at them as if fascinated. He knew that Ponsonby had plenty of money; but this was a large sum to give away.

Billy Bunter thought it out, and he hit on an explanation at last. He nodded his head sagely.

"That's because Redwing saved him on the cliff," he murmured. "Of course! Ass, not to think of it before! He wants to reward Redwing."

The Owl nodded again, feeling that he had hit on the truth at last.

"Redwing's as proud as Punch!" he murmured. "He won't take a reward. He wouldn't take anything from old Vernon-Smith for fishing Smithy out of the sea. He won't take anything from Pon. So Pon's put it here for him to find, without knowing who it comes from."

It really seemed the most probable theory under the mysterious circumstances. But Billy Bunter, on further thought, was not quite satisfied.

Ponsonby of Highcliffe really was not the kind of fellow to do good by stealth.

Besides, if he only wanted to give the money to Redwing without letting him know from whom it came, why had he been so very careful about the numbers of the notes? In the case of a gift there was no necessity to keep the numbers of the notes; that was certain. And why had he hidden them so securely? Tom Redwing might not open the domino-box for weeks; perhaps he did not even play dominoes. The notes might remain there undiscovered by Redwing for weeks, perhaps for ever.

Billy Bunter remembered the pallor in Ponsonby's face, his stealthy manner. His own fat face became a little pale.

"Is it—is it a—a trick on Redwing?" he muttered, staring at the notes. "Oh, the rotter! That's more like Pon than giving anything away. But—but he couldn't make out that Redwing had pinched them. He never sees Redwing."

Billy Bunter repacked the dominoes in the box, and replaced the box on the mantelpiece. The currency notes remained in his fat hands.

He gazed at them long and hard.

Six pounds was a large sum. Bunter was not a thief, though he was duffer enough to go very near the line sometimes from sheer stupidity. But the six pound notes seemed to fascinate him.

"Suppose it's a beastly trick, it's doing Redwing a good turn to take 'em away!" murmured Bunter nervously. "Suppose it's a secret gift—well, Redwing won't lose anything, as he don't know anything about it. Suppose—suppose a chap borrowed some of the cash for a time, and—and made it up out of a postal-order——"

The notes were in his pocket by this time.

"I'll speak to Redwing about it," he reflected. "After all, Pon's got no right to shove his money here secretly. I believe it's a dirty trick. In that case, Pon deserves to lose his money. I can't leave it here, anyhow. Of—of course, I'm not going to keep it. Perhaps I might change one note to pay my fare home. I can't walk it. Perhaps a bit of a feed at Friardale—ahem! Suppose—suppose a fellow used one note, and made it up out of a postal-order——"

Then a glimmering of common-sense, if not of honesty, came into Bunter's obtuse mind, and he trembled.

"Pon's got the numbers! If one's

changed it'll be traced! Oh, dear! I—I might be accused of stealing them!"

At that awful possibility Billy Bunter felt inclined to replace the notes where he had found them. But he did not. He rolled out of the cottage with the currency notes still in his pocket. He was assured that Pon and his companion, on their bicycles, were miles away by this time, and the coast was clear.

As he started on his long tramp home he forgot all about the notes in his pocket in his fatigue and discomfort.

Every mile seemed a league to the unhappy Owl as he tramped wearily on. The things he said about Skinner en route were simply lurid. He could have boiled Skinner in oil, or scalped him, with keen enjoyment.

The miles seemed endless.

But as he came out into the lower road a whir of bicycles sounded, and his fat face brightened up at the sight of Harry Wharton & Co., and Courtenay and De Courcy of Highcliffe.

"I say, you fellows!" he gasped.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Stop! Stop for me!"

The cyclists, who were taking it easy home after their spin round the country, halted, grinning as they looked at Bunter. Never had they seen the fat junior so red, so damp, and so dismal.

"By gad! You've been goin' it, Bunter!" remarked the Caterpillar.

"Been to Hawkscliff?" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Oh, dear! I'm tired! Take me up on your machine, Bob, old chap!"

"My machine isn't built to carry a ton," said Bob, with a shake of the head.

"He looks as if he might have been to Hawkscliff!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, with a frown. "Have you been playing any trick at Redwing's, Bunter?"

"I—I just dropped in——"

"And what did you drop in for?"

"That beast Skinner——"

"What about Skinner?"

"He—he said there was a food-hoard there!" groaned Bunter.

"A food-hoard in Redwing's cottage?" yelled Bob.

"Ow! Yes. He said he'd seen it! It was only a rotten trick, to make me walk ten miles!" moaned Bunter.

There was a roar of laughter from the cyclists.

The idea of Billy Bunter tramping ten miles in search of a food-hoard that did not exist made them shriek.

"Oh, gad!" gasped the Caterpillar. "This is too rich! Why, that man Skinner's a genius!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" moaned Bunter. "I'm tired; I'm nearly dead! Oh, dear! I say, Bob, old chap, you'll lick Skinner when you get in, won't you? I'll hold your jacket."

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Bob. "No, old son, I won't lick Skinner! I'll give him a pat on the back! Perhaps you'll give up food-hogging after this."

"I—I wasn't going to—to—to——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"And did you find the hoard?" grinned the Caterpillar.

"There wasn't any hoard, only some cold potatoes."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I've had nothing to eat but a chunk of bread and two cold potatoes!" said Bunter pathetically. "After tramping ten miles!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The sufferfulness of the esteemed Bunter must have been terrific!" chuckled Hurree Singh. "It also serves him rightfully."

"I—I had to make sure the hoard was there before I—I went to the Food Committee, you know."

"Before you stacked it down your greedy neck, you mean!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull——"

"You can get up behind me, if you like," said Frank Courtenay good-humouredly. "Put your feet on the foot-rests, and hold on."

"Thanks, old chap! You're a real pal!"

Courtenay laughed, and wheeled on with the Owl of the Remove behind him. The cyclists, still chuckling, rode on towards Greyfriars, the only member of the party who did not share the general merriment being Billy Bunter. William George was not feeling merry at all.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.
A Surprise for Tom Redwing!

TOM REDWING came in at the gates of Greyfriars with the Bounder, the latter wheeling his machine.

Redwing was looking very fit and cheerful.

The long walk from his home did not tell on the hardy sailorman's son. His step was springy and vigorous as he crossed the quadrangle with the Bounder.

Several fellows gave him friendly nods as he came along.

In spite of the lofty attitude taken up

by Skinner & Co. on the subject, it was evident that Tom Redwing was persona grata at Greyfriars. The fellows who knew him had always liked him, and the courage he had shown on the occasion when he had fallen over the cliff with Ponsonby had made a good many fellows like him who had not given him a thought before.

Even Wingate of the Sixth, the captain of the school, bestowed a nod of friendly recognition on the sailorman's son. Even Coker of the Fifth—the great and only Coker—gave him a nod and a smile. Temple of the Fourth—the exceedingly aristocratic Cecil Reginald Temple—called out to him "Cheero, Redwing!"

Skinner stood in the doorway, with a sneer on his face. But he did not venture on anything more than a sneer.

Peter Todd was standing near him, and the expression on Peter's face said, as plainly as could be said, that if Skinner made himself obnoxious he would go rolling headlong down the steps. So Skinner sneered, and nothing more. Snoop did not even venture to sneer.

Tom Redwing and his friend stopped at the door.

"See you later," said Vernon-Smith cheerily. And he wheeled his machine away, and Tom came up the steps.

"Cheer-ho, kid!" said Peter Todd.

"Top of the afthernoon, intirely!" said Micky Desmond.

"Glad to see you, dear boy!" yawned Lord Mauleverer.

And Tom Redwing nodded and smiled, and felt very happy as he went on to the Remove-master's study.

He tapped at the door, and Mr. Quelch's voice bade him enter.

The Remove-master greeted him kindly.

He liked Redwing, as nearly everybody did. And his heart had been won by Tom's whole-hearted devotion to work—work of a kind that appealed to Mr. Quelch. What most of the fellows did because they had to, Redwing did because he liked it, and naturally he made great progress.

Few, if any, of the fellows in the Remove read Virgil because they liked reading him—perhaps Mark Linley, and sometimes Wharton. But Tom Redwing preferred the classic poet to any novel that could have been offered to him. His Latin had hitherto been mostly self-taught—perhaps being all the more thorough on that account, though with superficial defects that he was getting rid of with the kind assistance of Mr. Quelch.

He had high hopes now of carrying off the scholarship for which his name was down. If he failed, it would not be for want of hard work. The prospect of entering the Remove was an agreeable one, and there were few fellows who did not wish him success. Indeed, two or three specially bright juniors had deliberately refrained from putting their names down in order not to interfere with Tom Redwing's chances.

Redwing would not have asked that. Perhaps he would not have liked it if he had known; but there it was.

"To work again, my boy?" said Mr. Quelch, with a smile. The Remove-master gave up two hours on every half-holiday to Redwing—this to continue until the exam—and it was a considerable sacrifice, for Mr. Quelch's leisure was scanty. But with such a pupil it was really rather pleasure than work.

"Yes, sir," said Tom brightly.

"You are not tired after your walk?"

"No, sir. I got a lift part of the way, too, and Smithy—I mean Vernon-Smith, took me on his bike at Friardale."

"You are very friendly with Vernon-Smith, I believe, Redwing?" said the Remove-master, glancing rather curiously at the sailor lad.

"Yes, sir; he has been a good friend to me."

"I am very glad to see it, Redwing."

Mr. Quelch did not add that he was glad for Vernon-Smith's sake. But that was the truth. He was aware how good it was for the reckless Bounder to have a chum in the quiet, honest, straightforward sailorman's son.

They sat down to work, and the two hours passed away quickly enough for both of them.

Work finished, and Redwing's exercises for the next three days arranged, the boy took his leave, thanking the Remove-master. And Tom's thanks were not merely words—they came from the heart. Mr. Quelch's somewhat severe face was very kind as he glanced after the boy.

Tom left the study. He looked round for Vernon-Smith, to speak to him before going away. The Bounder was not to be seen, but there were several fellows standing in the hall, and among them Tom Redwing recognised Ponsonby and Monson of the Fourth Form at Highcliffe.

"Here he is!" said Russell, as Redwing came up the corridor.

Ponsonby turned to him.

Pon looked a little tired and dusty. His machine was outside, and he looked as if he had been on a long ride—as

indeed he had, though it did not occur to Tom Redwing where he had been.

"Hallo, Redwing!" said Ponsonby cordially. "I've been waitin' here for you for a quarter of an hour."

"Do you want to see me?" said Tom, in surprise.

"Yes, rather!"

"Well, here I am."

Redwing spoke coldly enough. He was fully aware of Pon's bitter enmity, and he was expecting some sneering remark, such as he had often heard from Ponsonby before. He shrank from the thought of a "scene" at Greyfriars between him and the Highcliffe junior, and he intended to be as patient as he could—even erring on the side of patience, if necessary.

But Pon's manner, to his surprise, was not unfriendly.

In fact, it was very friendly indeed.

He came towards Redwing with smiling face and outstretched hand. Tom simply stared at him.

He was taken quite aback.

"You'll shake hands with me, Redwing?"

"Ye-es, if you like," stammered Tom.

Ponsonby shook hands with him warmly.

"I owe you an apology, Redwing," he said, loudly enough for a dozen fellows to hear, and very curious glances were cast upon Cecil Ponsonby. The high and haughty Pon was not much given to apologising to anybody for anything.

"Tare an' 'ounds!" ejaculated Micky Desmond. "It's jokin' he is! Pulling Redwing's leg, bedad!"

Redwing stared. He could not make it out.

"I owe you an apology, and I apologise, Redwing," continued Pon. "I've treated you like a cad. In return, you ran a lot of risk to save me from an accident. I own up, and I apologise."

"Oh!" murmured Tom.

Skinner, who was looking on, sneered. Here was one of his allies gone in the campaign against Redwing! Pon—the bitter and revengeful Pon—had gone over to the enemy!

Ponsonby glanced round at the curious juniors.

"You fellows have heard about it, I suppose?" he said. "You know what Redwing did? My friends and I were going to rag him. I'm ashamed to admit it. We two fell over the cliff, and Redwing held me up and saved my life! It was simply rippin'! I want to acknowledge it in public."

"Begad," said Lord Mauleverer cordially, "that's very decent of you, Ponsonby! Of course, any fellow would feel like that."

"I suppose so," assented Ponsonby. "I know I do. I had a silly prejudice against Redwing, I admit it. I'm ashamed of it. He's paid me out in a way only a splendid fellow would have done—by saving me from a serious accident. I ask his pardon."

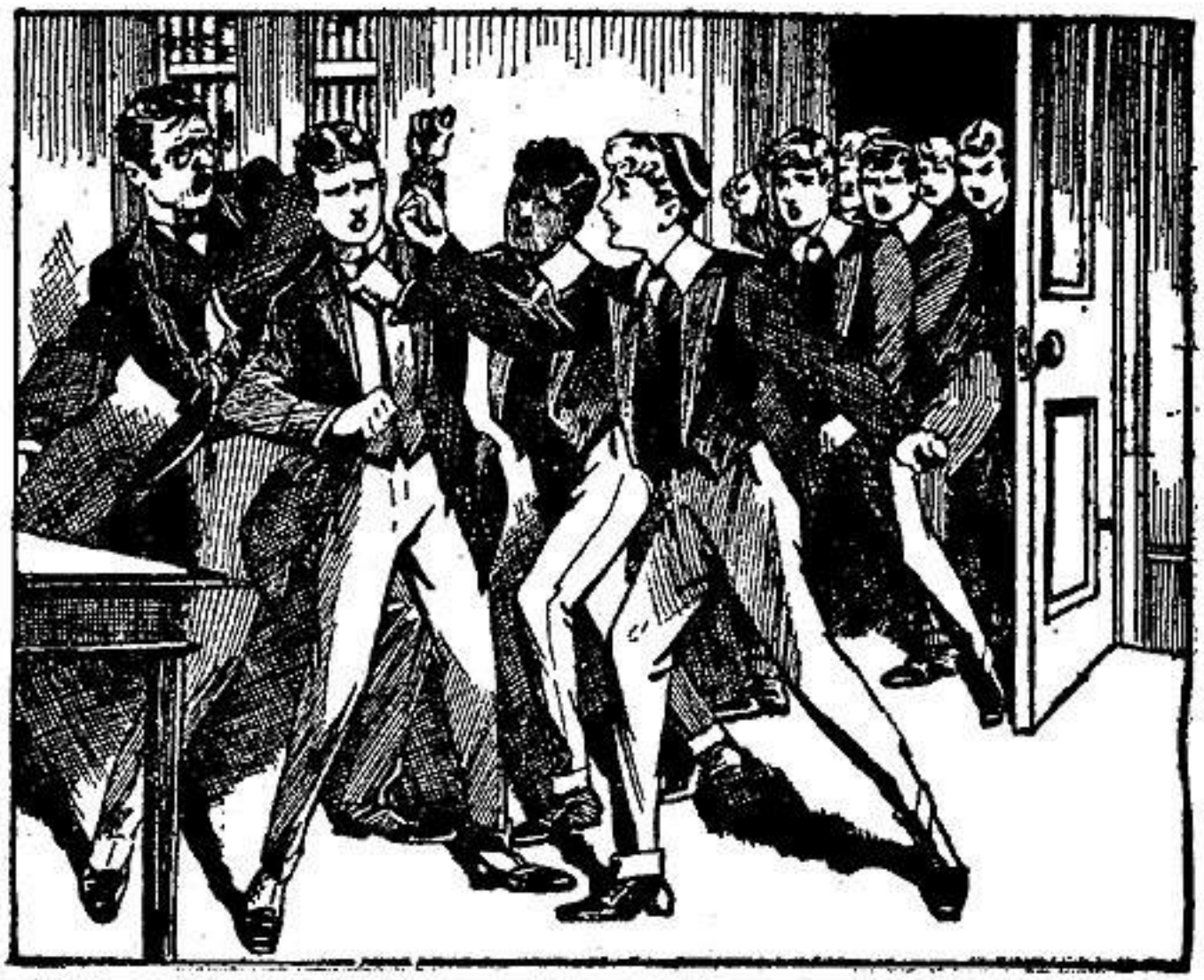
"Well done!" said Russell, thinking to himself that Cecil Ponsonby was not half such a howling cad as was generally supposed.

"Redwing, old chap, I'd like to hear you say that you don't feel sore about any little unpleasantness in the past," said Ponsonby. "If you care to overlook any offence I've given, it will relieve my mind."

Tom smiled—a very cheery smile.

"My dear chap, that's all right!" he said. "I don't bear malice. As for what I did for you, any fellow would have done it. I'm sure you would have done it for me. I'm very glad that you're willing to forget our little trouble. It was really nothing, after all."

"Nothing," assented Ponsonby. "But I bore malice, and I own it. That's all over now. I'm your friend, if you choose to have me for a friend—a silly ass like me, Redwing!"



Ponsonby bowled out! *(See Chapter 11.)*

Redwing laughed.

"I'm glad to hear you say so," he replied.

"And you're goin' to let bygones be bygones?"

"Yes, certainly."

"Good!" said Ponsonby. "I felt sure you'd say so, knowin' you to be a generous chap. Will you come over to Highcliffe this afternoon, Redwing? You're finished with Mr. Quelch, I think?"

"Yes," hesitated Tom. "But——"

"Oh, do come!" urged Ponsonby. "My friends want to see you. I've talked to them about you, you know, and they'd be glad to set themselves right with you, too. Fact is, we're havin' rather a little celebration in my study, and we want you. Do come!"

"Do come, old fellow!" chimed in Monson.

"But I—I——"

"If you refuse, I shall feel that you're still thinking of that miserable grudge between us," said Ponsonby, reproachfully. "Of course, I can't expect you to forget it, I suppose——"

"But I have—I have already!" exclaimed Tom. "Don't think that! But——"

"Well, come, then! The fact is, I've as good as promised for you, and we want you!" urged Ponsonby. "Do come!"

"You're very good," said Tom, almost overwhelmed with all this cordiality. "I'll come if you really want me, Ponsonby."

"Good man!" said Pon, with a smile. "Come on, then! We're killin' the fatted calf, an' we mustn't be too late."

"I must speak to Smithy——"

"Buck up, then; I'll wait!"

Redwing, with a light step, ran up the staircase to the Remove passage.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.
The Guest at Highcliffe!

"SMITHY!"

"Hallo, my son!"

The Bounder was deep in an imposition he had to do for Mr. Quelch, but he laid down his pen, with a smile, as Tom Redwing looked in.

"Just looked in to say good-bye, old chap," said Tom.

"Finished—eh?"

"Yes; and—and I'm going over to Highcliffe."

"What on earth for?"

"Ponsonby's asked me."

"My hat!"

Tom smiled at the Bounder's astonishment.

"He's downstairs," he said. "He's spoken very decently, Smithy, about my holding him on the cliff the other day. It seems to have made a lot of difference to him."

"I shouldn't have thought it."

"Well, I didn't think about it; but he's put it so straightforwardly I can't help thinking I've rather done him an injustice," said Redwing. "I couldn't very well refuse his invitation, as he made a point of it, and he wants to be friendly."

The Bounder looked at him oddly.

"I know Pon better than you do," he remarked. "But I won't say anythin' about that. Good-bye, my boy! I hope you'll have a good time at Highcliffe. I was going to ask you to stay with me to tea, of course; but next time——"

"You don't mind, Smithy?" asked Tom quickly.

"Not a bit," said the Bounder, laughing. "Why should I? Don't get into a game of bridge with Pon."

"Bridge!"

"Ha, ha!" roared the Bounder. "That's Pon's favourite game."

Redwing looked serious.

"Of course, I shouldn't," he said. "But—but I suppose it's no business of mine if Pon gambles, Smithy. I'm not called upon to preach to him."

"Of course not; and you've got too much sense to be led into anything of the kind."

"I hope so."

"Well, ta-ta!"

"Good-bye, Smithy!"

Tom Redwing ran downstairs again, and Vernon-Smith, with a rather thoughtful expression, crossed to the study window. A few minutes later he saw three forms crossing towards the gates—Tom Redwing walking between

Ponsonby and Monson, and all three apparently on the best of terms.

The Bounder shook his head.

He knew only too well the cold-hearted, cynical nature of Cecil Ponsonby. He did not believe that Pon was grateful, or that he felt friendly towards the Hawkscliff lad who had thrashed him. Tom Redwing might forget old offences easily enough; but not Cecil Ponsonby.

Yet it seemed too thick to suppose that Pon was inveigling the sailorman's son to Highcliffe for a rag on him. It could hardly be that. Vernon-Smith, puzzled, but not at all trusting Ponsonby, returned to his impot.

Meanwhile, Tom Redwing walked away from Greyfriars with the two Highcliffe fellows with a light heart. It went against the grain with Tom to be on bad terms with anyone, and he was glad that Pon had become friendly. Ponsonby had injured him, and had striven to injure him more deeply; but that was before the scene on the cliff. Tom was only too willing to let bygones be bygones

He could make allowances, too, for Pon's snobbishness and prejudice; it was largely a matter of training.

Ponsonby could be very agreeable when he liked, and he liked now. During the walk to Highcliffe Pon kept up an agreeable chatting with his new friend, and was very careful to avoid any topics upon which he knew his ideas and beliefs would shock and disgust the sailorman's son. Monson said little, and sometimes he looked at Pon with a kind of wonder. He knew that while Ponsonby talked so smoothly and cordially hatred and scorn and all uncharitableness ran riot in his breast, and he wondered how Pon could do it. But Pon's silky friendliness never failed him for a moment.

They walked in together at Highcliffe gates, and Tom coloured a little as glances were cast at him by well-dressed fellows hanging about. Tom was very plainly though neatly clad, and he seemed a little out of place between his two expensively-dressed companions.

Gadsby and Vavasour were lounging about the quadrangle, but they did not approach the trio. They looked in another direction, and lounged away.

"This way, old fellow!" said Ponsonby cheerily; and he led Redwing up to his study.

Tom Redwing could not help glancing about that apartment with admiration.

Pon's study was furnished regardless of expense, and for luxury there was nothing at Greyfriars like it. Even Lord Mauleverer did not surround himself with such sybaritic comforts as Ponsonby of Highcliffe.

There was a step in the passage. Mr. Mobbs, the master of the Fourth, glanced in somewhat severely. Mr. Mobbs seldom looked in at Pon's study—perhaps being afraid of catching his favourite in some infraction of the rules. But he had seen the plainly-dressed lad from Hawkscliff, and Mr. Mobbs' snobbish nature was shocked.

"My dear Ponsonby, who is your—your guest?" he exclaimed. He could not say friend; he could not suppose that the great Ponsonby made a friend of a fellow whose clothes had not cost more than three pounds in all.

"Tom Redwing, sir. Redwing, this is my Form-master, Mr. Mobbs. You do not mind my bringin' Redwing in to tea, sir, I'm sure; he did me a very great service the other day."

"But really, Ponsonby——"

"He helped me when I fell over a cliff, sir," said Ponsonby. "I might have been badly hurt."

"Oh, very well, Ponsonby!" said Mr. Mobbs graciously. "It is certainly very kind and very generous of you to take notice of the lad. I trust he will be properly grateful for your notice."

With that Mr. Mobbs rustled away.

Tom Redwing's cheeks were crimson.

"Don't mind Mobby," said Ponsonby, as the Form-master's steps died away. "We butter him up, you know, to keep the sneakin' little beast in a good temper. He's a crawlin' snob, and doesn't know a decent chap when he sees one!"

"That's Mobby!" concurred Monson.

Redwing smiled, though he was still feeling uncomfortable.

"Squat down, old chap," continued Pon hospitably. "You'll find this chair comfy. Now, do you mind us leavin' you alone for a few minutes while we gather the clan?"

"Not at all," said Tom.

"Right you are, then—only a few minutes!"

Ponsonby left the study with Monson, closing the door after him. As the solid oak shut him off from Redwing's view the agreeable expression dropped from Ponsonby's face like a mask.

His face hardened, and looked older; his brows knit, and his eyes glittered. A sneering grin curved his well-cut lip.

"It's worked!" muttered Monson.

"Like a charm, old top!"

"You've left him there—alone——"

"With the currency notes on the mantelpiece," murmured Ponsonby. "All the fellows saw them put there."

"The notes you took to Hawkscliff ——"

"Shush!"

"And you're leavin' him alone——" whispered Monson.

"While he steals them."

"Oh, Pon!"

Ponsonby laughed softly. He rubbed his eye; the mark was long since gone, but he remembered how Tom Redwing's knuckles had landed there long ago. Ponsonby had deserved that blow, and many more; but he had not forgotten or forgiven it.

Monson was breathing rather hard.

"You're not goin' to have him to tea?" he whispered, as they went down the passage.

Ponsonby laughed mockingly.

"Have that longshore lout to tea!" he answered. "What are you thinkin' of? I'm not quite a Bolshevik yet! Let's call on Mobby."

"Mobby! What for?"

"You'll see!"

Ponsonby led the way to Mr. Mobbs' study. The master of the Fourth gave him his usual indulgent smile.

"Well, my dear Ponsonby?"

"The fact is, sir," said Ponsonby meekly, "I—I feel I've acted rather foolishly in bringin' that sailor chap here. It was really an impulse; he seemed so pleased at bein' taken notice of. But I'm afraid, sir, that you don't quite approve ——"

"A somewhat unsuitable person to ask into your study, Ponsonby," said Mr. Mobbs, shaking his head. "However, as you have asked him——"

"Well, sir, you know my father's specially told me to defer to your judgment in everythin'," said Ponsonby.

"Your noble parent, Ponsonby, honours me very much."

"Not at all, sir. Thinkin' it over, sir, I feel that I've acted indiscreetly, and I'd like the fellow to go. I can't very well turn him out. Perhaps, sir," said Ponsonby meekly, "you wouldn't mind speakin' to him——"

"If you wish, my dear Ponsonby——"

"If you mentioned, sir, that I'm sorry I can't ask him to stay to tea after all—I don't want to hurt his feelin's, of course—that would get rid of him without any awkwardness."

"My dear boy, I shall be very happy to do so," said Mr. Mobbs.

"You are very kind, sir."

"Not at all. I am glad, Ponsonby, to see that you possess so much good judgment, as well as a kind and generous disposition."

And Mr. Mobbs, who was quite honoured at performing an errand for the highly-connected Ponsonby, trotted contentedly away. Monson looked at Ponsonby in great admiration as they strolled out into the quad.

"That will cut him rather, Pon," he murmured.

"Just what I want."

Monson laughed.

Tom Redwing, in his study, was surprised by the sudden entrance of Mr. Mobbs. He rose to his feet at once.

"Ahem! My—er—lad," said Mr. Mobbs, blinking at him, "Master Ponsonby regrets that he cannot—ahem!—ask you to partake of his hospitality here. It is—er—somewhat against the rules for a Highcliffe boy to ask—er—a lad of—ahem!—your social station into his—ahem!—quarters."

Redwing crimsoned.

"I came here at Ponsonby's invitation, sir," he answered quietly. "May I ask if Ponsonby asked you to tell me this?"

"Ahem! It is at Master Ponsonby's request, certainly."

"Then the fellow is a cad, sir!" said Tom Redwing.

"Wha-at?"

Tom picked up his cap.

"Kindly go at once!" snapped Mr. Mobbs. "After that insolent speech, boy, it is very clear that Master Ponsonby was mistaken in honouring you with his notice. I am glad that he sees his error already. Not a word! Leave this House at once!"

Redwing had nothing more to say, and he went. As he came out of the House, his cheeks burning, he passed Ponsonby and Monson. He glanced towards them, and as Pon met his glance he smiled, shrugged his shoulders, and turned deliberately on his heel.

Tom went on to the gates. Dozens of eyes were upon him. Ponsonby's action had been seen and noted far and wide. His cheeks burned, but it was more contempt than anger that he felt. He could not help thinking now that Ponsonby had intentionally asked him to Highcliffe to inflict this humiliation upon him. He did not guess more, as yet. And when he thought of the friendly cordiality Pon had displayed towards him at Greyfriars, of his friendly chat on the way hither, he wondered, and a feeling of disgust, of loathing, came over him that was too deep for words.

Without a glance to right or left, he walked down to the gates, and passed out into the road, shaking the dust of Highcliffe from his feet.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.
Bunter Sees It All!

"HERE you are!" said Frank Courtenay.

Billy Bunter jumped down from behind Courtenay's walked down to the gates and passed

The fat junior felt as if that lift home had saved his life.

The seven juniors dismounted. Courtenay and the Caterpillar were coming in to tea with their friends, and Billy Bunter, guessing that, intended to make an eighth at the festive board.

They wheeled in their bikes, and went on to the School House together. Vernon-Smith was lounging in the doorway, and he nodded to them.

"Redwing gone?" asked Wharton.

"An hour ago," answered the Bounder.

"Sorry. I'd have liked him to meet these chaps," said Harry. "I thought he might be staying on a bit."

"They may meet him yet," said Vernon-Smith, with a smile. "He's gone over to Highcliffe."

"By gad!" ejaculated the Caterpillar. "Did Pon call here, then?"

"Yes. He came for Redwing. Quite a touching scene of reconciliation, I hear. Ponsonby was so grateful, an' all that."

The Caterpillar looked at him queerly. He did not need telling that Smithy's view of Pon's gratitude was identical with his own.

"I must say that Ponsonby's shown up better than I expected," said Harry Wharton frankly. "He's acted very well."

"Acted is the word!" murmured the Caterpillar. "Pon was always good at actin'."

"That wasn't my meaning," said Harry, rather sharply.

"It was mine," answered the Caterpillar calmly.

Vernon-Smith smiled.

"Pon may mean well; there's no telling," he remarked. "Anyway, a fellow couldn't say anything. Redwing will see for himself."

"I—I say, you fellows, has Redwing gone over to Highcliffe with Ponsonby?" exclaimed Billy Bunter, his round eyes growing rounder.

No one troubled to answer Bunter; but the fat junior caught Vernon-Smith by the sleeve in considerable excitement.

"Smithy——"

"Let go, you fat duffer!"

"Has Redwing gone to Highcliffe with Pon?" shouted Bunter.

"Yes, ass!"

"Oh, crumbs!" ejaculated the Owl of the Remove.

He looked so thunderstruck, that the juniors, who were about to go on to the staircase, paused, and looked at him.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Has the esteemed Bunter a pain in his excellent inside, due to exceeding the respected grub rules?" inquired Hurree Singh.

"My hat!" said Bunter. "Oh, the deep rotter!"

"What are you burbling about?" asked Frank Nugent, staring at him. "Have you walked yourself into a state of dangerous lunacy?"

"The beast!" said Bunter.

"Who's a beast?" yelled Johnny Bull. "What are you talking about?"

"I—I say, is Redwing going into his study?" asked Bunter, blinking at the Bounder.

"I suppose so," said Vernon-Smith. "I understand that Pon's asked him to tea. Do you know anything about it, you fat owl?"

"He, he, he!"

That unexpected cachinnation made the juniors stare at Billy Bunter harder than ever.

"What are you he-he-heing about?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"Oh, the deep rotter!" said Bunter.

"Are you alludin' to merry old Pon?" inquired the Caterpillar, gazing very curiously at Bunter.

"Yes, rather! The scoundrel!"

"What?" exclaimed Courtenay.

"Scoundrel!" said Bunter defiantly. "I don't care whether he's your cousin or not, he's a scoundrel! Do you hear? Scoundrel!"

Courtenay compressed his lips. He knew very well that the term was not inappropriate to Cecil Ponsonby; but it was not agreeable hearing, all the same. Johnny Bull took Bunter by one fat ear.

"Is that the way you talk to visitors, you fat villain?" he growled. "Do you want your fat head jammed on the banisters?"

"Ow, ow, ow!"

"Jump on him!" growled Bob Cherry angrily. "Don't mind the fat idiot, Courtenay."

"Yow-ow-ow! Leggo!"

"Hold on, dear boys!" interposed the Caterpillar mildly. "Before you jump on our rotund friend, let him get it off his chest. He's got somethin' to tell you."

"He's a scoundrel!" yelled Bunter.

"What do you mean" asked Courtenay, very quietly. "You are speaking of a fellow at my school, Bunter, and my cousin."

"Yes; and I say he's a villain!" howled Bunter. "I'll jolly well prove it, too. I know what I know!"

"Well, what do you know?"

"I know why he's made friends with Redwing. I know why he's asked him over to Highcliffe!" jeered Bunter. "Redwing's a silly ass. Still, he's not a thief. I don't approve of him. I think he's got ideas above his station."

"You fat fool!" said the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy——"

"What do you mean by mentioning the word thief?" asked Harry Wharton. "Has anyone dared to suggest such a thing of Tom Redwing?"

"Not yet," grinned Bunter.

"Do you mean to say somebody's going to, then?"

"Yes, I do."

"Who?"

"Who do you think?" grinned Bunter. "Ponsonby, of course!"

"Are you potty?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Redwing must be, to trust that cad Ponsonby," grinned Bunter. "I know what I know, I can tell you. Rather! I couldn't make out how he was going to pretend that Redwing had taken the currency notes; that was what beat me. But as soon as I heard that he'd asked Redwing to his study at Highcliffe, that made it clear enough. He, he, he!"

This was so much Greek to the juniors. What it meant they had not the faintest conception. But that there was something behind it was plain enough.

Vernon-Smith took Bunter by the shoulder.

"Come up to the study, and explain yourself," he said. "No need to shout it out here."

"That's a good idea," agreed the Caterpillar.

"It's only Bunter's rot!" growled Johnny Bull.

"There's more in it than that!"

Billy Bunter, with a feeling of great importance, marched up to Study No. 1 with the puzzled juniors. He was feeling a very important personage indeed now. The mysterious actions of Cecil Ponsonby in Redwing's cottage were all explained now; a more obtuse fellow than Bunter would have guessed what they meant. In his new importance, Bunter felt that he could forgive even Skinner for having sent him on that wild-goose chase to Hawkscliff.

Skinner met them in the passage, and burst into a chuckle.

"Ha, ha, ha! Did you find the food hoard at Hawkscliff, Bunter?"

"You rotter!" said Bunter. "There wasn't a hoard——"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Skinner. "I hope you enjoyed the walk!"

"You can cackle," said Bunter, disdainfully. "I'd give you a jolly good licking if—if I wasn't tired. And perhaps I'm not sorry I went over to Hawkscliff this afternoon, Skinner, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it!"

"I don't think!" grinned Skinner.

Billy Bunter turned up his fat little nose, and rolled into Study No. 1. Harry Wharton & Co. followed him in, with Courtenay, the Caterpillar, and Vernon-Smith. Smithy closed the door.

"Now explain!" he snapped.

And Billy Bunter, with great unction, proceeded to explain; and his explanation was listened to by the juniors with mingled horror and incredulity.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.
The Accusation!

"MR. MOBBS!"

"Come in, my dear Ponsonby!"

Dear Ponsonby came into his Form-master's study.

There was a very serious expression upon dear Ponsonby's face, and his troubled look made the snobbish Form-master concerned at once.

"I trust that nothing untoward has occurred, my boy," said Mr. Mobbs kindly.

"It's rather a shockin' thing, sir," said Ponsonby. "I felt that I had better come an' tell you at once. Some money has been stolen from my study, sir."

Mr. Mobbs jumped.

"Ponsonby!" he gasped.

"I know it's horrid, sir," said Ponsonby, with a sorrowful look. "Simply horrid! But it's happened."

"This is dreadful, Ponsonby!" Mr. Mobbs pursed his thin lips. "My dear boy, I need not ask you if you are sure ——"

"Monson and Gadsby and another fellow were with me, sir, when I put the currency notes on the mantelpiece," said Ponsonby. "I was called out of the study soon afterwards, an' forgot about them. They were put under a bronze statuette for safety. I was goin' to use them to pay some bills. As it happens, I have all the numbers. Gadsby took them for me, as it happens. I don't usually bother about such things; but Gadsby is rather a precise fellow."

"Very fortunate, under the circumstances!" exclaimed Mr. Mobbs. "They can be traced. Kindly give me the particulars."

"Six pounds notes, sir. Here are the numbers."

"It is incredible that a thief can exist in Highcliffe," murmured Mr. Mobbs. "I think, Ponsonby, it—it may turn out to be some foolish jest. Stay, though! Were the notes there when that boy Redwing was in the study?"

Mr. Mobbs fairly jumped at that.

Ponsonby repressed a smile.

He greatly preferred the suggestion to come from the Form-master, as it was bound to do in the circumstances. But it pleased Pon to put on a shocked and startled expression.

"Good heavens, sir! Do you think that he may have taken them?" he exclaimed.

"It is much more probable, Ponsonby, than that any Highcliffe lad could have committed so base a crime."

"I—I suppose so, sir."

"The boy was left alone in the study, Ponsonby?"

"Yes, sir, while I came to speak to you."

"The notes were there at the time?"

"They certainly were, sir. I noticed them as I entered the room with him."

"When did you miss them?"

"I went for them ten minutes ago, sir, and found they were gone. That was about a quarter of an hour after Redwing left."

Mr. Mobbs looked relieved.

"Then the case is clear, Ponsonby. I am assured that no Highcliffe lad would commit so base a crime. That unfortunate lad, whom you foolishly took notice of, has taken the notes."

"I—I hardly like to think so, sir."

"My dear boy, your feeling does you credit; but it is perfectly clear. The boy was alone in the study for a time, and doubtless he observed the notes on the mantelpiece, and was unable to resist the temptation. He is poor, I think?"

"Yes; a poor, workin'-class fellow, sir."

"Do you know much about him?"

"Nothin', sir, only that he's plannin' to get a scholarship at Greyfriars, an' mixes with fellows much better off than himself."

"That is doubtless the cause of the wretched boy's fall," said Mr. Mobbs. "His superiors are to blame for taking notice of him and turning his head. Let this, my dear Ponsonby, be a warning to you not to be led into injudicious kindness to your inferiors by your generous nature."

"I—I will, sir."

"The money must be recovered, of course," said Mr. Mobbs. "I will telephone to the police-station at once."

"The—the police, sir?"

"Certainly, Ponsonby! Only the police have authority to search the boy and his residence, wherever it is. If instant action is taken, the money may be recovered before he has had time to expend it in riotous living—as I have little doubt is his intention."

Pon's eyes glittered.

The officious Form-master was playing his game for him. Mr. Mobbs, as he spoke, went across to the telephone, and Pon watched him with a cruel smile.

In his mind's eye he could see it all unroll before him—the success of his cunning, heartless scheme. The visit of the police to the little cottage at Hawkscliff—the helpless indignation of poor Redwing—the search for the stolen notes—the discovery of them concealed in the domino-box!

What could save Tom Redwing then? What could possible happen to baffle the deep-laid scheme, or to implicate the plotter? Every step was cunningly planned, every move in the game was calculated.

Redwing would be taken into custody. That was assured. And Ponsonby would graciously refuse to prosecute—for even Ponsonby halted at the thought of sending an innocent lad to prison. His bitter, undying disgrace and humiliation, the contempt and scorn of his friends—the ruin of all his prospects at Greyfriars—his overwhelming shame and degradation—that was enough to satisfy even Ponsonby's revenge. He would stop at that. Yes, he would stop there; and Redwing would be let off as a first offender, and Ponsonby's gracious kindness would be known and admired. Redwing, covered with shame as with a garment, would probably disappear from the neighbourhood, with the weight of Ponsonby's vengeance heavy upon him.

These pleasant thoughts stirred in Ponsonby's mind as he watched Mr. Mobbs at the telephone.

He did not flinch when the Form-master called up Courtfield police-station, and asked Inspector Grimes to send a constable to Highcliffe. It was a case of a theft committed by an intruder in the school, Mr. Mobbs explained. He rang off, and turned again to Ponsonby.

"The man will be here in half an hour, Ponsonby," he said. "Fortunately, the miserable matter can be cleared up at once. You will remain at hand to answer any questions he may put to you."

"Certainly, sir!"

Ponsonby moved towards the door, and as he did so there was a tramp of many feet without. A voice—a well-known voice—was heard, in tones that the famed Bull of Bashan could hardly have excelled.

"Where's Ponsonby? Where's that sneaking scoundrel Ponsonby?"

Bob Cherry's powerful voice rang right into Mr. Mobbs' study.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Mobbs, aghast.

Ponsonby stood very still.

A sudden fear was upon him—a sudden, icy, terrible fear. What did it mean? What could Bob Cherry, of all people, know? Mr. Mobbs, unheeding Ponsonby, whisked to the study door, and threw it angrily open.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Foiled at the Finish!

HARRY WHARTON & Co., in Study No. 1 at Greyfriars, listened to Billy Bunter as he related his story. Bunter related it with great enjoyment, all the more as he noted the darkening of the juniors' brows. Never was there a fellow so bursting with importance as William George Bunter was just then.

There were few interruptions.

Harry Wharton & Co. were almost dumb, shocked and startled beyond measure. The Caterpillar smiled cynically. Vernon-Smith's brow grew darker and darker, till it was so fierce and savage that it startled his companions. Frank Courtenay did not speak, but he was very pale.

Billy Bunter finished at last.

He blinked at the juniors through his big spectacles, greatly elated at the impression he had made.

The Bounder was the first to speak.

"You've got the notes?" His voice was hard and steely.

"I've got 'em," grinned Bunter. "Of course, I wasn't going to leave them there, planted on poor old Redwing, you know."

The juniors did not care to inquire into Bunter's exact motives for removing the notes. Probably his motives had been mixed. Bunter loomed very large in his own eyes at this moment; but the part he had played was not very creditable to him. But it was fortunate for Tom Redwing that he had played it; all the juniors realised that.

"Let's see the notes," said Courtenay, perhaps with a lingering hope that the tale was only spun out of Bunter's imagination after all.

Billy Bunter threw them upon the table.

He followed them with a regretful blink. But the knowledge that Ponsonby had the numbers of the notes lessened his regret at parting with them.

The six pound notes were proof positive, if proof was wanted. Bunter was well known not to possess any such sum himself.

"You take them, Courtenay," said Harry Wharton, in a husky tone. "They—they'll have to be given back to—to Ponsonby."

The Bounder broke in.

"For Ponsonby to play another game like this, another time!" he exclaimed, fiercely. "Ponsonby is going to be shown up!"

Courtenay shivered.

"It can't be helped, Franky," said the Caterpillar, softly. "Depend on it, Pon has made his accusation against Redwing already. He couldn't leave it long after Redwing was there—he had to make it clear. I tell you, the fellow's already accused of stealin'."

"It—it may be—be something else," faltered Courtenay. "I know he's bad; but suppose he was trying to make Redwing a gift? Bunter himself thought so at first, he says."

"Why was he so jolly particular about the numbers of the notes, then?" grinned Bunter.

Courtenay was dumb. There was no answer to be made to that.

"I watched him," grinned the Owl. "He was comparing the numbers with a list on a paper! He didn't want to risk leaving the wrong notes there. He, he, he! That wouldn't have done."

Vernon-Smith set his teeth.

"I'm going over to Highcliffe," he said. "We're going to have this out. You fellows had better come—and Bunter. They may have called in the police already; but we may be in time to stop Redwing being arrested."

"Arrested!" stammered Wharton.

"That would follow."

"Good heavens!"

"Let's get off!" exclaimed Bob Cherry feverishly. "Let's get off, and nip it in the bud!"

"Come on, Bunter!" said Harry.

"Oh, I say! What about tea?" exclaimed Bunter in alarm.

The juniors glared at Bunter. It was exactly like Bunter to think about tea at that moment. As a matter of fact, all the juniors were hungry; but they had forgotten it.

Bunter's question was not answered; but Bob Cherry took him by the neck and led him out of the study. And the look on Bob's face warned Bunter not to ask anything more about tea.

The juniors ran their machines out again, a bike being borrowed from the shed for Bunter. Billy Bunter rode off rather sulkily with the rest. He was tired, and he was hungry. But Bob's strong hand rested on his shoulder, and Bunter free-wheeled most of the way to Highcliffe.

They lost no time on the way. Leaving the machines at the lodge, they hurried across in a body to the School House. Smithson of the Fourth was in the doorway, and he called to Courtenay.

"Heard about it, Courtenay? There's a yarn goin' round that Pon's had money stolen from his study."

It was then that Bob Cherry inquired for Ponsonby, in tones that penetrated into Mr. Mobbs' study. Fellows stared from all sides as Bob roared out to know where "that sneaking scoundrel" was!

"Shut up, Bob!" murmured Nugent.

"Pon's in Mobby's study," said Smithson, with a rather scared look. "He——"

The juniors did not wait for him to finish. Courtenay led the way, and they tramped on in a body to Mr. Mobbs' study.

The door was thrown open as they reached it, and Mr. Mobbs' angry face glared out at them.

"What does this mean?" exclaimed Mr. Mobbs harshly. "How dare you invade these precincts in this way, and—— Courtenay! You with them? And you, De Courcy?"

"Where's that scoundrel?" shouted Bob, who was too furious to care a rap for Mr. Mobbs or anybody else. "He's found out. Oh, there you are, you slinking cur!"

He strode into the study, pushing Mr. Mobbs aside. The astonished Form-master gasped as the crowd followed him in. Courtenay closed the door.

Bob was shaking a big fist under Ponsonby's nose.

"You're found out!" he roared.

"Boy!" shrieked Mr. Mobbs. "What does this mean? How dare you! I will send for the police! I—I——"

"Send for them!" exclaimed the Bounder fiercely. "We want them! We want to give Ponsonby in charge!"

"What! Wha-a-at!"

"Let me speak," said Courtenay. "Mr. Mobbs, Ponsonby has done a horribly wicked and treacherous thing, and he has been found out. But—but I think these fellows will be willing to keep it

from becoming a public scandal——" He looked at the Greyfriars juniors.

"So long as justice is done," said Wharton.

Ponsonby was white as chalk.

"What do you mean?" he hissed. "What are you drivin' at?"

"Ponsonby has accused Redwing of stealing money from his study?" said Courtenay, looking at Mr. Mobbs.

"Ponsonby has acquainted me with the fact that it was missing after that wretched boy's visit," snapped Mr. Mobbs. "I have telephoned to the police to take the matter in hand!"

"Currency notes were missing?"

"Yes."

"Ponsonby has the numbers——"

"They are written on this paper. What do you imply, Courtenay?"

Frank Courtenay flung the notes on the table.

"There are the notes!" he said.

Ponsonby staggered.

"Compare the numbers, Mr. Mobbs, please!"

Mechanically, the astounded Form-master did so.

"They—they are correct," he stammered. "These—these are your notes, Ponsonby. Did you take them from that wretched boy Redwing, Courtenay?"

"I did not, sir," said Frank. "These notes were placed by Ponsonby this afternoon in Tom Redwing's cabin during his absence, and he was watched while he was doing it!"

Ponsonby uttered a faint sound. He had to put his hand on the table for support; his knees were knocking together.

This was his scheme—this was the safe, secure plan he had deemed guarded at all points. Tom Redwing, on his way home, could hardly have reached his cabin yet. And here was his scheme in pieces round him, shattered like a castle of cards!

The bitter scorn and loathing in every face round him hardly touched Ponsonby. He was thinking, with a dizzy brain, of his own danger.

Mr. Mobbs was breathing with difficulty.

"This—this—this is amazing—appalling!" he stuttered. "You—you say that Ponsonby was seen——"

"He was watched, all the time, by a Greyfriars fellow, who is ready to give his evidence on oath in a court of law, sir!"

"Yes, rather!" chuckled Billy Bunter.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Mr. Mobbs, really shocked. "Ponsonby, unhappy boy, what have you to say to this?"

Ponsonby could say nothing. His tongue cleaved to his mouth, his throat was dry and husky. His face was so ghastly that even the indignant juniors felt almost sorry for him.

If ever guilt was written in a human face, it was written in Ponsonby's at that moment. Not that he needed to confess; the proofs were plain enough without that.

"Ponsonby!" stammered Mr. Mobbs.

"I—I—I——"

"Deny it, you cur!" exclaimed the Bounder. "Deny it, and have it proved before a magistrate!"

"For Heaven's sake, hush!" exclaimed Mr. Mobbs, in alarm. "If—if Ponsonby has done this, he—he will be severely punished. Every reparation will be made to—to Redwing; but—but there need be no scandal. I appeal to your hearts, my—my dear boys."

"Does Ponsonby withdraw his accusation against Redwing?" asked the Bounder grimly.

"Ponsonby! Speak!"

"I—I withdraw it!" muttered Ponsonby thickly. "I—I am sorry——"

"Do you admit that you planted your notes in Redwing's cabin with the intention of accusing him of theft?" said the Bounder mercilessly.

"I—I admit it! For—for Heaven's sake, don't speak so loud!" groaned Ponsonby. All his arrogance was gone now. "I—I am sorry. I never meant—— I was going to—to own up——"

"Liar!"

"I think we've finished here," said Harry Wharton contemptuously. "No need for it to go further. There's plenty of witnesses, if the cur should try that game again. Let's get out."

The juniors left the study.

Ponsonby was left alone with Mr. Mobbs. That gentleman hastily rang up the police-station, to explain that the whole matter was a mistake, and was informed that the constable was already on his way. The worried man called in a fag, and sent a message to the porter. Then he turned to Ponsonby, who stood leaning on the table, white as chalk.

Pon was Mr. Mobbs' favourite. Even now the sycophantic master was thinking chiefly of saving the young rascal from the results of his iniquity. But even Mr. Mobbs was shocked and angry and exasperated. Pon listened in silence to all he had to say—and it was a great deal. It was followed by a severe caning, which Ponsonby hardly felt. He was white and dumb as he quitted the study at last, and the look on his face, as he went up to his quarters, scared his friends away from him. He was thinking, with terror, of what would have happened to him if the matter had been taken before the Head of Highcliffe—and before the law—as it might have been. For once the rascal of Highcliffe had had a lesson that he was not likely to forget.

* * * * *

Billy Bunter smirked loftily when Tom Redwing, on the occasion of his next visit to Greyfriars, rushed up to him and shook his fat hand. Redwing knew what Bunter's visit to his cabin had saved him from now; and though Bunter really did not deserve much thanks, Tom was grateful. Bunter received his thanks, and allowed Tom to shake his flabby hand with great complacency; and he carried his kindness so far as to borrow five shillings of Tom Redwing on the spot!

(Don't miss "TOM REDWING'S WIN!" — next Monday's grand complete story of Harry Wharton & Co., by FRANK RICHARDS.)

The Editor's Chat.

For Next Monday:

"TOM REDWING'S WIN!"

By Frank Richards.

This is the last of the second series of stories about Tom Redwing, though that does not mean that he is going to drop out of the stories. On the contrary, you are certain to hear of him pretty often in future, though, like Mark Linley, he may be a bit outside some of the fun at times. A fellow who goes to school to work for all he is worth has not the time to spare for constant japing.

The title gives away the fact that Tom won the scholarship—as it had been hoped all along he would do. But you will not realise till you have read the story how very near he came to losing it through the last cunning, desperate trick of Skinner to upset his chance. This is as good a yarn as any of those about the sailor lad—and that is saying quite a lot.

LIST OF GREYFRIARS STORIES IN THE "MAGNET" (continued).

In spite of the plain intimation I gave you some weeks ago, notices continue to flow in. Either the senders of these don't read the Chat, or they have disregarded what I told them. But they are only wasting stamps. I have so many notices in hand that I decline most positively to take any more—except cricket challenges—until these are cleared off. So once again let me warn you that it is of no use writing for a notice that you want any of the stories in the list below. And it is equally useless to write asking me to send you them, or even to send stamps to the publishing department for them. We have not a single copy, either for sale or to give away. The list is in no sense an advertisement; it is inserted because so many readers are interested in the stories of the past, and have asked specially for it.

61.—"The Rivals of Greyfriars."
62.—"The Shipwrecked Schoolboys."
63.—"The Greyfriars Picnic."
64.—"Wharton & Co. v. Tom Merry & Co."
65.—"Rival Scouts."
66.—"Stony Broke."
67.—"Harry Wharton's Ward."
68.—"The Invasion of Greyfriars."
69.—"The Bully of Greyfriars."
70.—"The Cliff House Party."
71.—"The Barring of Bulstrode."
72.—"The Greyfriars Photographers."
73.—"The Greyfriars Caravan."
74.—"The Greyfriars Camp."
75.—"The Tenants of Study 13."
76.—"Billy Bunter, Editor."
77.—"The Greyfriars Bun-Fight."
78.—"Harry Wharton's Bank Holiday."
79.—"Harry Wharton's Eleven."
80.—"Boy Scouts From the Faderland."
81.—"Bunter the Boxer."
82.—"The Head's Holiday."
83.—"Bunter the Bully."
84.—"Harry Wharton & Co. Afloat."
85.—"The Greyfriars Visitors."
86.—"The Chum From New Zealand."
87.—"Billy Bunter's Windfall."
88.—"The Lancashire Junior's Resolve."
89.—"Staunch Chums."
90.—"With Flying Colours."

Yours Editor

THE AIR-RAIDS THAT COME IN THE SPRING!

(Tune: "The Flowers That Bloom in the Spring.")

BILLY BUNTER:

The air-raids that come in the spring, tra-la!
Are not to my taste, I opine.
When I hear them above on the wing, tra-la,
And think of the bombs that they bring, tra-la,
I feel very cold in the spine.
I wish that the moon wouldn't shine!
And that's what I mean when I say or I sing,
Oh, bother the raiders that come in the spring!
Tra-la, la-la-la-la! Tra-la, tra-la-la-la!
I wish they would stay by the Rhine.

BOB CHERRY:

The raiders that come in the spring, tra-la,
Would not stay at home by the Rhine.
If they didn't come here on the wing, tra-la,
They'd go to the Front, and they'd fling, tra-la,
Their bombs on the boys at the line—
On the Tommies who stand at the line!
And that's why I think it's a jolly good thing,
That they're duffers enough to come here in the spring,
Tra-la, la-la-la-la! Tra-la, tra-la-la-la!
So let 'em all come in the spring!

NOTICES.

Back Numbers, Wanted.

By W. Gorry, 54, South Main Street, Kildare, Ireland—"Boy Without a Name."

By J. G. Ball, 46, Kingsbury Road, Islington, N. 1—red-covered MAGNETS—please write first, stating price.

By A. E. Edmundson, Hill Top House, Ripponden Wood, Ripponden, near Halifax—MAGNET and "Gem," numbers between 300 and 400—offers 9d. per dozen.

Extracts from "THE GREYFRIARS HERALD" and "TOM MERRY'S WEEKLY."

WHEN GUSSY FRETTED!

By HARRY NOBLE.

I.

"FIVE o'clock!" grunted Jack Blake. "Now, where's that ass got to, I wonder? We shall have to stop sending Gussy out foraging. I'm bless—— Hallo! Here he is! Well, I'm jiggered!"

The door of Study No. 6 flew open, but instead of the immaculate figure of Gussy of the Fourth Form at St. Jim's, the grinning faces of Tom Merry, Harry Manners, and Monty Lowther appeared in the doorway.

"Tea ready?" grinned Tom Merry. "Oh, good! Sorry we're late, you chaps, and all that, you know. Still, better late than never, as William Shakespeare remarks."

"Well, I'm hanged if that ain't cool!" gasped Jack Blake. "Hanged if I remember inviting you chaps to tea!"

"All serene! Don't apologise!" murmured Tom Merry, drawing up to the table. "We'll overlook your omitting to invite us for once. Won't we, you chaps? How could you know that we were starving? Still, you'll find we won't expect too much."

"Ahem! That's lucky!" remarked Blake, eyeing the table grimly. "For it's a dead cert that you won't get much. There's a middling white tablecloth, a few spoons and forks and things, half a loaf of bread, and about two ounces of margarine. And there's a little tea in the teapot. Sugar, of course, is out of the question. Still, you're as welcome as the flowers in May. So pile in!"

"Don't mention it," said Tom Merry hurriedly, picking up his cap and making for the door. "It's extremely kind of you, but I've just remembered an important engagement."

"We've really come to the wrong place," explained Monty Lowther apologetically. "It is a German detention camp we are looking for—somewhere where we could rely upon getting a jolly good feed! But I see we have strolled into a casual-ward instead. Sorry! Good-bye!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Terrible Three filed out of the study, laughing. They were hardly through the doorway, however, when Blake gave a shout. It wasn't like Study No. 6 to turn guests away hungry—not even uninvited guests.

"Stop, you asses! Don't be in such a hurry, fatheads! There'll be plenty to eat when Gussy comes back loaded up with grub. He's gone to the village to blue a quid."

"Good! Then we'll stay!" said Tom Merry magnanimously. "How long will the ornament be? That's the question!"

"Can't be long now. He's—— Hallo! Oh, my hat!"

Blake's expression of amazement was echoed by all as the door flew open with a crash and Arthur Augustus D'Arcy marched in. Under one arm he carried some lengths of thin wood about six feet long by two feet wide. And under the other arm was a parcel. The noble Arthur Augustus was loaded up without a doubt. But he certainly didn't appear to be loaded with grub!

Gussy looked hot and tired, but he smiled round benignly upon the juniors. His fellow-owners of Study No. 6 at least did not return the smile, however.

"What the merry dickens——"

"What the thunder——"

"What is it?" roared Blake. "What have you got there? And where's our grub, you tailor's dummy?"

"Weally, Blake, pway withdwaw that oppwobwious and insultin' expwession!" protested Gussy, looking severely at Blake. "I wefuse——"

"But we're waiting for our tea!" yelled Herries wrathfully. "What have you done with that quid? Have you brought any grub back? That's what we want to know!"

"Certainly not!" said Gussy, with dignity. "All you fellows seem to think about is gwub! You don't seem to weallse that there's a war on!"

"Then what's in that parcel?" demanded Blake, in exasperation.

"A fwetsaw!" said Arthur Augustus coldly.

"A wha-what?" gasped six voices simultaneously.

"A fwetsaw! I am taking up fwetwork," explained Gussy loftily.

"Oh, crumbs! Fan me, someone!" gasped Monty Lowther.

"Taking—up—fretwork! You—you unutterable idiot!" yelled Blake. "Do you mean to say you've blued all our tin on a blessed fretsaw? Well, I'm hanged! Gussy, you—you——"

"Pway contwol yourself, Blake, deah boy!" said Arthur Augustus severely. "When you heah my weasons I'm suah you will not be so unpatwiotic as to put gwub befoah our countwy's welfare. The other day, you know, I was weading that evewyone should take up some work of national importance, and those who couldn't should take up some useful hobbay. Now, I wegard fwetwork as a vewy useful hobbay—if not actually of national importance. I intend to make lots of useful things, and sell them for war chawities."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"So," continued Gussy, "when I saw the fwetwork outfit in a shop window it struck me how much more patwiotic it would be to spend the pound on something weally useful than to waste it on gwub, especially as the countwy is so short of foodstuffs at this cwitical pewiod."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"This is not the time for wibald laughtah!" said Arthur Augustus frigidly, shaking an admonishing finger at the laughing juniors. "You youngstahs don't seem to wealise the extwemo gwavity of the situation. While you iwwesponsible kids are eatin' pwecious foodstuffs, and wastin' pwecious time playin' about with a football, fellahs of tact and judgment like myself realise the nation's pewil, and—— What! Wow! Keep off, you asses! Oh, help! You wottahs! Yawooh!"

Arthur Augustus yelled in astonishment when six angry juniors flung themselves upon him, for, though he had realised his nation's peril, he had apparently not realised his own. To be done out of their tea was bad enough, but to be called youngsters and irresponsible kids on the top of it was the last straw. The tea-party was fed up with Gussy—to put it mildly.

"Bump him!" howled Blake wrathfully. "I'll teach him to spend our tin on that rot! We'll give him 'youngsters' and 'kids,' the jumping jackass! The blithering idiot!"

Bump, bump, bump!

D'Arcy yelled in anguish as the angry juniors bumped him again and again. Then, somewhat mollified, the disappointed tea-party trooped out to have a belated war-time tea in Big Hall.

"The wottahs! The unpatwiotic wottahs!" gasped D'Arcy, picking himself up, and eyeing his disarranged attire in tragic dismay. "Weally, I shall sewiously begin to think soon that none of the beastlay slackahs care whethah we win the war or not. Fancay wowwyin' about gwub when there is sewious work to be done! The feahful Huns!"

And, to show his utter disregard of grub, D'Arcy began feverishly to clear the tea-things from the table. Then, filled with burning zeal to carry out his patriotic intentions, he settled down to work, and very soon sounds that suggested a carpenter's shop in full blast were proceeding from Study No. 6.

II.

"AND now for prep!" said Jack Blake, as he kicked open the door of the study some time after tea. "I wonder if Gussy —— Oh, my hat! What a mess!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby roared as they stood in the doorway and looked into the room. Fretwork and tools were spread all over the room. But Arthur Augustus was in a worse mess. He sat at the table, fretsaw in hand, and surrounded by bits of fretwood, tools, and broken saw-blades. His clothes, usually so neat and spotless, were white with a covering of sawdust. His hot, perspiring face, and the fact that two fingers of his left hand were bound in blood-stained bandages, gave the impression that the enthusiastic war-worker was not finding fretwork entirely free from labour and personal danger.

"Weally, you boundahs, I see no cause for hilawity!" protested D'Arcy indignantly. "While you have been away I have been working feahfully hard. I'd no ideah that fwetwork was such vewy stwenuous work. And I feah those six dozen saw-blades I bought are of vewy infewiah qualitay. There must have been flaws in at least four dozen of them, for they are all broken, and I feah I shall be obliged to puwchase a fwesh supply soon."

"So I saw—I mean, see," said Blake humorously. "But don't fret, Gussy! With your fretsaw you'll win the war—which is poetry—rhyme, anyway. But let's see the result of your labours."

D'Arcy proudly handed a piece of fretwork, full of weirdly-shaped holes and curves, round for inspection.

"What is it?" asked Blake curiously. "A Chinese puzzle, or what?"

"Don't be widic, Blake! It's a photo-fwame. I'm going to make hundweds of them, an' sell them at a guinea apiece. I wegard that as a vewy weasonable pwice."

"Oh, crumbs!"

"Well, put the blessed stuff away now, Gussy! We want to do our prep," laughed Blake.

"Certainly not, Blake! I have quite a lot of work to do yet, and I shall wequiah the studay to myself this evenin'. I must wequest you fellahs to do your pwep in the Form-woom or in some othah studay. I weally cannot allow pwep to interfeah with my work, deah boys!"

The dear boys stared wrathfully at the enthusiastic war-worker. They did not appear at all keen to adopt his suggestion.

"Why, you frightful ass—you potty lunatic!" yelled Blake. "D'ye think we're going to work in the cold Form-room while you wriggle in here making jig-saw puzzles, you ass? Not much! If this mess isn't cleared away in two ticks, my noble war-worker, you go out—on your neck!"

Arthur Augustus eyed Blake frigidly through his eyeglass.

"Weally, Blake, I wegard your expwession as extwemely wude! I uttahly wefuse to go out on my neck. And——"

Gussy got no further. From long experience the occupants of the study had found it useless to argue with him when he began to ride the high horse. Prompt action was the only thing. A moment later D'Arcy gave a startled yell as three pairs of hands gripped him.

Struggling and protesting feebly, the swell of the Fourth was whirled out of the study, to descend with sprawling limbs and a dismal bump on the passage floor.

"Yawwooh! Oh, help! You feahful wottahs! Wow!"

D'Arcy yelled again as a hailstorm of fretwood and tools rattled round his noble head. Then the door banged.

"The feahful duffahs! The wuff bwutes!" groaned Arthur Augustus, sitting up painfully. "I will weturn and give them all a fwightful thwashing!"

D'Arcy broke off his reflections as he heard the quiet rustle of a gown, and, looking up, he found Mr. Railton peering down in amazement.

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"Good gracious, D'Arcy, what are you sitting there for?" demanded the Housemaster. "And what does all this rubbish mean?"

"I—I—this is fwetwood, sir. I have been doing fwetwork," stammered D'Arcy feebly.

"Fretwork! But a passage is not the place to work at your hobby, boy! Why don't you work in your study, D'Arcy?"

"Because—ahem!—er—as a matter of fact, I hear there isn't enough woom, sir, and it is most inconvenient," explained D'Arcy.

"But surely you could find somewhere—one of your empty box-rooms upstairs, for instance? Why not do your fretwork there? Come to my room, and I will give you the key."

Mr. Railton rustled away, smiling, leaving D'Arcy staring after him with a beaming countenance.

"Bai Jove! Now I considah that extwemely kind and considewate of Wailton!" he murmured. "Weally, I must wun after him at once and thank him!"

D'Arcy rose to his feet with that intention, but then, suddenly realising his dusty and dishevelled appearance, he shook his head decidedly.

"No; upon weflection I will put these things in a place of safety, and have a bath and change of clothin' first," he muttered. "Weally, it would be most wude and ungentlemanly to call upon Mr. Wailton in this disweputable state. But I must wemembah him. Bai Jove! I've got an idea. I will make him somethin'—a pipe-wack or something of that descwiption. What a wippin' ideah!"

And, full of his ripping idea, D'Arcy forgot all about the fearful thrashing he was going to administer to Blake, Herries, and Digby—which was perhaps lucky for Arthur Augustus.

III.

IT was a few days later.

Tom Merry, clad in footer garb, and with a football under his arm, kicked open the door of Study No. 6. Behind him were Monty Lowther and Manners, also garbed for the fray.

"You chaps ready?" called Tom Merry cheerily. "It's a glorious afternoon for footer, so buck up! Blessed if it doesn't take some people some time to change! Where's Gussy?"

Blake snorted disgustedly.

"The idiot says he's dropping footer! He's fretting."

"He's what?" gasped Merry. "Fretting! What on earth's he fretting about? The rise in the price of neckties, or what?"

"Worse than that," growled Blake. "He's taken up fretwork—in earnest, too. Ever since he bought that blessed fretwork outfit in Rylcombe he's done nothing but talk, dream, and do fretwork! He's dropped all games, and spends all his blessed time in the box-room. And now he's making a pipe-rack or some other blessed thing for Railton—it's his birthday to-morrow. It's sickening!"

"What?" gasped Tom Merry. "Do you mean to say he's not going to turn out for the match this afternoon? Why, we haven't a blessed man to take his place! Haven't you talked to him?"

"With my tongue and with my boots," growled Blake. "But it's no use. You know what Gussy is—he can be as obstinate as a mule when he likes!"

Tom Merry thumped his fist on the table emphatically.

"Then fretwork's got to stop!" he said warmly. "I can forgive a fellow neglecting prep for a hobby, but when it comes to neglecting footer—well, someone's got to put a foot down! It's too serious. Look here! We are now going to visit Gussy in the box-room, and if we can't persuade him to turn out and drop his fretwork rot—well, there'll be a giddy funeral in the D'Arcy family!"

Blake, Herries, and Digby did not look very hopeful, but they followed the Terrible Three upstairs to the box-room.

From inside the room came the sound of sawing. Tom Merry turned the handle of the door and grunted.

The door was locked. Tom kicked vigorously on the lower panels.

"Bai Jove! Who is there?" came a voice as the sawing stopped.

"Open this blessed door, Gussy, you dummy! We want to talk to you!"

"Wats!" said Arthur Augustus briefly.

Tom Merry breathed hard.

"Look here, Gussy!" he shouted. "Are you coming to play footer or not?"

"The answah is in the negative, Tom Mewwy," came the voice. "Pway wun away and play! I am too busy to talk to you youngstahs now."

"But what about the House match?" yelled Tom Merry, kicking away at the door.

"Sowwy, deah boy; but I cannot neglect my work for such childish games! I am at pwesent engaged upon a birthday gift for Mr. Wailton. I have discovered that it is his birthday to-mowwow. Therefore, it is impewative that it should be completed to-day. Pway do stop that howwible wow, and wun away! You are thwowing me into quite a fluttah with that tewwible din."

Tom Merry gave the door a last hefty kick, and turned away with a snort of anger.

"Come on! It's no use wasting the whole afternoon on the hopeless dummy! I'll slay the raving lunatic for this, see if I don't!" he growled wrathfully.

Arthur Augustus D'Arcy waited until the tramp of the angry footballers died away down the stairs. Then he chuckled, and resumed his sawing.

"The cheeky asses!" he murmured to himself composedly. "Fancy expectin' a fellah to give up important work like this for footah! I wathah pwide myself on my tact and judgment in locking the door. Bai Jove, yes! If I can always wemembah to lock the door I need nevah feah such intewwuptions. And—what——"

He gave a startled jump, and the delicate saw-blade was smashed into fragments as, with a sudden click, the door swung open, and Racke, Crooke, and Mellish sneaked cautiously into the room. D'Arcy eyed them in indignant amazement. It was plain that they were just as startled at D'Arcy.

Bai Jove, you wottahs! How dare you intwude in this wude mannah! Have you feahful cads got a key of this woom? And pway what do you want heah?"

Racke coolly lit a cigarette. It was fairly obvious that the invaders possessed a duplicate key, and it was plain for what reason they had come to the box-room. The pack of cards in Racke's hand, and the fact that all three were smoking cigarettes, told that without an answer in words.

"You beastly smoky boundahs!" shouted Arthur Augustus, coughing violently as the smoke reached him. "Pah! If you dingy wascals don't throw those filthy fags away at once and wetiah, I will give you all a feahful thwashin'! Pah!"

Aubrey Racke grinned, and puffed a cloud of smoke insolently into D'Arcy's face.

"That's where you're off it, my boy! We're three to one, and——"

Smack!

Racke crashed to the floor with a bang that shook the room. Arthur Augustus can punch when he wants to. With flourishing fists and blazing eyes, he danced round the prostrate Racke:

"Get up, you howling wottah! You uttahly wude beast!" he shouted. "Get up, and I'll—I'll knock you down again!"

The invitation didn't appeal to Racke. He stayed on the floor, nursing his nose and groaning. So D'Arcy, breathing fire and slaughter, rushed at Crooke.

But Crooke didn't stop. Mellish was already through the doorway and clattering downstairs. Crooke followed him. D'Arcy reentered the box-room, to find that Racke had staggered to his feet. But as the infuriated D'Arcy rushed at him he dodged desperately round the table and shot through the door.

"The boundahs!" gasped the victorious D'Arcy, shutting the door. "The feahful Huns! I wathah fancy I shall not be bothered with a visit fwom those fwightful boundahs again. But what a feahful nuisance! These wotten intewwuptions are delayin' my work considewably. I weally feah I cannot finish this before bed-time. In that case, I shall have no alternative but to finish it aftah lights out."

Two minutes later work was proceeding briskly in the box-room.

. . . . . .

"Quiet, you ass! Not so much row! Mellish, you'll wake the whole school!"

The voice was Racke's, and Mellish, who had stumbled on the stairs, picked himself up, and scowled in the darkness. It was half-past ten, and Racke, Crooke, and Mellish were once more creeping upstairs to the box-room. Lights-out didn't always mean bed for these dingy sportsmen.

"Here we are!" whispered Racke, unlocking the box-room door and entering. "Who's got the candle?"

A moment later a light was produced, and the sportsmen began to make preparations for one of their card-parties.

"This is a bit of all right!" observed Racke, dealing out the cards with a practised hand. "Jolly good luck getting hold of a duplicate key of this box-room. We can have some good times here undisturbed."

"What about D'Arcy? He's got a key, and he'll always be fooling round here now!" grumbled Crooke.

Racke scowled. His nose was still sore from the punch D'Arcy had given him.

"Oh, that fool!" he snarled viciously. "Hang him, he's mucked up our chances of a game in the day-time with his kid's rot; but we can be sure of a game at night without his shoving his nose—— What's that?"

From outside came a slight creaking sound.

"Someone's coming! Collar the cards, and get behind those boxes!"

Quick as lightning the cards were swept away, and the light was put out just as the door-knob rattled. Next moment a dim form entered the room. Then sounded the striking of a match, and Racke, peering from behind the pile of boxes, gave a stifled gasp as the flame lit up the features of Arthur Augustus D'Arcy.

"Bai Jove!" murmured the visitor, as he lit the candle. "I'd swear I took the key away with me and locked the door. Extwaordinawy!"

A soft chuckle came from behind the boxes. But D'Arcy didn't hear it. Blissfully unconscious of the presence of the shady trio, D'Arcy opened the drawer in the table and took out his precious fretwork. Then he set to work in earnest by the dim light of the candle.

For a solid hour the enthusiast worked away. Then, just when Racke & Co. were feeling that they could stand their cramped position no longer, Gussy gave a stifled sigh of relief.

"There, that's finished at last!" he murmured aloud. "I wathah fancy Mr. Wailton will be vewy pleased with it. Though I say it myself, I considah it a piece of work to be pwoud of. And now I will w'ap it up and leave it here for the seccotine to dwy until the morning." And Arthur Augustus, feeling he had done a good day's work, put his tools away and left the room, carefully locking the door behind him.

"The howling chump!" snorted Crooke, jumping to his feet and stretching himself painfully. "Hang the silly fool! I'm as stiff as a poker, and half frozen! Come on! Light that blessed candle, and let's get to the cards again! That's a clear hour wasted."

"Hang the cards!" said Racke, with a nasty grin. "I've a little score to settle with D'Arcy first. Where's that blessed thing he's been working at? He won't think it a piece of work to be proud of when I've finished with it!"

A few seconds later the three were gazing scornfully at D'Arcy's precious work. The pipe-rack, though it wasn't exactly a piece of work to be proud of, was not bad for a beginner. The design itself was floral, and well cut out. And above the slots for the pipes were the words, "Many Happy Returns," neatly cut out in white letters glued on the face of the pipe-rack.

"Smash the blessed thing up!" sniffed Crooke in disgust. "Can't you see whom it's for? It's a birthday present for Railton—it's his birthday to-morrow. Fancy making a master a present! Bah! Sucking up!"

"No, no! That's just why I'm not going to smash it up!" grinned Racke cunningly. "If you chaps will just remove the 'Many Happy Returns' carefully with a penknife, I'll get on with a little fretwork myself. I did a bit when I was a kid. When Gussy hands his precious present to Railton to-morrow morning, I don't fancy he'll be as pleased with it as Gussy imagines."

Half an hour later Racke had finished his alteration. Wrapping up the pipe-rack again, he put it back where Gussy had left it. And, it being too late for cards, the trio made for the door.

It was then their troubles began. For the door was locked. D'Arcy had not, as he had imagined, left his key in the door that afternoon. The key was Racke's, and, naturally, D'Arcy had locked the door and taken Racke's key with him when he went.

"The only thing to do," groaned Racke at last, "is to kick up a row! We can't stay here all night. When someone comes we shall have to make a dash for it, that's all. With luck, we may perhaps manage to get clear away."

But, unfortunately for Racke & Co., this plan didn't come off as they hoped. The row was heard right enough, and Mr. Railton,

(Continued on page 16.)

Kildare, and about half the school came to investigate. Kildare's broad shoulders made short work of the lock; but Racke & Co. rushed out, only to find the stairway blocked with pyjama-clad figures.

It was hopeless from the start. The three sportsmen were collared at once, and hauled before the master. Mr. Railton held up the candle, and gazed in astonishment at the trio before him.

"Good gracious! Racke, Crooke, and Mellish! What are you boys doing here at this time of night? Answer me at once!" he demanded sternly.

Racke was rarely at a loss for an excuse, but the excuse he made this time was a poor one, and he knew it.

"Well—er—the fact is, sir, we thought we heard a burglar, and came up to see!"

"Oh! And I suppose he locked you in?" replied Mr. Railton, with biting sarcasm. "No, Racke, that's not good enough! But you had better get off to bed at once. To-morrow I shall require an explanation."

Somehow, the yarn had gone round that Arthur Augustus was giving Mr. Railton a birthday-present, and D'Arcy was bombarded with requests to have a squint at it. The noble Gussy, nothing loth, proudly handed it round for inspection. Perhaps, had he only looked at it himself beforehand, the unfortunate Gussy would have been saved much unpleasantness, and fretwork might have been even yet his hobby and delight. But he didn't, and the pipe-rack was passed round from hand to hand.

By the time the present reached the last fellow the whole crowd was chuckling. D'Arcy looked quite hurt when it finally reached him, obligingly wrapped up by the last to see it. But he hadn't time to censure their rudeness, for just then Mr. Railton came in for breakfast.

"Now's your chance, Gussy! Buck up!" came several encouraging whispers.

Everyone was grinning broadly when Arthur Augustus left his place, and, with a graceful bow, handed the parcel to the astonished master.

"A little birthday-pwesent for you, sir," said Arthur Augustus beamingly

Mr. Railton smiled good-naturedly as he opened the parcel and held up the pipe-rack. Then, quite suddenly, the smile vanished and his face darkened.

"Why, how—how dare you, D'Arcy! Is this intended for a joke?" he demanded sternly.

D'Arcy stared in open-mouthed astonishment from the master to the pipe-rack. Then he gave a sudden jump.

"Bai Jove!" he gasped feebly. "Someone's altered it! Bai Jove!"

Plainly enough, someone had altered it. The words, "Many happy returns," that D'Arcy had so carefully cut out were missing, and in their place "Rats to you!" stood out in bold white letters.

Mr. Railton looked grim. Then he asked a few more questions, though D'Arcy's explanation had already told him all he required to know. The fact that Racke & Co. had been found in the box-room after D'Arcy had left was quite sufficient, without further proof.

"Ah, that will do, D'Arcy!" he said at last. "I think I understand perfectly. You will please do me two hundred lines for being out of bed after 'Lights out.' And—— Wait a moment! Er—you had better take this article with you. And now, Racke, Crooke, and Mellish, I will deal with your case. Come here!"

D'Arcy, with a very red face, and the unappreciated birthday-gift under his arm, walked past the grinning juniors. He was feeling deeply mortified and far from happy. But Racke, Crooke & Co. were looking still more unhappy. Mr. Railton had sent for a cane.

"I am now going to cane you, not only for disturbing the whole House last night, but for gross disrespect to a master!" he said briefly. "Hold out your hand, Racke!"

When Blake, Herries, and Digby entered Study No. 6 after lessons they were not very much surprised to find D'Arcy burning wood on the fire.

"What's up, Gussy?" grinned Blake, winking at Herries and Digby. "You're not burning the pipe-rack, surely? It deserves a better fate than that. Why, I haven't laughed so much for ages!"

"Don't be widic, Blake!" said Arthur Augustus, blushing. "As a mattah of fact, deah boys," went on D'Arcy confidentially, "I have decided to dwop fwetwork altogethah."

THE END.

THE GREYFRIARS GALLERY.

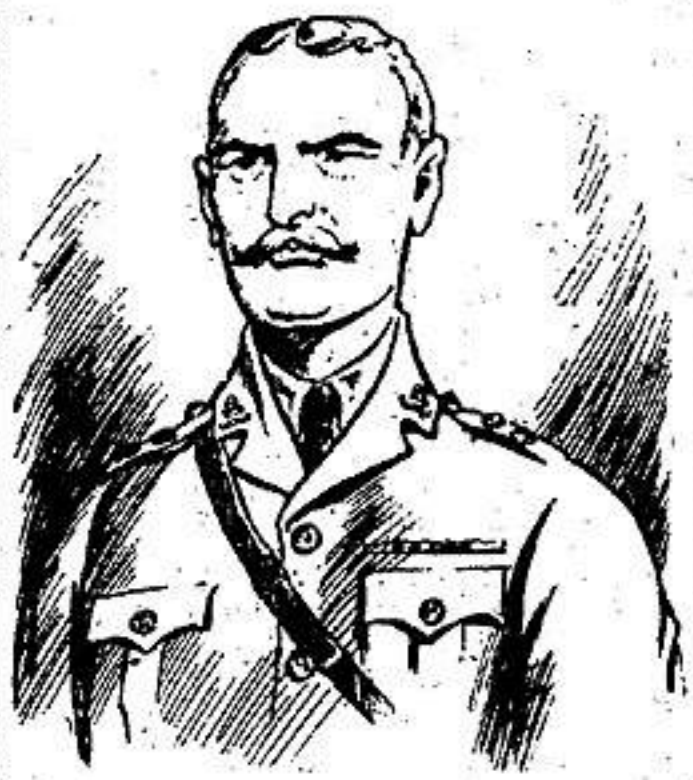
No. 68.—COLONEL JAMES WHARTON.

COLONEL WHARTON is just the sort of uncle a fellow might be glad to have. But there was a time when Harry did not see this.

The boy is the son of the colonel's only brother, and it was natural enough that his uncle should have been nominated guardian to him by the will of Harry's father. But the colonel was serving the King in India during a large part of the time in which Harry was developing from a child into a self-willed and rather sulky boy. And when the colonel came home at length the two did not hit it at all.

Harry had had his own way. His Aunt Mary had not meant to spoil him. But she had been very fond of him, and had not seen his faults, as the keener vision of the colonel, aided by the fact that he was able to judge Harry almost as he might have judged a stranger, after being away so long from him, could see.

One can imagine Harry Wharton as a distinctly taking small boy, with pluck and nice manners, affectionate, and amenable to discipline, though liable to fits of temper. That would be how the colonel remembered him. He returned to find a boy who had reached the age when a boy thinks he has a right to a will of his own, and who had been allowed his will in almost everything.



He thought Harry a sulky and rather ill-conditioned cub. Harry thought him a meddling tyrant. But the colonel saw redeeming qualities under his nephew's faults, whereas Harry did not even look for his uncle's good points. His uncle ordered him about, forbade things that his aunt had never forbidden—in fact, did what his father would have done had he been alive to do it; and did it in just the same spirit. But Harry could not realise that.

So the colonel determined that Harry should go to school; and naturally he chose his own old school—Greyfriars.

The boy did not want to go to school at all. He wanted to run wild and follow his own impulses. And the fact that Greyfriars was the colonel's old school did not recommend it to him.

There were high words before he went, and the man spoke out plainly, and the boy was rude and passionate. But at the end of the stormy interview, when Harry had gone, Colonel Wharton comforted himself with the thought that, after all, the boy had the makings of a man in him.

He was right there, as we know.

When the colonel wrote to say that he was coming to see his nephew at Greyfriars Harry was by no means pleased. Nugent tried to bring him into a better frame of mind, but without success. "He seems to believe in ruling a home as if it were a native regiment!" Harry said sulkily. "Your uncle thought you were spoiled," remarked Nugent. "Well, as a matter of absolute fact, you weren't the nicest sort of chap in the world when you first came to Greyfriars."

Harry could recognise the truth of that and he tried to look at things more reasonably. He saw that his uncle meant kindly to him, and the offer made by the colonel to get him and his special friends a half-holiday actually brought an expression of thanks from him. But then things went wrong again. Harry had to admit that he had pawned his watch, and he would not explain that he had done it for Hazeldene's sake, not from any need of his own.

The colonel was very angry. In his days at Greyfriars, he said, the boys did not visit pawnshops. But Colonel Wharton did not show his anger as Major Cherry would have done. There was no thundering at Harry; but a cold, stern disapproval that hurt him far more.

Hazel came to the rescue. He has his better moments, and this was one of them. He told Colonel Wharton the truth, and the truth was very greatly to Harry's credit. He had sacrificed his watch, not for a chum, but for one who had been his enemy. That was just the sort of thing James Wharton could appreciate.

Then there came the saving of Harry by his uncle from death in the waters of the Sark; and that swept away the last cloud that had overhung their relationship. Thenceforth, though they might not always understand one another, though the colonel might be led to believe Harry guilty of something he could never have done—and, if my memory does not err, that did happen once—yet between them there was a strong bond of affection like that of father and son, with each proud of the other.

We have not seen very much of the colonel in the stories. Now and then he has come to Greyfriars on a brief visit, sometimes with his old friend Major Cherry, sometimes alone; but it cannot be said that he has often played a prominent part. Yet one has a very clear mental portrait of him—a strong man, with gentleness under his sternness, very upright, hating any kind of meanness, somewhat reserved. He is not a bit like Bob's father outwardly. They share some qualities—both are brave and kindly and honourable—but the major is a roaring lion compared to the colonel. When the major gets angry hard words, and sometimes other things, are apt to be flung about. The colonel's anger is colder; it never masters him. Perhaps it was because they were so different that they were always such good chums.

One can imagine them both as boys. The major has kept more of the boy's spirit; but the colonel has not lost it all, or he would not be so sympathetic as he is.

There is an interesting link between the colonel and one of his nephew's dearest chums. When he first met Hurree Singh the nabob said: "I have often heard my father speak in my childhood of his esteemed friend Colonel Wharton, but I did not know that the august Colonel Sahib was the relation of my honoprable chum. I have heard my father say that I was carried through a rebel mob in the streets of Bhanipur in the honourable arms of the Colonel Sahib, with the tulwars of the rebels flashing round him." The colonel promised to tell them the story later, and he did tell it—"a tale of revolt in the wild land of Bhanipur, and of a child carried to safety by a horseman through a crowd of savage rebels, whose weapons gleamed on every side." The youthful nabob could only dimly remember it, but it was fresh enough in the mind of the man who had carried that dusky baby.

Many scenes of war, of peril and courage and endurance, many a memory of such deeds as make us thrill when we read of them the colonel's mind must hold, for service on the Indian frontier means hard work and many risks. He is not the man to talk much, though. And now, in the veteran stage, he is again facing shot and shell—and the far worse devices of the Huns to boot—in the greatest war the world has ever known.

And who can doubt that he is winning credit there, as he won it in the old days in the land of Hind? For Colonel James Wharton is a fine type of the best kind of British officer—and what more can one say of any man?