

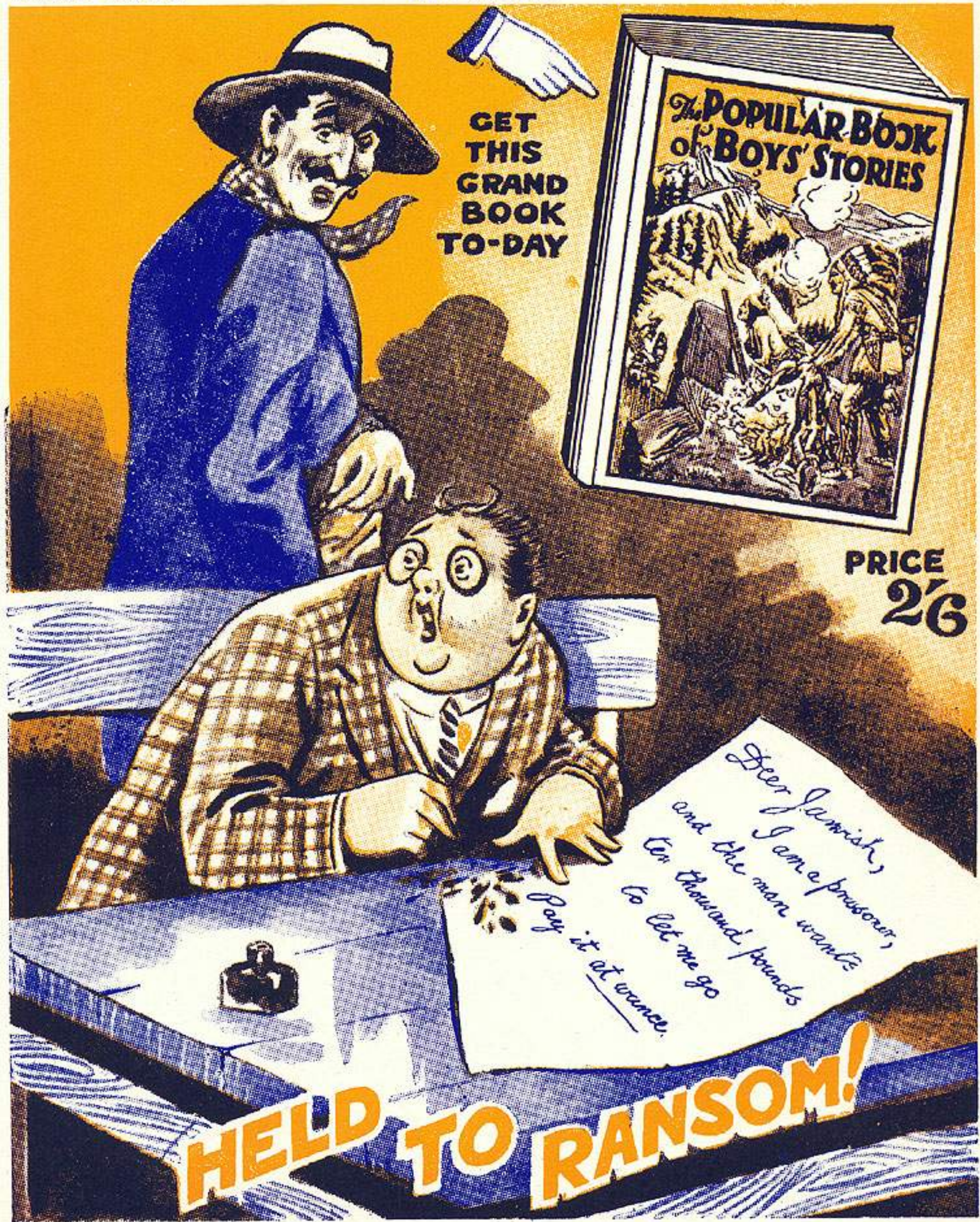
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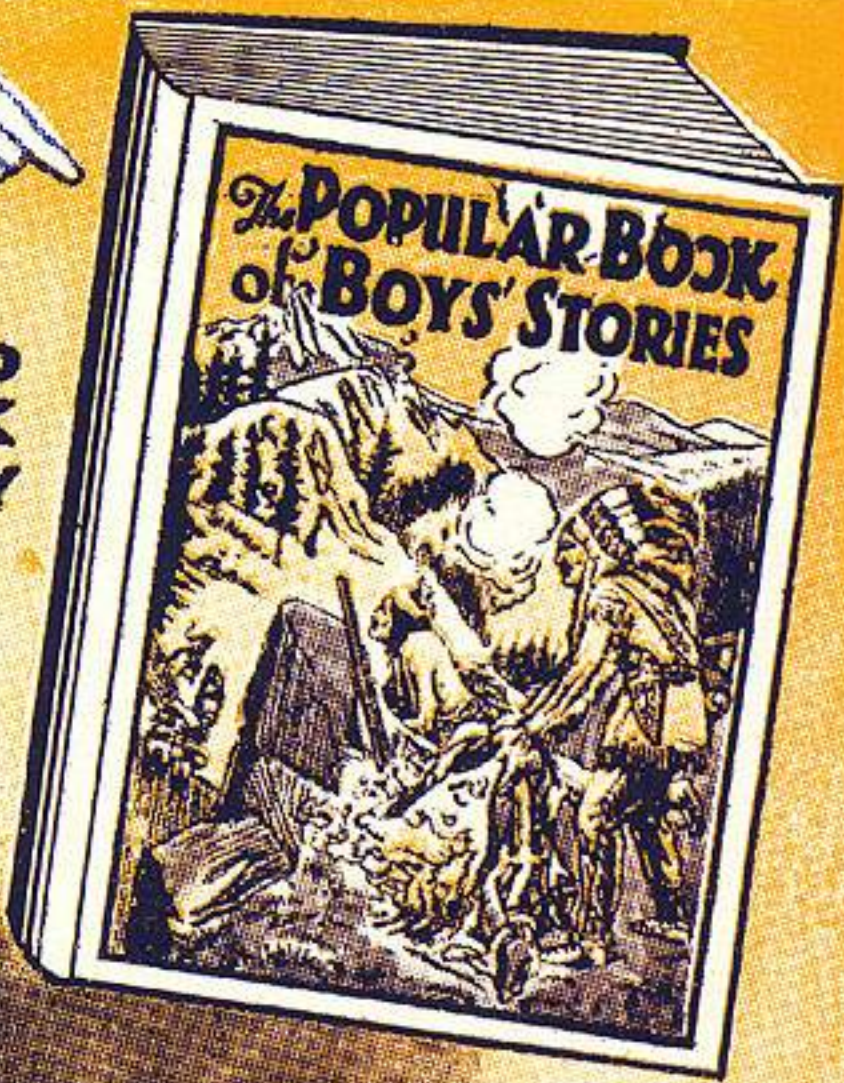
No. 1,387. Vol. XLVI.

EVERY SATURDAY.

Week Ending September 15th, 1934.



GET THIS GRAND BOOK TO-DAY



PRICE 2/6

Dear Jewish,
and I am a prosor,
Ten thousand pounds
to let me go
Pay it at wance.

HELD TO RANSOM!

BAGGED BY BANDITS!



BY FRANK RICHARDS.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Orders from Bunter!

CRASS-SHHH!
That long, echoing roll of thunder seemed to be splitting the very heavens.

The plane rocked to it.

The Kingfisher was a splendid machine, as fine a machine as the Airways Company could provide. Harry Wharton & Co. had travelled many long hundreds of miles in it with perfect comfort and satisfaction. Even Billy Bunter had got used to it and agreed that it was safer and smoother than car or train. But this was the first storm they had run into, and it made them, so to speak, sit up and take notice.

Crash! Crash! Crash! rolled the thunder!

Vivid streaks of lightning flashed past the windows of the passengers' cabin. They came like tongues of flame out of the black clouds banked over the Apennines. Rain came down in sheets, blurring the windows, and turning the earth below into a dim ocean of mist.

The Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove had been looking down at Italy as they flew. But there was little to be seen of Italy now. The world was wrapped in rain and vapour.

Following the crash of the thunder as it died rolling away came another sound. It was a snore!

Billy Bunter was asleep!

Leaning back in his seat, with a cushion behind his head, and his feet resting on the table before him, the Greyfriars millionaire slept and snored.

How any fellow could sleep through that terrific roar was a mystery to the chums of the Remove.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,387.

But Bunter could! Bunter could sleep anyhow and anywhere. Sleeping, in fact, was Billy Bunter's long suit.

Crash!

Snore!

Crash!

Snore!

The plane rocked—and Bunter rocked! Bob Cherry caught him by a fat shoulder and held him safe in his seat. Bunter gave a gurgle, as if he were about to wake. Then he snored on.

"Don't wake him, for goodness' sake!" said Johnny Bull. "He will be howling with funk if he wakes up."

"Thank goodness he's asleep!" remarked Frank Nugent.

"The terrific sleepfulness of the idiotic Bunter is a boonful blessing," assented Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Crash, came the thunder again, rolling long and loud, drowning Billy Bunter's snore and the roar of the Kingfisher's engines.

The floor seemed to tilt under the feet of the juniors.

"We're climbing!" said Harry Wharton.

He glanced at the altimeter. It indicated three thousand feet. Looking from the nearest window, he saw only rain and mist, and flashing lightning. The earth had utterly vanished. The Greyfriars party might have been the sole inhabitants of a universe of sky and rain.

"We're past the Apennines, anyhow!" remarked Bob Cherry. "No joke to bump into a jolly old mountain-top, what?"

"Oh, chuck it, ass!" said Nugent. The idea of bumping into a mountain-top in that ocean of mist was neither grateful nor comforting.

"Are we anywhere near Rome yet?" asked Bob.

"Goodness knows!" answered Harry Wharton. "Can't see a thing! I think

we're passing over Umbria! We've passed over the Apennines, anyhow. I'm rather glad we left the mountains behind before this started."

"We're still climbing!"

"Getting up above the storm, perhaps!"

Crash! Crash! Crash! came the thunder again, following a sheet of lightning that illuminated the cabin like a burst of electricity.

All over the Kingfisher sounded the heavy pattering of the rain in the lulls between the thunder-crashes.

Hitherto, the Greyfriars fellows had found the sunshine of Italy very bright and very hot. Now the sun seemed to have vanished completely from the universe. The rain and mist made a dim twilight round the plane.

"Three thousand five hundred feet!" said Harry Wharton, with another glance at the altimeter.

"Hurrah, and up she rises!" sang Bob Cherry cheerfully.

A terrific crash of thunder drowned his voice. It roared, and it rolled, peal on peal of earsplitting sound, as if it would never die away. Nugent put his fingers to his ears. In that fearful roar, not a whisper was heard from the engines. The plane seemed to shake and tremble like a frightened animal. There was a movement from Billy Bunter. Even Bunter had been awakened, at last, by that rending crash.

He started up, set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and blinked round him in startled alarm.

"I say, you fellows!" gasped Bunter.

The rolling thunder died away at last. In the lull that succeeded, Billy Bunter's voice was heard instead of his hefty snore as hitherto.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Bunter. "What's up?"

"We are!" answered Bob Cherry.

"I mean, is anything the matter, you

silly ass? I thought I heard a row—it woke me up!"

"Only the steward washing teacups in the pantry!" said Bob reassuringly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" grunted Bunter. "Go and tell the man to keep quiet! I don't like being woke up! I was having a lovely dream—about a feed in the study at Greyfriars! I suppose if a fellow charters a plane, regardless of expense, he's entitled to have a nap in it if he likes! Go and tell the man not to make such a thundering row with his washing-up."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You cackling asses—why—what's that?"

"That" was another peal of thunder. It roared and rolled and died away. Bunter's fat voice was heard again in tones of alarm.

"I say, you fellows, that's not the steward!" he gasped.

"Oh, my hat!" stuttered Bob. "No, that's not the steward, Bunter! That's the pilot taking his boots off!"

"He must have let one of them drop!" said Johnny Bull.

"The dropfulness must have been terrific."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses! That was thunder!" roared Bunter. "I believe there's a storm or something going on. Look here, I don't like being up in a storm! Go and tell the pilot to go down at once! Never mind about waiting till we get to Rome! Anywhere will do!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five, quite entertained by the idea of going along and giving the pilot instructions.

"Stop cackling!" yelled Bunter. "It's my plane, ain't it? Those two pilots put on a lot of lift, but I'll jolly well make 'em understand that I'm paying. Will you go and tell that beast to go down at once?"

"It's all right, Bunter," said Harry soothingly. "The pilot knows best, old fat bean—he really does!"

"Beast! Jarvish!" roared Bunter. "Where's Jarvish? Where's that fool Jarvish? Where's that idiot Jarvish? Where's that dummy Jarvish? I'll sack him! I'll kick him out when we get to Rome. I'll—"

"Did you call, sir?"

James Jarvish, sleek and sedate as ever, glided into the cabin. Billy Bunter gave him a ferocious glare through his spectacles. Bunter expected his "man" to be right on the spot when he was wanted. A servant's hours of service, in Bunter's estimation, should be twenty-four a day.

"I've had to call you twice, Jarvish!" he snapped.

"I am sorry, sir—"

"Oh, shut up! Go and tell the pilot to descend at once! Say it's a direct order from me!"

"Oh, sir!" gasped the valet.

"Go!" roared Bunter.

And he went—though whether he went to carry Bunter's orders to the pilot of the plane the Famous Five doubted very much! Anyhow, he went, and Billy Bunter blinked triumphantly at the grinning juniors.

"Now we'll jolly well see!" he snorted. "We'll jolly well see whether a fellow can't give orders on his own plane, chartered at enormous expense."

"The seefulness will be terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Thunder roared and rolled again. Billy Bunter gave a squeak as the plane shook, and clung to the table. There was a wild dash of rain on the windows.

"Ow! Wow! Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "I wish I'd come by train! I

wish I'd come by car! I wish I hadn't come at all! I wish—"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. He pointed to the altimeter. It was registering three thousand feet once more.

"We're going down!" exclaimed Wharton.

"I told you so!" sneered Bunter.

"Unless something's wrong with the jolly old instrument—" said Frank Nugent, staring at the dial on the wall.

Wharton shook his head.

"That's all right! We're going down—look—two thousand four hundred already— My hat! Two thousand—"

The Kingfisher plunged through the storm. The chums of the Remove had no doubt that it had been the pilot's intention to climb above it. That intention had been changed. Instead of ascending, the Kingfisher was going down—fast!

They were not likely to believe that it was Bunter's order, carried by Jarvish, that had caused the change. They could not help thinking that it meant trouble, and a forced landing. And their faces were grave. Bunter's, on the other hand, wore a triumphant grin.

"Can you fellows understand that thing on the wall?" he demanded.

"Yes, ass!"

"Does it say we're going down?"

"Yes!"

"He, he, he! Who's master here, I'd like to know?" grinned Bunter.

Since he has become a billionaire, Billy Bunter's wonderful wealth has landed him in a good many troubles. But the biggest of them all is when he falls into the hands of a villainous gang of bandits!

Harry Wharton looked at him, but he did not answer, and the other fellows were silent. It was useless to tell Bunter that they were going to have a forced landing in a roaring thunderstorm; the news would have frightened him out of his wits, such as they were! Bunter, in the happy belief that his orders had been obeyed, and that the pilot was dutifully carrying out his lordly instructions, grinned with satisfaction. But his fat face was the only one in the cabin that wore a grin—the others were very serious.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Forced Landing!

HARRY WHARTON stared from the rain-blurred window.

Here and there, through the rain and mist he had a glimpse of something darker. The engines droned, shut off, and droned again. Now they levelled out with a roar. Now it was a silent glide. For some reason, the pilot had to get his machine down; and he was taking it down with steady skill and iron nerve. It was a full-sized man's job in the lashing rain and buffeting wind and rolling thunder. He was looking for a possible landing-place in strange country, far from any aerodrome. Wharton wondered how he would pick it out in the driving rain and mist. There was nothing for the passengers to do, but to trust the man at the wheel.

The steward came along and looked in. Perhaps he thought that a word of assurance would be useful to the school-boy passengers.

He found five of them serious, but quite good. To his surprise he found the sixth grinning. He stared at Bunter.

"No danger, gentlemen!" said the steward. "We're just going down!"

"All serene!" said Bob Cherry cheerfully. "Nobody here's got the wind up, steward."

"The upfulness of the absurd wind is not terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Where are we now, steward?" asked Harry.

"I think this part of the country's called Umbria, sir. Plenty of level ground there to land on. We're well away from the mountains, now."

"I say, steward!" squeaked Bunter.

"Yes, sir! Nothing to be afraid of, sir."

"Who's afraid?" hooted Bunter.

"Oh! I—I thought you might be a— a little!" stammered the steward. He had seen a good deal of the Greyfriars billionaire during that holiday trip, and was amazed not to find him shivering and shuddering at the bare thought of a forced landing in a storm.

"What rot!" snapped Bunter. "But, I say, tell the pilot to buck up."

"Eh?"

"I want to go down quicker than this! I don't like being up in a storm! Tell the man to get a move on, see?"

The steward gazed at Bunter as if dumbfounded. The fat billionaire was displaying a careless courage that might have amazed anyone who knew him.

"Don't stand there staring!" said Bunter irritably. "Go and tell the pilot he's to land at once! I'm fed up with this! Tell him it's my order!"

"Oh! Ah! Yes, sir!" gasped the steward.

He almost tottered out of the cabin.

"I say, you fellows, that's the way to handle 'em!" said Bunter complacently. "You've only got to make 'em understand that you won't stand any nonsense, and they'll feed out of your hand. What?"

Harry Wharton & Co. made no reply to that. There was another terrific peal of thunder that shook the plane fore and aft.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "Look here, if that man doesn't buck up and get us out of this, I'll jolly well sack him and get a new pilot! I'm not sticking up here in the air in a thunderstorm just to please him, I can jolly well tell him!"

"You silly ass—" began Johnny Bull. But he stopped. It was much better for the fat and fatuous billionaire not to know the facts.

The machine went into a long glide. They were going down—fast!

"That's better!" said Bunter.

"Oh, that's better, is it?" asked Bob.

"Yes—the steward's told him, and he's doing as I've ordered! We're getting down quicker now."

"Oh!"

"I hope we shall land at a place where there's a decent hotel," said Bunter. "I shan't go up again till it's better weather. I really hope there'll be some sort of a decent hotel. We've got to think of the grub, you know."

The chums of the Remove were not thinking of grub. They were thinking of the landing, now imminent, and wondering what would happen.

Still, they were glad to see the fat billionaire in this happy state. Had Bunter been aware that it was a

forced landing, and not obedience to his lordly commands, it was possible that hysterics might have ensued.

"I say, you fellows," Bunter blinked at five serious faces. "What are you looking like a lot of moulting owls for?"

"Are we?" murmured Frank Nugent.

"You jolly well are! There's no danger," said Bunter scornfully. "The plane must be under perfect control, or the pilot couldn't be carrying out my orders so promptly."

"Oh!"

"Well, then, what are you worrying about?" demanded Bunter.

"We're not exactly worrying," said Bob cheerfully. "But—"

"I—I say, you fellows, you—you don't think there's any danger, do you?" ejaculated Bunter, in sudden alarm.

"Danger of getting bad grub for dinner!" said Bob gravely. "If we land in some lonely country place—well, you know what the grub is like in a country inn in Italy!"

"Oh, I see!" Billy Bunter could understand grave faces on such a subject as that! His own fat face cleared again. "It's all right, though—there's lots of grub on the plane! Plenty! Jarvish has my orders to see that there's plenty of everything of the very best! We shan't starve! You forgot that, old chap!"

"Yes, I rather forgot that for the moment," admitted Bob Cherry. "If—if you're sure there's plenty of grub on the plane—"

"If there isn't, I'll jolly well sack Jarvish!" said Bunter darkly. "But it's all right—Jarvish knows his duty! There's lots! And if the grub's all right, everything's all right!"

That, however, was a point that seemed doubtful to the five fellows who knew that a forced landing was at hand.

Looking down from the windows, they could now see the earth through the spattering rain.

They vaguely made out a river, a distant hill, trees, and scattered buildings. It seemed to be farming country below them, which was so much to the good, with fields to land in.

The thunder rolled again and again. In the lulls of the thunder they could not hear the engines. The Kingfisher was gliding down.

Flying low, the plane passed over a building so near that the juniors spotted a face staring from a window.

It glided on, over a drenched wood, steaming with mist. The juniors felt a slight shock, and knew that the under-carriage had grazed high branches. Then, to their immense relief, they were past the wood, and wide fields lay spread before the plane.

"I wish the silly ass wouldn't bump like that!" said Billy Bunter irritably. "Why can't he land properly? Giving us a shake, I dare say, because he's had to carry out my orders to land at once."

There was another roll of thunder. It was followed by a crashing sound, and the Famous Five knew that a fence had been carried away. Then there was a light bump as the plane landed in an extensive field and taxied over grass.

Bob Cherry drew a deep breath.

"All right now!" he muttered.

"Right as rain!" said Harry Wharton in deep relief. "She's landed as if she'd dropped on the drome at Croydon."

"Thank goodness!" breathed Nugent.

The plane taxied on, and came to a stop in the middle of a large field. Mud spattered from the landing-wheels.

"I say, you fellows, we're down!" said Billy Bunter. He rolled across to the

window and blinked out. "I say, I can't see anything of an hotel, or anything! I hope that silly idiot hasn't landed us right out in the wilds!"

"Looks rather like it!" grinned Bob.

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"The silly dummy!" exclaimed Bunter angrily. "I told him to go down at once, but, of course, I meant him to pick up a suitable place! I suppose he's done this out of cheek!"

"You silly ass!" roared Johnny Bull. "Now we're safe you may as well know that it was a forced landing, and we're lucky to get down alive."

"Wha-a-at?" gasped Bunter.

"Forced landing, you howling ass!"

"Yaroooooh!"

Bunter made one bound for the door.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"It's all right now, you fat dummy—no need to get out in the rain!"

"Get this door open!" shrieked Bunter. "Supposing it catches fire?"

"It won't, you ass—it's all right!"

"Lemme out!" yelled Bunter.

"Jarvish! Steward! Help!"

"Oh crumbs! You blithering idiot, we're as safe as if we'd landed on the drome at Rome!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Beast! Help! Jarvish! Steward! Rescue! Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter.

The steward came running in.

"What—" he gasped.

"Open this door, you beast! I want to get out! Oh crikey—"

"Certainly, sir, if you wish! But it's raining hard—"

"Beast! Lemme out!"

Bunter rolled out, and bumped into wet grass. He sat there in drenching rain and roared. Then he scrambled up and ran.

"What's the matter with the young gentleman?" gasped the amazed steward, staring into the rain after him.

"He's getting clear before we catch fire!" yawned Bob Cherry.

"But there isn't any danger—"

"Bunter seems to think that there is! I fancy he will get wet!"

"The wetfulness will be terrific."

There was no doubt that Bunter was getting wet! A fleeing fat figure, drenched and dripping, vanished into the rain, followed by a roar of laughter from the juniors in the plane.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Strange Disappearance of a Billionaire!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. sat in the passengers' cabin on board the Kingfisher, and looked from the dripping windows as the rain pelted down.

The thunder was dying away in peals, rolling away towards the Apennines; but the rain was still coming down hard and fast. They did not feel disposed to follow Billy Bunter into the heavy downpour. Indeed, every moment they expected the fat and fatuous billionaire to reappear. But Bunter did not reappear. It was hardly possible that he was, like Charley's celebrated aunt, still running! But they concluded that he had dodged into shelter somewhere.

The Kingfisher had made a forced, but perfect, landing. There was no danger to anybody concerned—except of getting wet if they got out! The two pilots were in consultation forward; and the juniors learned from the steward that there was a leak in an oil pipe, which might take some time to locate. Whether they would be able to take off again that day or not, they

did not yet know. The sun was sinking in a mist of rain; and from the blurred windows they could see little but drenched fields and wrenched woods in the distance, backed by low hills. That the spot was a lonely one was proved by the fact that no one, so far, had turned up to stare at the landed plane. If it had been near a town, or even a village, there was little doubt that the local inhabitants would have turned out to look at it, in spite of the rain.

Jarvish had buttoned himself up in a raincoat, jammed a hat over his sleek head, and gone out.

As Bunter's valet, he might be supposed to be anxious about his master, but if he was, it was more than the juniors expected of him. They did not trust that sleek valet of Bunter very far.

However, he was gone, and it was more than an hour before he returned. By that time, the rain was clearing off, though a shower was still falling.

James Jarvish put his head into the cabin from the steps outside, and looked round.

"Has not Master William come back?" he asked.

"No!" answered Harry Wharton.

"It is very odd, sir!" said Jarvish.

"It appears that he was in rather a state of alarm—"

"In a blue funk, you mean!" growled Johnny Bull.

"The funkfulness was terrific!"

grinned the Nabob of Bhanipur.

Jarvish coughed his deferential cough.

"I gather, sir that he fancied that the plane might catch fire—having heard of such happenings," he said.

"But he would surely not be long in learning that there was no fire. He had only to look back."

"He's got under shelter from the rain somewhere," said Frank Nugent.

"There appears to be no shelter anywhere at hand, sir, excepting a small osteria, or inn, at a little distance," said Jarvish. "I have inquired for him there, and they have seen nothing of him. It is very singular."

Harry Wharton & Co. looked very curiously at Jarvish.

They had far from a high opinion of that incomparable valet! They more than suspected him of being an extremely unfaithful servant.

Indeed, they had suspected him, in Venice, of trying to betray Bunter into the hands of Tiger Bronx, the gangster from Chicago who was hunting the fat billionaire for some mysterious reason.

Yet now he certainly seemed anxious about his master. If he was "spoofing," it was rather difficult to guess why.

"You don't fancy that anything can have happened to Bunter, surely?" exclaimed Harry.

"What on earth could?" asked Nugent.

"This is a very solitary place, sir, and my master had a large sum of money on him, as he generally has!" answered Jarvish.

"Oh, my hat! But there aren't any jolly old brigands in Italy these days!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"The old gangs of handitti have been broken up many years ago, sir," answered Jarvish. "But—even in England, sir, it is scarcely safe for a schoolboy to wander about in lonely places with large sums of money in his pockets."

"That's so!" agreed Wharton slowly.

"And less safe in Italy than in England, I suppose. But—"

"It is very singular where he can have gone," said Jarvish, and there was no doubt that the man was uneasy and

troubled. "I shall make a further search for him. Probably you young gentlemen will put up at the osteria for the night—the plane will not be going on again to-day."

"Nothing else to be done, I suppose," said Harry

"Quite so, sir! In fact, I have taken the liberty of engaging rooms for you and for my master!" said Jarvis. "It may save you a little trouble as you do not speak the language."

"Good egg; thanks," said the captain of the Remove. "May as well get a move on, you fellows. Get hold of your bags."

"I have brought a man from the inn to carry your baggage, sir!" said Jarvis.

It was a small country inn, built, like many rural inns of Italy, in a square, with a courtyard in the centre, on which the windows opened.

On the outer Walls there was hardly a window to be seen. They passed in by an arched way, which at night could be closed by a great gate.

That style of architecture dated, no doubt, from the days when banditti lurked in the adjacent woods and hills, and descended every now and then in plundering expeditions on the open country.

In the central courtyard several carts were turned up, in a sea of mud, which in dry weather was doubtless an ocean of dust.

Round the court ran a wooden

But it was a case of any port in a storm, and the passengers of the Kingfisher were only too glad that there was an inn at all in the vicinity.

So they nodded and smiled in reply to Signor Pirandelli's stream of Italian, of which they understood hardly a word, and were shown to their rooms.

The "cameriere," who was badly in need of a wash and a haircut, brought in their suitcases after them.

Then they were shown to the "sala di pranzo," for dinner. Jarvis had disappeared again, doubtless in search of Bunter.

By the time they had finished their meal the chums of the Remove were



Minus coat and hat, Billy Bunter rolled out of the plane and ran for his fat life. Spattering in mud, splashing in rain, the fat billionaire pelted across the field, haunted by the unfounded terror of the roar of blazing petrol behind him. "Oh lor!" he gasped. "Oh crikey!"

"You think of everything," said Wharton with a smile.

"That is my duty, sir, to my master's guests," said Jarvis smoothly.

He spoke over his shoulder in Italian, and a cameriere came up into the cabin for the baggage.

Leaving him to handle it, the Famous Five descended from the plane, and followed Jarvis across the drenched, muddy field.

Little as they either liked or trusted the man, they found themselves thinking rather better of him now.

It was plain, at least, that his anxiety for Billy Bunter was genuine; and that was very unexpected. And he was certainly making himself useful.

The sun was low in a watery sky. Drops of rain were still falling. Mud squelched under their feet as they tramped across the field.

They left the field by a gap in a broken fence, and followed Jarvis up a narrow, muddy lane.

In a few minutes more they arrived at the osteria.

gallery, with stairs to it, and the doors and windows of the bed-rooms opened on the gallery. There were no interior staircases. There was a wooden roof to the gallery, however.

In the entrance hall the "oste" or host, that is, the innkeeper, greeted them with many bows and smiles.

Signor Pirandelli, landlord of the Osteria Aquila Nera, was evidently very glad to see a party of foreign tourists in his humble inn.

His usual customers were carters and drovers, and a party of "signore" from foreign parts were something like a mine of wealth to the innkeeper.

It was the custom of Bunter the Billionaire to put up at the grandest of grand hotels, with gold-laced head-porters, an army of under-porters, waiters, innumerable, messengers, interpreters, commissionaires—all sorts and conditions of persons to carry out his lofty behests.

What Bunter the Billionaire would think of this little dingy wayside inn hardly bore thinking of.

growing rather worried about the fat billionaire.

It was dark now, and outside the osteria the countryside, when they looked out, seemed as black as a hat.

Where was Bunter?

Evidently, he had not got back to the plane, or the steward would have brought him along to the inn.

Evidently, Jarvis had not found him!

It had seemed a jest to the Remove fellows when the fat billionaire bolted into the rain, in a state of blue funk. But they began to feel now that the jest might have a serious side.

For what had become of him?

"What on earth can have happened to the fat ass?" said Harry Wharton, wrinkling his brows as the juniors looked out of the doorway into the night. "What the merry dickens—"

"Landed in trouble of some sort, I suppose!" grunted Johnny Bull.

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"Yes; but what—?"

"If there was any trouble lying around, Bunter would be sure to barge into it!" said Bob Cherry.

"But what the thump—" said Nugent.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Jarvish! Found him?" exclaimed Bob, as the valet, looking muddy and tired and troubled, came into the gateway.

Jarvish shook his head.

"No, sir! I can get no news of him! I have seen several peasants and inquired of them; but no one seems to have seen him. It is very odd."

"It can't be—Bronx?" said Bob slowly.

Jarvish smiled faintly.

"Hardly, sir! Even if Mr. Bronx followed us from Venice he can hardly have been aware that we should have to make a forced landing in this solitary spot. He can know nothing about our being here."

"That's so!" assented Harry Wharton, and the juniors nodded.

Whatever had happened to Billy Bunter, it had nothing to do with the American gangster, from whom he had had so narrow an escape at Venice.

But that certainly only made his strange disappearance more strange and mysterious.

Where was Bunter?

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Asking for It!

BILLY BUNTER ran for his fat life!

Unaware of the trifling circumstance that it was in no danger, he ran for it—and ran hard!

He pelted across the rainy field, slogging in mud, and pattered and spattered into a muddy lane, and pelted on.

His one thought, so far as his fat brain thought at all, was to get to a safe distance before the plane burst into flames!

Billy Bunter had a fertile imagination—sometimes too fertile! His ready imagination of things that never happened would have made the fortune of a newspaper reporter.

Bunter had read of air disasters. He had heard of fallen planes bursting into flames. Such things have happened of course; just as wrecked railway trains have burst into flames, and wrecked motor-cars.

The possibility was enough for Bunter. At the bare words "forced landing," funk supervened—the bluest of blue funks! It was said of old that the guilty flee when no man pursueth; and, in the same way, the funky flee when there is no peril. The Kingfisher had made a forced, but perfectly skilful and safe, landing. Nobody but Bunter was alarmed! But Bunter evolved enough alarm for the whole crew, and some over!

Spattering in mud, splashing in rain, the fat billionaire bolted, haunted by an unfounded terror of the roar of blazing petrol behind him. He had covered about three hundred yards when his wind gave out, and he stopped his wild race puffing and panting and blowing. It was then that it occurred to him to look back to see whether a mountain of flame was soaring towards the rainy sky.

It wasn't!

There was no sign of a fire anywhere! There was no sign of the

plane at all, as a grove of trees hid it from Bunter's eyes and spectacles. There was nothing to be seen but weeping trees, mud, and rain.

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter.

He puffed and he blew.

He realised that he was getting wet. He had rushed out of the plane just as he was—without a coat, without even a hat!

And the rain was thick and heavy! Bunter was already drenched! He dripped from head to foot.

"Oh crikey!" he gasped.

Even Bunter realised that there was no need to run farther. There was no fire—not a sign of one. There was no sign of anybody else in flight from the plane. Possibly, after all, there wasn't going to be a fearful conflagration.

Bunter backed under a tree, out of the rain, and leaned on it, puffing and gasping for breath. Water ran down him all over.

"Oh crumbs!" he gurgled.

He blinked round him through his big spectacles. There was no sign of a building or habitation of any kind. Had he taken a different direction he would have passed the Osteria Aquila Nera in his flight. But, after getting out of the field where the plane had landed, he had plunged across the lane, and across another field. Now he was on a muddy cart-track, with nothing in sight but drenched fields and trees.

In finer weather, no doubt, there would have been natives about. Now there was nobody. Billy Bunter was lost in Italy—three hundred yards from his travelling companions, and about the same distance from an inn! But, as he could see none of them, it might as well have been three hundred miles!

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter.

The tree afforded him some shelter from the rain. He was not disposed to leave that shelter. Neither was he thinking of getting back to the plane. It had not burst into flames yet, or Bunter must have seen them! But it might—any minute! "Safety first" was Bunter's motto!

If that brute of a pilot had only landed somewhere near a Grand Hotel it would have been all right. But it was only too painfully clear that there were no Grand Hotels about!

There was a sound of grinding wheels, and splashing in the mud, and Billy Bunter blinked round hopefully. A cart came jolting up, drawn by a bony horse. It was covered by a patched canvas tilt, doubtless on account of the rain. Under the cover Bunter had a glimpse of the man driving—a dark-skinned Italian, with a black felt hat pulled low over his swarthy face, and a cloak muffled round him. Bunter could see little more of him than a rather prominent nose and a black, curly moustache.

"Hi!" shouted Bunter, waving a fat hand.

The carro came on slowly. The man in it either did not hear, or did not heed, the fat junior under the tree beside the track.

Bunter stepped out into the track and waved and shouted again. Then the man looked at him.

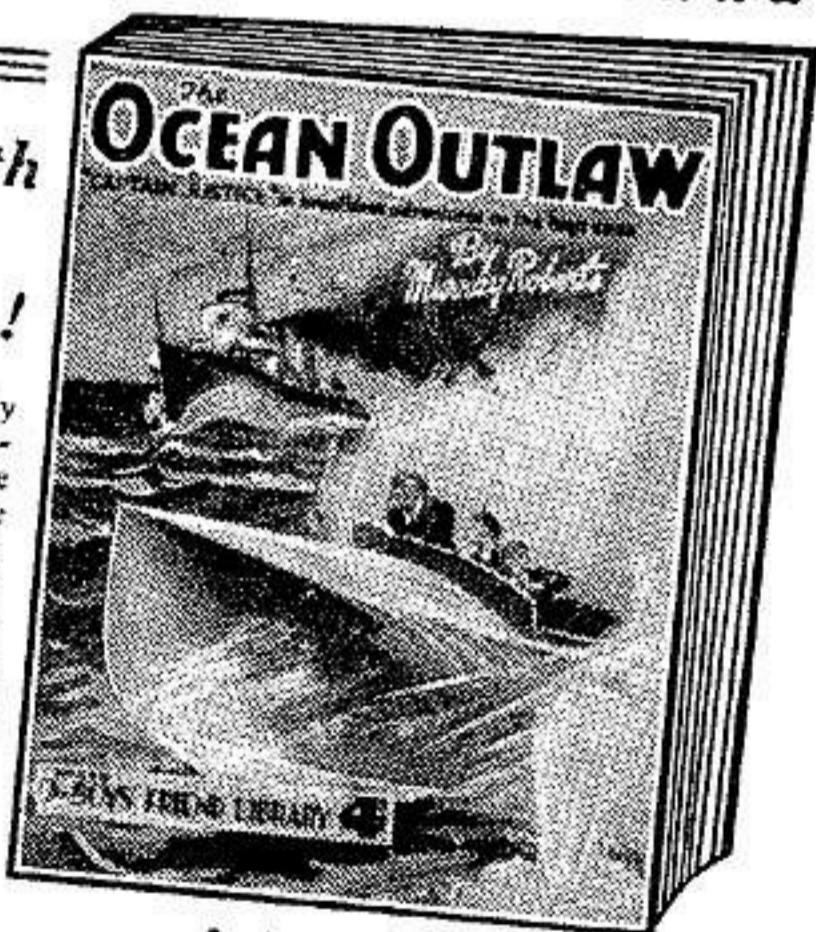
"Hi! Stop!" shouted Bunter. "I want a lift! See? Stop!"

The covered cart was a windfall to the drenched Owl. At least, it was a shelter from the rain, better than a saturated and dripping tree. And it meant a lift—to the nearest hotel or inn! The Greyfriars billionaire could afford to pay for a lift!

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But the man in the cart did not seem keen on picking up a stranger to give him a lift.

He stared down at Bunter and drove on.

The fat billionaire glared at him. "Stop!" he roared. "Hi! Stop! Fermate!" Bunter had learned the Italian word for "stop." Fermate! Do you hear? Hi!"

The carro rolled on. It came abreast of Bunter, and the man evidently intended to drive on without stopping.

But there was one infallible resource! Bunter plunged his fat hand into his pocket and jerked out a wad of Italian banknotes.

"I'll pay you for a lift!" he hooted. "Payo for a lifto—see?" Bunter had an idea that by adding an "o" to the end of a word he could make himself understood by Italians!

But if the man in the cart did not understand Bunter's words, he understood his actions. His black eyes snapped at the sight of the wad of money in the fat billionaire's hand.

He drew the horse to a halt. "Oh, good!" gasped Bunter. "Gratchy tanty!" That was Bunter's Italian for "grazie tanto," or many thanks!

The man in the cart stepped down. Between his muffled cloak and his low, felt hat there was little of him to be seen. Bunter cared little what he looked like, so long as he gave him a lift out of the rain and got him somewhere where there was shelter and food.

"Speak English?" asked Bunter, not very hopefully.

"Si, signore, a small English!" The swarthy man's manner was very civil now. Bunter had no doubt that the sight of the money had done it! No doubt it had had an effect on the swarthy man—to a greater extent than Bunter suspected at the moment!

"Oh, good! I say, I've landed from a plane—"

"Coma?"

"Komay be blowed! Speak English if you can!" grunted Bunter. "What do you mean by komay? Look here, I want a lift to an hotel! I can pay. I'll give you a hundred leers—I mean, leeray! Cento lire! See?" Bunter displayed his banknotes again. "Two hundred leers—I mean, lire! See?"

The Italian seemed to "see."

"Si, signore! You get in a carro!" he said. "I drive you anywhere! In a cart there is no rain! Yes!"

"That's right!" said Bunter. "Help me in, can't you?"

The swarthy man bowed, his dark face breaking into a grin. He helped Bunter into the cart, and the fat junior sat down on a heap of dry hay under the canvas cover.

Before getting in again, the man carefully fastened the opening at the back of the cart. Then he climbed up in front again, and took up the reins and the whip, and the carro jolted on.

Bunter tapped him on the shoulder, and he glanced round, the grin still on his face.

"Hotel!" said Bunter. "See?"

"Si, signore!"

"Grand Hotel!" explained Bunter.

"Si, signore!"

"Is there a Grand Hotel anywhere here?"

"Si, signore! Very soon! You rest in sieno—"

"What the thump do you mean by fee-ay-no? What's a fee-ay-no?" grunted Bunter. "Oh, if you mean hay, why can't you say hay? All right! Get me to an hotel as soon as you can. I'm wet! See? I'll tip you a hundred lire! What's your name?"

"Son Tiriddu!"

"Son Tiriddu! What a name!" grunted Bunter.

The swarthy man grinned. "Name Tiriddu!" he said.

"Then what the thump did you say it was Son Tiriddu for?" grunted Bunter, unaware that son, or sono, meant "I am." "Anyhow, get on—and get on quick!"

"Si, signore!"

GREYFRIARS CARTOONS

By HAROLD SKINNER.

No. 15.—WILLIAM WIBLEY.

(The Amateur Actor of the Remove.)

This week our lightning artist obliges with a clever cartoon of William Wibley, who promises to rise to "dizzy heights" in the theatrical world.



For acting there's none to touch Wibley, He's full of theatrical poses. Quotes Shakespeare and Sheridan glibly, And makes up with wigs and false noses.

His costumes are open to stricture, Though mostly of classical order. He played Julius Caesar (see picture), As a cross between Cromwell and Lauder.

Tiriddu drove on, still grinning, and Bunter settled down in the hay.

It was dry and warm, and very grateful and comforting to the wet Owl of the Remove. The carro jolted on slowly, but faster than before. Bunter, in the happy belief that he was heading for a Grand Hotel, was feeling better. If there was a Grand Hotel within fifty miles, Tiriddu certainly was not heading for it. And he was driving directly away from the only inn in the vicinity!

Billy Bunter's wonderful wealth, since

he had become a billionaire, had landed him in a good many troubles. Now it had landed him in one more! Harry Wharton & Co., waiting at the Osteria Aquila Nera for news of the fat billionaire, were likely to wait long. The carro rumbled on by a lonely track through a drenched wood, and it was still rumbling on when darkness fell.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Not a Grand Hotel!

SNORE! Tiriddu glanced back into the dark interior of the covered cart and grinned.

Warm and comfortable in the dry hay, Billy Bunter had dropped off to sleep. His nap in the plane had been interrupted by the thunderstorm; and he was restarting after the interval, so to speak.

Snore! Tiriddu chuckled and drove on. If he was, as Bunter supposed, driving to a Grand Hotel, he was taking a rather remarkable route. The track, scarcely marked, wound away through a wood, inclining upward as it climbed a hillside.

Tiriddu ceased to drive at last, and stepped down from the cart, and led the horse onward by a still dimmer track winding among the trees.

Bunter snored on.

It was not till the cart halted at last that the fat billionaire awoke. He sat up and rubbed his eyes, set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and blinked round him in the darkness. He started as he caught the gleam of Tiriddu's eyes looking in. The swarthy man was speaking.

"Signore! You get out of a cart!"

"Oh! Have we got there?" yawned Bunter. "All right! It's jolly dark! Where's the hotel? I can't see any lights."

He put his head out and blinked round him, puzzled and annoyed. There was certainly no sign of an hotel, grand or otherwise. The rain had stopped, but it was densely dark, and only the dim ghostly shapes of trees showed through the gloom.

"Look here, where's the hotel?" hooted Bunter.

"You walk on a foot some small way, signore."

Bunter snorted.

"What rot! Why the thump can't you drive up to the hotel? Look here, I'm not tipping you for nothing, Mister Tiriddu! Drive on to the hotel—see?"

"Non posso, signore! Carro no go!" explained Tiriddu. "Signore walk on a foot!"

"Is that what you call speaking English?" grunted Bunter. "My hat! These foreigners are an ignorant lot!" It did not occur to Bunter that his Italian was rather worse than Tiriddu's English! "I'll jolly well take it out of your tip if I have to walk, bother you."

Tiriddu helped him down from the cart.

"Get on with it!" grunted Bunter.

"Andiamo!" murmured Tiriddu.

He took Bunter by a fat arm, and led him on. The horse had been tethered to a tree. Without Tiriddu's guiding hand the fat billionaire would have been hopelessly at sea. He could not see a yard before his big spectacles. He stumbled over rough ground and bumped into trees, in spite of the helping, guiding hand.

The Greyfriars billionaire was soon out of breath. He never had a very ample supply of it.

"Look here, how far is it?" he

gasped. "What the thump have we got to walk through this beastly wood for? Where's the hotel?"

Tiriddu made no reply, but led him on through the darkness. His grip had tightened on the fat arm, as if he feared that Bunter might dodge away from him.

It seemed to Billy Bunter that that rough tramp through the dense wood was endless. Every moment he hoped to see the lighted facade of a Grand Hotel; but he saw nothing but trees and darkness.

The fat junior began to feel a vague alarm. Even on Bunter's obtuse brain it dawned that this was a rather unusual way of approaching a Grand Hotel!

"I—I say, where are we going?" he gasped, at last. "I—I say, I jolly well don't like this!"

"Ecco!" said Tiriddu, as a gleam of light showed in the dark.

"Eh! I don't hear any echo, and I don't care whether there are any echoes or not!" grunted Bunter.

"Ecco! See!"

"Why can't you say see, if you mean see? Oh, there's a light! Is that the hotel?"

"Si, signore!" grinned Tiriddu.

Guided by that faint, winking light in the darkness, Tiriddu led on through the trees, the fat billionaire stumbling by his side, breathless and weary and extremely bad-tempered.

"What the thump!" gasped Bunter, as they arrived at the building from which the light glimmered.

His little round eyes almost popped through his big, round spectacles as he blinked at it.

The light glimmered from a small window, in the front of a hut built of rough wood.

The building backed against a steep cliff jutting up from the hillside.

Obviously this was not a Grand Hotel. It was not even an inn. It was not the humblest of osterie. It was a small, miserable hut, or rather hovel—possibly the dwelling of a woodcutter or charcoal-burner. The door was shut; but as Tiriddu approached he gave a low whistle, and the door was opened from within. In the glimmer of a dingy lamp a short, thick-set man with a bull neck and a shaggy beard appeared in the doorway.

"Buona sera, Giacomo!" grinned Tiriddu.

The bull-necked man stared blankly at Bunter. He seemed amazed by the sight of Tiriddu's companion.

"Che cosa e? Che cosa significa?" he ejaculated.

Without replying Tiriddu led Bunter into the hut. He signed to the bull-necked man to close the door.

Giacomo obeyed, and threw a bar into position. Then he stood staring at Billy Bunter.

Bunter blinked round him.

The dingy hut, lighted by an evil-smelling oil lamp, had an earthen floor. There was a door at the back, and apparently another room beyond. Bunter felt a deep tremor as he blinked round. The barring of the door had sent a chill of fear to his fat heart.

"Look here!" he gasped.

Tiriddu, taking no notice of him, began speaking to the bull-necked man in Italian. Giacomo's look of astonishment changed to a grin.

Bunter made a step towards the door.

Instantly Tiriddu's black eyes glittered at him. He threw back his cloak, slipped his hand into a pocket, and snatched out a sheath knife. He half drew the blade from the sheath.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,387.

"No more!" he grinned. "Here we stop!"

Bunter stopped.

"Oh lor!" he gasped.

Tiriddu dropped the knife back into his pocket. The mere sight of it was enough for Bunter. He stood rooted to the muddy floor.

For several minutes the two Italians conversed in their own language. Bunter stood rooted, a prey to terror. He had heard of Italian banditti, but supposed that they had been abolished long ago, everywhere but on the films. Now it seemed to him that he was in the presence of a particularly ferocious pair of banditti.

He quaked as they finished talking, and turned towards him. Tiriddu stretched out a dusky hand.

"Il denaro!" he said. "You give."

Bunter knew that that meant money. With a shaking hand he sorted out a hundred-lire note, and handed it to the Italian.

Tiriddu took it, laughed, and held it up for Giacomo to see. Giacomo chuckled huskily. It was only too clear that the two rascals wanted more than a hundred lire.

"Tutto!" grinned Tiriddu. "All denaro! Si! Yes. You give."

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter.

He knew now, if he had doubted it before, that he had been brought to that lonely hut in the forest to be robbed. He only hoped that that was the worst. Money, after all, came easily enough to the Greyfriars billionaire. Willingly he would have given all that he had about him to be safe back with the Famous Five at the landing-place of the plane.

"Presto!" snapped Tiriddu.

"Oh, yes! All right! I—I don't mind!" gasped Bunter.

He handed over a wad of Italian banknotes. And the eyes of the two rascals gleamed with greed as they counted and divided them.

Then Tiriddu turned to the fat billionaire again.

"Moneta Inglese!" he said.

Bunter could guess that that meant English money. The fat billionaire had a supply of English banknotes as well as Italian. He handed them over to Tiriddu.

Again there was greedy counting and division. The plunder of the Greyfriars billionaire made Tiriddu and Giacomo the two richest rascals in the whole province of Umbria. Bunter hoped that they would be satisfied with that—a delusive hope.

Tiriddu approached him again, and proceeded to go through his pockets. A jewel-studded wrist-watch, a diamond tiepin, and other expensive decorative articles rewarded his search.

"Ecco—ecco!" grinned Tiriddu.

"Buon! Buonissimo!" chuckled the bull-necked man.

"E un ricco signore!" grinned Tiriddu.

"Richissimo!" chuckled Giacomo.

"I—I say, you've got the lot now!" groaned Bunter. "I say, lemme out of this! I'll pay you anything you like to take me to an hotel!"

Without heeding him, the two swarthy rascals consulted again in Italian. Bunter, aware that they were discussing his fate, listened without understanding, but in quaking terror.

Finally Giacomo opened the door at the back of the hut.

It gave access to a small room, hollowed out of the cliff, apparently used as a cellar, as there were faggots and two or three kegs stacked in it.

The bull-necked man made Bunter a sign to enter.

"I—I say—" gasped the dismayed Owl.

Giacomo gave him a rough push, and he staggered through the doorway.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter, as he sat down on the earthen floor of the cellar.

The door was shut on him, leaving him in darkness.

"Oh lor!"

He heard a gabble in Italian, and then the sound of the outer door opening and shutting again. Tiriddu was gone.

A thin glimmer of light showed that there was a crack in the cellar door. The hapless Owl applied an eye to it, and had a view of the outer room. He saw the bull-necked man seated on a bench at a rough table with his share of the plunder before him, counting it over again, and grinning with glee.

Bunter groaned.

There was no way out of the cellar, excepting through the outer room, where the bull-necked man sat with his plunder. The Greyfriars billionaire was a prisoner. Why, and for how long, he could not guess. But he was a prisoner—there was no doubt about that. This dismal cellar, in a dingy hut in some unknown forest, was the Grand Hotel to which Tiriddu had guided him.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Scouting!

A BLAZE of bright sunshine greeted the Greyfriars fellows when they turned out in the morning.

There was no sign left of the thunder-storm of the previous day. The sun shone down from a sky of cloudless blue.

But for the forced landing of the Kingfisher they would have been in Rome that day, exploring the wonders of the Eternal City.

They were quite content so far as that went, to spend a day or two where they had landed, and get a glimpse of Italian rural life. But they were growing anxious and worried about Bunter.

The night had passed, and nothing had been seen or heard of the Greyfriars billionaire.

What had become of him was a worrying mystery. It really seemed as if the earth must have opened and swallowed him up.

Jarvis had been up most of the night. The juniors saw him after breakfast in the osteria, and noted how pale and tired he looked.

Their opinion of Bunter's valet improved still further. His anxiety on account of his missing master was obviously great.

They would not have fancied that Billy Bunter was the kind of master to inspire affection in a manservant. And in Venice they had strongly suspected Jarvis of double dealing. Yet it was clear to the most doubting eye that James Jarvis was deeply disturbed by the billionaire's mysterious disappearance.

After breakfast the juniors came out of the osteria, and found Jarvis in talk with the innkeeper. The latter called a stable-boy, who saddled a shaggy pony, and galloped away by the dusty lane.

Pirandelli, passing the juniors as he went back into the inn, gesticulated and shrugged his shoulders.

"Che peccato! Cosa triste! Non e vero? Me ne dispaice! Ah! Si, si! E una cosa triste, signore!"

From which the juniors gathered that



As Tiriddu began speaking to Giacomo, Billy Bunter made a step towards the door. Instantly Tiriddu threw back his cloak, slipped his hand into his pocket, and snatched out a sheath knife. "No move!" he grinned. "Here we stop!" "Oh lor!" gasped Bunter, drawing back and quaking with terror.

Signor Pirandelli was much concerned over the disappearance of Billy Bunter.

"No news, Jarvish?" asked Harry.

"None, sir," answered the valet. "It is inexplicable. Master William appears to have utterly vanished. If it were possible for Bronx to know anything of our presence here, I should think he was at the bottom of it."

"But that's impossible!" said Bob Cherry.

"Oh, quite, sir! Probably that unpleasant character is still in Venice. At all events, he can know nothing of our being here. It is something else that has happened to Master William. But what?"

"Goodness knows!" The juniors were utterly perplexed.

"We cannot, of course, proceed on our journey until he is found," said Jarvish. "The defect in the plane will, I think, be repaired to-day; but we must wait till Master William is found. I have sent that lad with a message to Perni, the nearest town where official help can be obtained. And I have no doubt that some of the carabinieri will be here during the morning. In any case, the landing of the plane had to be reported. Possibly the police will be able to find Master William. But I fear—I fear very much—that something has happened to him."

Jarvish, evidently very worried, went into the osteria. The Famous Five walked to the field where the aeroplane had landed. The two pilots were at work on it there, with half a dozen Italian peasants looking on.

Among them was a very swarthy man in a black felt hat, with a big, curly, black moustache.

He turned his head and stared at the juniors as they came up, with a curious

glint in his jetty eyes. They did not notice him specially, however, little dreaming that he knew anything of Bunter's disappearance. The steward was looking out of the cabin, and they called to him.

"Seen nothing of Bunter?"

"No. Can't be still running, I suppose, sir?" said the steward. "Nearly at Rome by this time if he is."

The chums of the Remove made no reply to that. They turned away and walked back across the field.

The swarthy man with the curly moustache detached himself from the group of gazers and sauntered after them. He seemed to be interested in the travellers who had landed from the plane.

"Well, this beats Banagher!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"The beatfulness of the esteemed Banagher is terrific!" agreed the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"The howling ass!" said Johnny Bull. "If he hadn't been in a blue funk about nothing, he wouldn't have scuttled off at all!"

"But he can't have run far," said Harry. "Whatever happened to him must have happened quite close at hand."

"But what?" said Nugent.

"Blessed if I can begin to guess! Jarvish thinks he may have fallen into bad hands, and it looks like it; something must be keeping him away. Of course, brigands are a thing of the past, but some rascal may have spotted his money. Anyhow, we can't think of leaving till he's found, so we may as well put in the day looking for him."

"Might pick up some tracks," suggested Bob. "We're jolly good scouts, and we know the way he started."

"Might try, anyhow."

The juniors knew that Bunter had run across the field to the lane when he fled. So far they could follow. In the muddy, dusty lane, cut up by cart-tracks, it was not much use to look for "sign." The juniors crossed it, and tried the next field. There was a fence, but there were five or six gaps in it, by any one of which Bunter might have gone on his way—as, indeed, he had.

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

"Found anything?"

The other fellows ran up.

"Look!"

In a muddy patch in the field, half-way across to the farther side, were footprints. The soft earth retained quite clear impressions, and from the size, it was evident that the tracks were not made by a man.

"A boy—running!" said Bob oracularly.

"How do you know he was running?" asked Nugent.

"Listen to Sherlock Holmes!" answered Bob. "Observe these tracks, my dear Watson, and you will see that the toes are more deeply marked than the heels. The weight was thrown forward. I suppose nobody was tip-toeing across this field in the rain yesterday. Somebody was running."

"Good egg! Let's get on!" said Harry.

The Famous Five pushed on across the field and stopped at a rough cart-track that ran along the farther side.

On the other side was a wire fence which Bunter could hardly have crossed. He must have stopped on the cart-track and gone either to the right or the left.

"Here's his hoofprint again!" said

Johnny Bull. "Look! He must have gone under that tree and leaned against it!"

"Jolly dangerous to stand under a tree with lightning on!" remarked Nugent.

"How do you know he leaned on it? Of course, Bunter would lean on anything; but how do you know he did?" demanded Johnny.

"Brains, old chap!" answered Bob cheerfully. "Bunter was wearing a tweed jacket—a grey tweed jacket—yesterday afternoon."

"What about it?"

"Look!"

Bob picked a single thread of grey from the rough bark of the tree. His keen eyes had spotted it there. He held it up for inspection.

"Good scouting!" said Harry, with a nod of approval. "The fat ass stood leaning on that tree, and that bit rubbed off his tweeds. We know now that he stopped here."

The Greyfriars scouts were satisfied on that point. Bunter had reached that big tree, about three hundred yards from the landed plane, and stopped there. But that discovery only made his disappearance more puzzling. Why had he gone on again? And where had he gone?

The juniors scanned the cart-track. There were plenty of signs of wheels and horses' hoofs to be seen. There were footprints also, but none like Bunter's. The absence of the fat junior's tracks, however, beyond a certain radius was a fairly certain indication that Bunter had not left the spot on foot. The Greyfriars scouts had ascertained that much.

"He got a lift there," said Harry Wharton at last. "Some sort of a vehicle must have passed, and he got a lift on it—what?"

"Looks like it," agreed Nugent.

Bob Cherry whistled.

"If the fat boulder got a lift and barged in at a comfortable show, he would gorge and go to sleep, and he wouldn't be up yet," he said. "He wouldn't waste a thought on us. Are

we worrying about the fat duffer while he's snoring in bed all the time at some hotel a few miles away?"

"Oh crikey!"

The Famous Five looked at one another.

Knowing Billy Bunter as they did, it was only too probable. Now that it seemed certain that he had left the spot in a vehicle, the matter was very much altered. It would be exactly like Bunter to have supper and go to bed if he arrived at comfortable quarters, and concern for his travelling companions would certainly not make him turn out early in the morning.

Johnny Bull gave a grunt.

"Ten to one he's all right," he said. "I'm jolly well not going to worry till I know there's something to worry about, anyhow."

A swarthy Italian, with a curly black moustache, was loafing near at hand, with black eyes watching the juniors curiously.

He had followed them from the aeroplane field. Harry Wharton noticed him and crossed over to him. The man looked like other Italian peasants, but was rather better dressed than the average "contadino."

"Parlate Inglese?" asked Harry.

The swarthy man smiled and showed a gleam of white teeth.

"Speak one small English, signore," he answered. "Il nome mio Tiriddu—my name Tiriddu. You want guide—yes? Good guide?"

"We're looking for a friend of ours who has disappeared," said Harry. "He got into a cart of some kind on the spot yesterday afternoon."

Tiriddu gave a sudden start. His smiling face became dark and suspicious, and he eyed the juniors furtively.

"You see?" he asked. "You see the signore go in a cart?"

"Oh, no! We weren't here," said Harry, surprised by the sudden change in the man's look. "But we know he got a lift here."

"How the signore know if signore no see?" demanded Tiriddu.

Harry Wharton smiled. The native had been watching the scouts at work, but evidently without understanding what they were at.

"Well, we've found that out," said Wharton. "Bunter—his name is Bunter—left the aeroplane and came here, and took a cart or carriage of some kind yesterday afternoon. He drove away in it, and has not come back. Look here, we don't want a guide; but if you can find out where he went, and bring us news at the Osteria Aquila Nera, I will give you a hundred lire."

"Si, signore! I go to look and find," said Tiriddu.

There was nothing more to be done, and the juniors walked away towards the osteria, the swarthy man standing and staring after them, with the same dark and suspicious look on his face.

Hurree Janset Ram Singh glanced back at him, with a very thoughtful expression.

"My esteemed chums," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur, "I thinkfully opine that Mister Tiriddu may know something of the esteemed Bunter. He was terrifically startled when the absurd Wharton told him that we knew Bunter had left that ridiculous spot in a cart."

"I noticed that," said Harry. "But if he's the man who gave Bunter a lift, why shouldn't he say so?"

"The whyfulness is preposterous."

The juniors returned to the osteria, where they found that an officer of the carabinieri had arrived, and was in consultation with Jarvish.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Beastly for a Billionaire!

"L A COLAZIONE!" said the bull-necked man.

Billy Bunter knew that "colazione" was breakfast, and he brightened up a little. At least, the beasts weren't going to let him starve.

The Greyfriars billionaire was having a horrid time.

He had slept on a heap of sacks in the cellar. Fortunately, Bunter could sleep anywhere.

Sleeping in his clothes, on a heap of sacks, was rather a change for the fat billionaire. Still, Bunter managed to put in a solid ten hours.

He was still asleep when the door opened and light glimmered in. It was a dim light, for the hut had only one small window, and that was covered by a ragged curtain.

A push from Giacomo's foot awakened him, and he sat up, and blinked dismally at the bull-necked man, till the magic word colazione revived him.

"Oh, good!" said Bunter.

There seemed no facilities at Giacomo's solitary hut for a morning wash, let alone a bath. But that did not worry Bunter.

The amount of washing that Billy Bunter could do without was enormous. At Greyfriars School he was accustomed to cutting it down to the very minimum. So it did not worry him a lot to cut it down to vanishing point.

Breakfast was the thing!

He rolled out of the cellar into the hut, and sat down at the table. Breakfast consisted of macaroni, and there was some rather muddy coffee. But Bunter was too hungry to be very particular. He scoffed the macaroni at a great rate. It was filling, and probably it did Bunter no harm to miss his usual cargo of eggs, bacon, kidneys, tomatoes, marmalade, rolls, and other comestibles.

He felt decidedly better when he had finished.

Giacomo watched him eat, with a widening grin, perhaps wondering

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where the Signore Inglese packed away all that macaroni.

After breakfast, Bunter was in dread of being pushed back into the cellar. The hut, dirty and dingy as it was, was rather better than his late quarters. But Giacomo allowed him to remain where he was.

Several times the bull-necked man went to the door, half-opened it, and peered out into the surrounding wood. Bunter, blinking past him, had a glimpse of endless bewildering trees glimmering in the morning sunshine.

"I say, look here, Jackeymo!" said Bunter at last. "I can't stay here, you know. Look here! You take me back to my friends, and I'll give you a hundred pounds."

Giacomo looked at him.

"Non parlo Inglese!" he answered.

"You silly, ignorant beast of a foreigner!" said Bunter, finding comfort in telling the bull-necked man what he thought of him, a safe proceeding, as Giacomo did not understand English. "I've a jolly good mind to dot you in the eye, you black-jowled, ugly monkey."

"Il signore dice?"

"Ugly mug!" said Bunter. "Ugly brute! Dirty foreigner! Why don't you get a wash sometimes? I'll stand you a bar of soap! You need it."

Giacomo shook his head. Probably it was fortunate for Bunter that he did not understand.

"Beast!" said Bunter.

"Come!" ejaculated Giacomo.

"Beast!" said Bunter.

Giacomo's deep-set eyes glittered. He did not understand English, but that word was sufficiently like the Italian "bestia" to give him a clue to Bunter's meaning.

He made a stride towards the fat billionaire, and took hold of a podgy ear, in a dirty but very muscular finger and thumb.

"Yaroooooh!" roared Bunter. "Ow! Wow! I wasn't calling you a beast! Wow! I thought you didn't understand, you rotter! Wow! Leggo! Ow!"

"Non parlate piu!" grinned Giacomo.

Bunter rubbed his ear when Giacomo let go, and scowled. He did not tell the bull-necked man any more what he thought of him. It did not seem so safe as Bunter had supposed.

It was a dismal morning for the fat billionaire. Giacomo seemed restless. No doubt he had business out of doors in the ordinary way, but did not feel disposed to leave the prisoner unguarded. He smoked incessant cigars, clouding the hut with smoke, and making Bunter cough, and every half-hour or so went to the door and stared out into the wood.

Bunter could guess, easily enough, that he was waiting for his confederate to come back. Having captured the "ricco signore," no doubt the two rascals wanted to learn more about him, and especially what steps were being taken by his friends.

In that lonely hut, hidden away in the wood on the hillside, they had Bunter safe enough; but a "ricco Signore Inglese" could not disappear without a search to follow, in which the carabinieri were sure to be called in. Giacomo was an old man, old enough to remember the glorious days of brigandage, when captives could be carried off to the hills and held for ransom, and an ear or a finger could be sent to their friends as a reminder that payment was due.

But Italy had changed a great deal during Giacomo's lifetime, and the "good old times" were gone for good.

Especially since that energetic gentleman, Signor Mussolini, had turned up, this sort of game was more risky than ever before. Under the rule of the Duce, enterprising men with brigandish tendencies had to walk very warily.

Bunter could see that Giacomo was anxious, which was a little comfort to him.

Noon came, and another meal of macaroni. After which Bunter leaned back against the wall and went to sleep.

But even Bunter did not sleep so soundly as usual in his strange and alarming surroundings. He awakened at a sound of voices.

A blink through his big spectacles showed him Tiriddu sitting on the bench talking to the bull-necked man.

Tiriddu, as he talked, was twisting his curly moustache, which appeared to have been newly greased. He was dressed in different clothes, of a much better fit and quality than those Bunter had seen him in the day before.

He still wore a wide-brimmed black felt hat, but it was a new one, and had a band of gold filigree round it. His

boots the day before had been extremely down at heel; now he had a new pair of very handsome ones, brightly polished. There was a red silk sash round his waist, evidently also new. In fact, the young man had quite a dandified look.

Apparently he had already spent some of his plunder on personal decoration. As he sat on the bench, twisting his curly moustache, he stretched one leg across the table, and his glance fell on it admiringly, with an almost infantile satisfaction in his new velvet trousers and new boots.

"Silly ass!" murmured Bunter; but he was careful not to murmur aloud.

"Tutto sicuro!" Tiriddu was saying as Bunter woke up "Tutto! Tutto!"

Bunter knew that that meant "all safe."

There was a large box of cigars and several bottles of wine on the table. Tiriddu, clearly, had brought them to console Giacomo in his rather weary task of acting as gaoler. The bull-necked ruffian was already sampling one of the bottles.

(Continued on next page.)

SEPTEMBER'S STORIES.

This Month in the Libraries.

HERE'S a tip for the holidays! Travel with the cheery chums of Greyfriars on the holiday trail and share with them their rollicking and exciting adventures. Even if you've had your annual holidays you can still join up to-day with Harry Wharton & Co. by asking for the **SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY**, No. 227, "THE TRAIL OF THE TRIKE!" a sparkling book-length yarn by Frank Richards.

And if that's not enough, what about sailing with Tom Merry & Co. of St. Jim's on a grand holiday trip afloat? Where Tom Merry is, you are sure of fun and adventure, and it's all yours if you get Martin Clifford's latest—"SEVEN BOYS IN A BOAT!" It is **SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY**, No. 228.

Concrete Charlie they called him, in the football word, for obvious reasons. He inherited a derelict football club, but couldn't get money to run the show until he met Waldo, the Wonder Man, an adventurer who took money from highly placed swindlers to give to their victims. And that was the start of adventures of perils that will thrill you, for Waldo's biggest enemy happened to be Charlie's, as well. Read all about it in **BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY**, No. 445, "WALDO'S WONDER TEAM!" by Edwy Searles Brooks.

There are no characters more famous in boys' fiction to-day than Captain Justice, the skipper with a price on his head, and his companions, Dr. O'Malley, Len Connor, and young Midge. And here's another rousing yarn of their exploits—"THE OCEAN OUTLAW!" by Murray Roberts. It is **BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY**, No. 446.

The "St. FRANK'S CASTAWAYS!" by Edwy Searles Brooks, is a thrilling holiday yarn of the boys of St. Frank's, with Nipper & Co. well to the fore. If you read last month's St. Frank's story, "The Kidnapped Remove!" you'll have to read this one. Even if you didn't, you'll find "St. FRANK'S CASTAWAYS!" is a winner. Note the number—**BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY**, No. 447.

And who likes yarns of the Spanish Main, pirates, hidden treasure, and the

rolling sea? "WHO SAILS WITH ME?" by Maurice Everard, will more than fill the bill. This rattling fine story is **BOYS' FRIEND LIBRARY**, No. 448.

A man once called at Scotland Yard and asked for police protection. To look at, he was amazingly like Sexton Blake, the famous detective, only he was plainly in fear of something, or somebody. His story sounded wild and incredible, but the police agreed to help him. Then, as he left the famous building, a car shot past, there was the rat-tat of a machine-gun, and he fell dead! And that is how the thrilling story by popular John G. Brandon, featuring R. S. V. Purvale, adventurer, begins. Read it in **SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY**, No. 445—"UNDER POLICE PROTECTION!"

Everyone likes a story of baffling mystery and clever detective work. Such a book is "THE BRITISH MUSEUM MYSTERY!" by Warwick Jardine. It is **SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY**, No. 446. A man is murdered in the museum itself, and a mummified head is stolen. The exploits of a cunning crook make absorbing reading for all lovers of first-rate detective fiction.

For an exciting book of adventure and sinister plotting you will have to search far to beat Anthony Skene's latest novel, "THE RIVERSIDE CLUB MURDER!" This is No. 447 in the **SEXTON BLAKE LIBRARY**, while No. 448 in the same series, is Mr. Pierre Quirole's sensational drama of international intrigue, introducing Granite Grant and Mlle. Julie, of the Secret Service. It is entitled, "THE RED DOMINO!"

No. 5 of this month's issue of fascinating thrill-stories in the **THRILLER LIBRARY** is "THE HUNCHBACK OF HATTON GARDEN!" by G. M. Bowman. Here is a story that will intrigue and thrill you with the twists and developments of a plot from which you cannot tear yourself away.

No. 6 of the **THRILLER LIBRARY** is equally excellent—an exciting and challenging piece of detective fiction, thrilling in action and baffling in mystery. Make a note of the title—"THE MIDNIGHT MAIL!" by Henry Holt.

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They talked in rapid Italian, taking no notice of the fat prisoner. Here and there Bunter caught a word that he understood. "Carabinieri" occurred several times, and Bunter knew that a carabinieri was a country policeman in Italy. The words "i ragazzi"—boys—evidently referred to Harry Wharton & Co. "Servitore" was probably a reference to Jarvis.

At length Tiriddu turned to Bunter. "You want to go from a place?" he asked, in his imperfect English.

"Yes, rather!" said Bunter eagerly.

"You pay—molto—much?"

"Yes! Oh, yes!"

Tiriddu nodded and grinned.

"Quanto—how much you pay?" he asked.

"A thousand leers—I mean, lire!"

Tiriddu laughed.

"You make one joke, non e vero?" he asked. "You are one ricco signore—richissimo—yes! You pay large sums. Ten thousand of Engleesh pounds!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"You pay?" asked Tiriddu, sliding his hand towards a pocket.

Bunter guessed what was in that pocket, and answered in a great hurry:

"Yes! Oh, yes! Anything you like! Look here! You take me back to my friends, and I'll pay you anything you like. Word of honour!"

Tiriddu laughed again. He was not likely to trust his prisoner to that extent.

"You write!" he said. "Una lettera—a letter! L'inchiestro—la carta!" he added, taking a bottle of ink and a packet of notepaper from a pocket. "Una penna—yes! You write."

Bunter sat at the table, and took the pen. He dipped the "penna" into the "inchiestro, and blinked at Tiriddu through his big spectacles. Billy Bunter was certainly the most amenable prisoner that could have fallen into brigandish hands! He was ready to agree to anything, and to write anything, for the barest chance of getting away.

"Your friends—they have much money?" asked Tiriddu.

Bunter sniffed.

"No fear! Jarvis will pay the money, if you let me go!"

"Jarvis! Che cosa e?"

"My servant—il mio servo—servitore!" explained Bunter.

"Si, si! I see him, shiny-face, at Osteria Aquila Nera, with your friends. Yes! He have money to pay?"

"Yes, that's all right! He will pay anything I tell him," said Bunter. "But look here, you let me go—"

"Pay ten thousand Engleesh pound," said Tiriddu, "then you go—free as one bird in a air! You trust me?"

"That's all very well, but—"

"No pay—la morte!" said Tiriddu, touching the pocket where he kept the sheath-knife.

Bunter shuddered.

"All right! I'll write anything you like! Oh lor'!"

The writing of that letter was rather a lengthy business. Several copies had to be written before Tiriddu was satisfied. His acquaintance with the English language was limited, and he had to be careful that Bunter was not giving some secret clue to his place of imprisonment.

But he was satisfied at last, and he left with Bunter's letter in his pocket, addressed to James Jarvis at the Osteria Aquila Nera, and stamped. That letter was going through the post, and Billy Bunter, in a dismal mood, had to settle down to wait in the lonely hut of the charcoal-burner till it reached Jarvis, and his valet took the

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,337.

necessary measures. And as there seemed to be nothing but macaroni to eat, it was an awful prospect for the Greyfriars billionaire.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Letter from Bunter!

"L A posta!" said Signor Pirandelli, the landlord of the Osteria Aquila Nera.

The day had passed, and the night, without news of Bunter. It was the following morning, and the chums of the Remove had finished breakfast, when the postman came into the osteria.

The postman was a rather infrequent caller at the wayside inn. He had only one letter to deliver there, and Signor Pirandelli took it from him and came towards the juniors with it in his hand.

"Il Signor Jarvis non e qui?" he said.

"No, he's not here," said Harry Wharton, catching the innkeeper's meaning. "Is that letter for Jarvis?"

"Si, si, signore!"

Pirandelli held up the letter. There was a general exclamation of astonishment from the Famous Five.

It was odd enough for the valet to receive a letter there at all. And it was Billy Bunter's sprawling hand in which the address was written!

The juniors stared at it blankly.

"That's Bunter's fist!" yelled Bob.

"My only hat!"

"Alive, at any rate!" said Nugent.

"But what the thump!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "Is that fat dummy putting up somewhere, and writing to his man through the post?"

"Blessed if I can make it out."

The mystery had to remain unelucidated till Jarvis came in. Harry Wharton & Co. waited impatiently for him. It was unmistakably Bunter's handwriting on the envelope, and the postmark was Perni, a town eight or nine miles away. What it could mean they could not begin to guess.

Jarvis came in an hour or so later, looking tired and troubled. There was no doubt that the valet was taking his master's disappearance very seriously. Several of the carabinieri had taken up the search for the missing billionaire, but they had made no discovery so far. Neither had the man with the curly moustache brought any news.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry, as Bunter's man came up to the inn. "Letter for you, Jarvis, from Bunter."

"What?" gasped Jarvis.

Pirandelli handed over the letter. Jarvis stared at it in utter astonishment. Obviously he knew no more than the juniors what it could possibly mean. He opened it hurriedly.

The expression on his face was extraordinary as he read it! Harry Wharton & Co. watched him eagerly.

"Well, what's the news?" demanded Bob.

Jarvis gave a gasp.

"As I feared, sir, my master has fallen into lawless hands," he said. "Please read the letter."

He handed it over, and the Famous Five read it together. It ran:

"Dear Jarvis,—I am a prisoner, and the man wants ten thousand pounds to let me go.

"Pay it at wunce.

"You are to get it in Italian munny, in noats of one hundred leeray. He wont take bigger noats.

"Make the munny up into a bundel,

and put it in the hollow tree by the cross on the Via Bianca. I doant kno where that is, but you must find out.

"Keep it secret, and be quick about it, as my life is in dedly danger.

"W. G. BUNTER."

"Well, my only summer chapeau!" said Bob Cherry, with a deep breath. "Brigands ain't out of date in Italy, after all! Somebody's got hold of Bunter, and is holding him to ransom."

"Ten thousand pounds!" said Johnny Bull. "The sportsman seems to value Bunter at a high figure."

"Of course, he found a lot of money on him," said Nugent. "He must have made a fortune out of Bunter already from what he found in his pockets. And that's made him greedy."

"The greedfulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Well, thank goodness nothing worse has happened to him!" said Harry Wharton. "He's alive and well, at any rate."

"What are you going to do, Jarvis?" asked Bob.

"I can hardly say!" said Jarvis, evidently much worried. "I am quite sure that my master would approve of handing over even such a large sum to obtain his liberty and safety. But—"

"But can you get hold of so much money?" asked Harry, with a very curious look at Bunter's valet.

The source of Bunter's new and tremendous wealth was still a mystery to the Famous Five. They knew that Jarvis had something to do with it, though what, they could not say. Ten thousand pounds was an enormous sum for a manservant to find.

"I could obtain the money, sir!" said Jarvis, with a faint smile. "My master is kind enough to leave the handling of his funds to me. And I have no doubt that he would approve. But—I fear that if such a sum is paid over, without a guarantee that Master William will be set free, it may lead to nothing but further demands."

"Jolly certain, I should think," said Harry. "If the rascal can get hold of ten thousand pounds, simply for the trouble of making Bunter write a letter, he's not likely to let him go in a hurry."

"No fear!" said Bob Cherry, shaking his head. "Paying the money won't get us any forrarder, Jarvis. Why, if the brute, whoever he is, got hold of such a sum as that, he would ask twice as much next time, and then three times as much. But he jolly well wouldn't let go the goose that laid the golden eggs."

Jarvis nodded.

"I am afraid that that is certain, sir! The rascal was probably dazzled by the amount of money he found on Master William, and he fancies that he can be as exorbitant as he chooses. It would take some time to obtain such a sum in notes of small denomination, and the rascal is too cunning to risk being paid in large notes. Now that we know that Master William is alive and a prisoner not very far away, possibly the carabinieri may be able to find him."

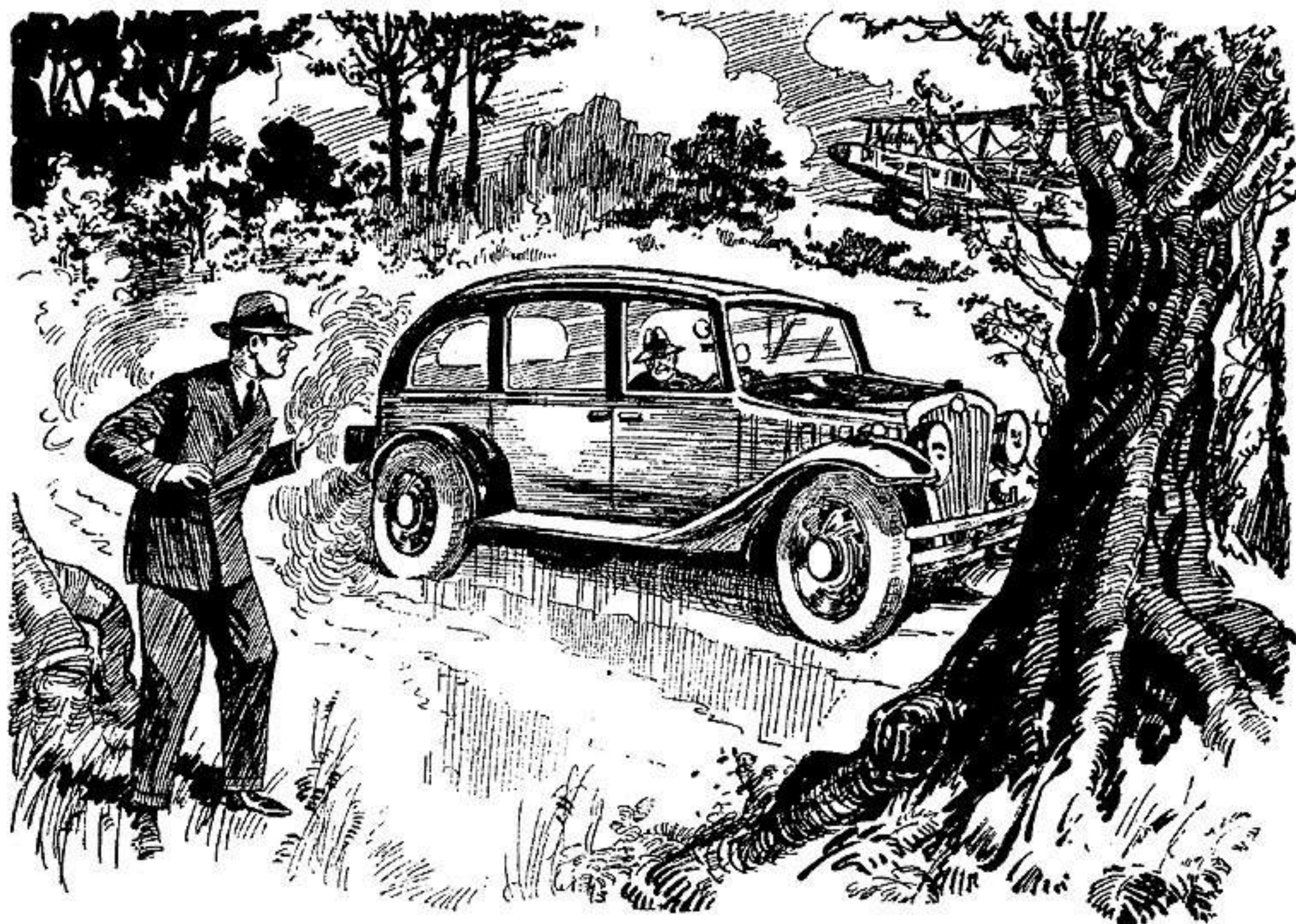
Jarvis hesitated.

"My master tells me to keep the matter a secret," he said. "But in the circumstances—"

"In the circumstances, the police are the best people to deal with it," said Harry Wharton.

"Yet—if his life should be in peril—" muttered Jarvis uneasily.

The juniors looked at him, and looked at one another. They were sure, or almost sure, that Jarvis had betrayed Bunter into the hands of Tiger Bronx at Venice. And in the gangster's



Jarvis was walking along slowly, his head bent in thought, when a car on the road suddenly braked, and a nasal voice hailed him. "Say, bo!" Bunter's valet spun round, with a startled gasp, to stare at the long-limbed gangster in the car. "Freeze on to that spot!" said Bronx, grinning, as Jarvis made a motion.

hands Bunter had certainly been in danger.

Yet it was clear that he was deeply concerned at the idea of Bunter being in danger from an Italian bandit. It was very perplexing.

"The carabinieri might keep a watch on the place where the money is to be left!" suggested Johnny Bull. "A dummy bundle might be put there, and the rogue snaffled when he came for it."

"I fear, sir, that the rascal will be rather too wary to be caught in so easy a trap," said Jarvis.

He shook his head.

"I shall have to consider what to do," he said at last. "It is a very difficult matter to decide. I would gladly pay over the money to see my master safe and sound. Possibly I may be able to get into touch with the bandit by leaving a note in the place mentioned, and make terms with him. I shall have to think it out."

James Jarvis put the letter in his pocket and walked slowly away, his sleek face lined with thought.

"I've given up trying to understand that man!" said Harry. "After his trickery at Venice, this beats me hollow! He's as keen as we are on getting Bunter back safe; and yet I feel certain that he would betray him to Bronx again if he had a chance. It's a giddy mystery."

"Beats me hollow!" said Bob.

"The hollowfulness is terrific!"

"Anyhow, we know that Bunter's a prisoner somewhere, and he can't be far away," said Nugent. "We can jolly well root over the whole place till we find him. Poor old Bunter!"

"The fat dummy asked for it!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Let's hunt for him, all the same."

And the Famous Five started out again for another day's hunt for Bunter.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bronx Blows In!

"I'll tell a man!"

"Tiger" Bronx uttered that sudden ejaculation.

Sitting at the wheel of a car, the American gangster was driving at a moderate pace along sunny, dusty roads, under a blazing Italian sun.

As he drove, his eyes gleamed to right and left of the road, scanning the countryside in keen search.

Suddenly he half-rose in his seat and stared across the brown, sun-scorched fields at a prominent object that was outlined against the sky.

It was a large aeroplane, landed in a field.

The gangster's eyes gleamed.

"I'll tell the world!" he exclaimed. "I'll say that that's the shebang I want, and if this ain't the opossum's eyelids, I should sure smile!"

He drove on, turning from the road and winding through lanes to approach the field where the aeroplane lay. He grinned over the wheel at the sight of a shortish, plumpish figure walking under the trees ahead of him.

If he had doubted whether the landed plane was the Kingsfisher, he would have doubted no longer when he saw James Jarvis in the road.

Jarvis was walking slowly, his hands clasped behind him, his sleek head bent in thought. He did not take any heed of the sound of a car on the road, overtaking him. But he took

heed, quite suddenly, when the car braked and a nasal voice hailed him:

"Say, bo!"

Bunter's valet spun round with a startled gasp. He stared at the lean, long-limbed gangster in the car.

Bronx grinned at him.

"Freeze on to that spot!" he said, as Jarvis made a motion. "I got something here that will stop you in one wag of an opossum's tail if you try to beat it, you big stiff!"

Jarvis controlled himself and stood still. Although, by the extraordinary measures he had taken, he had shifted the gangster's deadly pursuit from himself to Billy Bunter, he had never lost his fear of the desperado from Chicago.

The sleek man was no hero, and the knowledge that Bronx "packed a gun" and was reckless enough to use it made him wriggle with uneasiness in the gangster's presence.

But he pulled himself together and answered, with some calmness:

"So you've turned up, Mr. Bronx!"

"You said it!" grinned Bronx. "You lighted out of Venice like you was sent for in that pesky plane; but I guess Tiger Bronx ain't no guy to get left! Nope—not so's you'd notice it! I'll say I've been after that plane, and when I get wise to it that a big plane had had a forced landing in these parts, I allowed I'd come and give it the once-over. I'll say I'm glad to meet up with you, Jimmy Jarvis. Don't go. I'm too fond of you to part with you yet."

He had shut off the engine, and his hand was under his loose lounge jacket, resting on something at his hip. Jarvis knew what it was.

"There are very severe laws in this

(Continued on page 16.)

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,337.



(Continued from page 13.)

country, Mr. Bronx, against the carrying of deadly weapons," he said. "Much more severe than in your own country, and even than in England."

"I guess that don't worry me a lot," said Bronx, shrugging his lean shoulders. "Can it, Jarvish. You know why I'm here. I want that fat gink, Bunter. You're going to tell me where to put salt on his tail. You don't want to hear this leetle six-gun talk from my pocket, I guess. All the laws of Italy won't help you a lot if you do. Where's Bunter?"

Jarvish smiled.

"I wish I knew," he answered.

"You left him around and lost him?" jeered Bronx.

"He has lost himself," answered Jarvish. "This is the third day that he has been searched for unsuccessfully."

"I should smile!"

"It is true," said Jarvish quietly. "The fat fool—to you, Bronx, I may speak of him as I think—the fat fool has been showing off his money to some lawless native of these parts, and the man has collared him, and is trying to hold him to ransom."

"Search me!" ejaculated Bronx. "I'll say I figured that Italian brigands was as dead as Abraham Lincoln."

"No doubt. But the sight of the young fool's money has put him in danger. I hardly imagine that there are any brigands about, but some lawless character has got hold of him, and is trying on the game. If you don't believe me—"

"Not a whole heap," sneered Bronx.

"Look!"

Jarvish drew Bunter's letter from his pocket and handed it to the gangster.

The man from Chicago took it, and read it, and gave a whistle of sheer astonishment.

"Carry me home to die!" he ejaculated.

"If you can find Master William I shall be very much obliged to you," said Jarvish. "I have been leaving no stone unturned. I have hardly closed my eyes since he disappeared. Half a dozen carabinieri are engaged in the search, as well as a score of peasants, for the reward I have offered for news of him."

Bronx looked at him.

"Yep! I'll say you don't want him fixed by a dago!" he said savagely. "I guess I'm wise to your game, Jimmy Jarvish! You figure that you saved your sneaking skin by handing over the Shook billions to that fat gink. If he was knifed by a dago you'd be where you was before."

Jarvish made no answer.

"You ain't aiming at that," said Bronx. "Not you, you double-crossing geck! You've signed away the dust for that fat gink's lifetime, and if a dago washed him out it would come back to you. And I reckon you wouldn't live long to enjoy it with Tiger Bronx cavorting around. If he's fixed, you want him to be fixed by me. I'll tell a man!"

"I assure you—"

"Can it!" growled Bronx. "You figure that I ain't wise to your game. Quit chewing the rag!"

He bent his brows over Bunter's letter. Jarvish, in silence, watched him. The gangster's keen eyes read all that the letter could tell him.

"Noo paper from the stationer's, and postmark P'erni! I guess the guy that's got him bought this paper special for the letter to be written, and took it along to town to post. He wasn't giving you any clues he could help. You ain't got a line on him."

"I have no idea—"

"How did the fat gink disappear in the first place?" snapped Bronx.

Jarvish told him. Bronx listened attentively.

Whether his suspicion of the valet's motives was correct or not, it was clear that Jarvish had no objection to the gangster finding Bunter if he could. He was giving him every help in his power, at all events.

"The all-fired jay!" growled Bronx. "Waal, I guess he ain't fur off! He met up with some guy who cinched him—and I reckon that means that it was one of those local dagos. Brigands' lairs in the mountains is ancient history. I guess there ain't any left, except on the pictures. The guy's got him parked in some dive round about this pesky spot. I'll tell a man! I guess if your policeman looked into all the hovels for five miles round they'd pick up that fat guy all O.K."

Jarvish nodded.

"I guess I'm the hombre that's going to pick him up," added Bronx. "You ain't got any objection, Jimmy Jarvish. I reckon I spotted your game when you let the fat gink come on the felucca in the lagoon at Venice. You sure want me to rope him in. It suits your book. I guess it suits mine, too, you double-crossing lobo-wolf! You can beat it!"

"Thank you," said Jarvish smoothly. "I am very glad to have met you, Mr. Bronx."

"Aw, can it!" snapped the gangster in disgust. "Git!"

And Mr. Jarvish "got."

Bronx stared after him, with a dark brow, till he disappeared in the direction of the Osteria Aquila Nera.

He had retained possession of Bunter's letter; and now he scanned it again, with keen, searching eyes.

But there was nothing more that he could learn from it; and he gave a grunt, and crumpled it into his pocket.

Mr. Bronx did not seem in a good temper.

He had picked up the trail of the Greyfriars billionaire again, after losing it for days; only to find himself up against a new and quite unexpected difficulty.

Before he could carry out his own plans regarding Bunter the Billionaire, he had to get him out of the hands of the "dago" who had "cinched" him!

The first step was to locate the precise spot where the fat billionaire had been "cinched"; which obviously could not be very far away from the aeroplane field.

After some thought, Bronx backed his car off the road; and leaving it, walked in the direction of the field where the landed Kingfisher lay.

He was about to turn off the road, into the lane that ran by the field, when he stopped suddenly and backed.

Seated on the grassy bank by the lane under the shade of a tree, were five fellows whom he knew very well.

Bronx had almost forgotten the existence of the Famous Five of Greyfriars. Now he was reminded of them.

After what had happened at Venice, the gangster would have been quite

pleased to "soak" those cheery juniors, as he would have expressed it. But some painful experiences had taught him that he was more likely to get than to give the "soaking" if he tackled them in a bunch.

He came to a halt, undecided how to act for the moment. The chums of the Remove were talking, and their voices reached him through the trees.

And as he caught their words, Tiger Bronx seemed to decide suddenly what he was going to do. He stepped quietly into the field from the road, and with the stealthiness of a cat, approached behind the trees under which the juniors were seated. Hidden from sight, his presence quite unsuspected by the Famous Five, Tiger Bronx listened—with all his ears!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

A Clue!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. had had rather a tiring day.

How many miles they had covered, tramping up and down the country in the blaze of the sun, they did not know; it felt rather like hundreds. It was impossible to leave the place, till the missing billionaire was found; and hardly possible to settle down and do nothing while he was missing. Yet it seemed futile enough to hunt for him; and they had certainly had no luck. Now they were taking a well-earned rest, till it was time for "pranzo" at the osteria.

Hurree Janset Ram Singh was thoughtful and silent; he had been looking very thoughtful all day.

"My esteemed chums," said the Nabob of Bhanipur, breaking the silence at last, "I have been thoughtfully reflecting, and it appears to my absurd mind that I have hit upon a preposterous possibility."

"Go it, Inky!" said Bob Cherry. "I can see that you've got something in your old black noddle."

"That esteemed dago we met yesterday morning, whose absurd name was Tiriddu, offered his ridiculous services as a guide," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"What's the good of a guide?" asked Johnny Bull. "The man can't guide us to Bunter, I suppose."

"That is what I thoughtfully opine!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh quietly. "You will remember how extremefully startled he looked when he was told that we knew that the absurd Bunter had gone in a cart."

"They're not up to our scouting," said Bob, with a grin. "I dare say he wondered how on earth we knew so much."

"Quitefully so; but he was not only surprised—it occurred to my absurd mind that he was alarmed and also suspicious."

"That struck me, too," said Harry, with a nod. "I wondered if he knew anything about Bunter."

"Can't be the man who gave him a lift, or he would have coughed it up, when you offered him a hundred lire for information," said Johnny Bull.

"Unless," said the nabob quietly, "he is also the man who snaffled the esteemed and ridiculous Bunter."

"Oh!"

"The idiotic Bunter must have got a lift in some passing vehicle," went on Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "Either he was landed somewhere where he was snaffled, or the man who gave him a lift snaffled him. And if it was the esteemed Tiriddu, that would account

for his keeping an absurd eye on us yesterday, and looking so startled when we told him that we knew that Bunter had been taken away in a cart."

Harry Wharton nodded slowly.

A vague idea of the same sort had been in his own mind.

"But that man Tiriddu can't be a jolly old brigand," said Johnny Bull. "I've seen him about two or three times—he comes into the Osteria Aquila Nera for drinks."

The nabob smiled.

"There are no brigands in Italy in these esteemed days," he answered. "But there are lawless characters, as in all absurd countries."

"That's it!" said Harry. "The professional brigand is dead and done with—but there are some amateurs about. Whoever got in touch with Bunter was tempted by the fat duffer's stack of money, and thought he was on to a good thing. So he's playing brigand on Bunter's account."

"Special performance, positively for one occasion only!" grinned Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Something like that, most likely," he said. "Probably he's a chap who would have been a brigand in the old days, and has a sort of taste for it. Even in England a fellow can't wander about safely with a thousand pounds in his pockets."

"That's so!" agreed Nugent.

"To-morrow," said Hurree Jamset Singh, "suppose we engage the esteemed Tiriddu as a guide—"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Johnny Bull. "If he's got Bunter parked somewhere, he won't guide us in that direction."

"Hardly!" grinned Bob.

"No fear!" chuckled Nugent.

"The no-fearfulness is preposterous!" agreed the nabob. "But we can keep an absurd eye on Mister Tiriddu, and perhaps discover if he knows anything of the absurd Bunter. And if we find out that he does, we can take him

by his neck and make him guide us to the ridiculous billionaire."

"Well, it's a chance, anyhow," said the captain of the Remove, "and there seems to be no other chance of any sort. We can ask some questions at the osteria about Tiriddu, too, and find out what sort of a reputation he's got."

"Good egg," said Bob. "Jarvish speaks Italian, and he can interpret for us to Pirandelli."

"I am terrifically convinced that the esteemed and ridiculous Tiriddu knows something!" declared Hurree Jamset Singh. "And as the English proverb remarks, the proof of the pudding is in the cracked pitcher that goes longest to the well."

"Good old proverb!" chuckled Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And having discussed the matter a little longer, the chums of the Remove rose from the grassy bank and walked to the osteria.

(Continued on next page.)



What "Linesman" doesn't know about "footer" isn't worth knowing. Bombard him with any ticklish Soccer problems you like—he's willing to solve 'em! Address your letters: "Linesman," c/o The MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

THERE'S a better time coming for the goalkeepers of football: at least, there will be if the experiment now being made by the Manchester United Club proves successful, and is copied by others. I expect you have noticed that, even on your own pitches, the grass soon gets worn off near the goal, and that when the rain comes there is much mud for the goalkeeper to flounder in.

Well, the Manchester United manager has noticed this, too, and an experiment is being made this season with shale to the width of about four feet, across the space where the goalkeeper does his job of work. This is expected to give the custodian a sure foothold in all sorts of weather. If the idea is generally adopted we shall no longer see goalkeepers almost literally stuck in the mud, and unable to get to shots which they could reach were the ground dry.

A MAGNET reader, who has noticed this Manchester United experiment, wants to know whether the big football games can be played on any sort of surface, according to the whim of a club. My reply is

that there is nothing in the rules of the game which suggests that football matches must be played on grass. Indeed, it would be impossible to carry out any such rule, because on most of the pitches the grass vanishes in the course of a season's play, and the games are played on soil rather than grass.

"TIME'S UP!"

AN interesting query is sent to me by a Worksop reader. In a match in which he played recently, he banged in a shot at goal, which was successful to the extent that the ball landed in the net. It was a

perfectly good goal, but it didn't count, because, as the ball was on the way to the net from his foot, the referee blew the whistle for time.

My reader friend very naturally asks the question as to whether the referee was justified in cutting the timing so fine, and whether he was acting in accord with the laws of the game.

It was certainly a bit of bad luck for my friend's team to be deprived of a goal by a fraction of a second, but the referee was quite right.

There is only one circumstance under which the referee is permitted to extend the period of play, and that is to allow a penalty kick to be taken. On all other occasions he must blow the whistle when his watch registers the expiration of time, no matter the situation of the ball.

I have seen first-class teams go through the same experiences as the junior club for which my correspondent plays. Two or three seasons ago, at Tottenham, the referee blew the whistle for time while the ball was only a few yards from the net, which it entered in due course. The margin was so fine on that occasion that the spectators did not know for certain what the final score was, and the newspaper reporters had to go round to the referees' room to inquire whether he had blown the whistle for a goal, or whether he had blown for time.

WHERE THE SNAG COMES IN!

I HAVE a personal idea that the rules of the game ought to be altered in respect of this "time up" business. In my opinion it would be better if the referee only called the play off—either for half-time or full-time—when the ball goes "dead" after the expiration of the allotted period. More than once in the course of my experience referees

have been looking at their watches so closely during the last few seconds of a match they they have not noticed offences by one side or the other.

When this happened in a match a short time ago, the officials of one of the teams concerned was so upset that he started an agitation to take the timing of a match out of the hands of referees altogether, and give the job to some official who could sit up in the stand.

The suggestion never got beyond that stage, one of the snags being that the referee is the judge as to the time which shall be knocked off for stoppages caused by injury, and other things. To enable them to do this, all the leading referees use stop watches.

Have you seen the watches used by referees? They haven't an ordinary watch face. The face of a proper referee's watch is marked off for three-quarters of the hour only, with the last quarter of the watch face devoid of figures. When the referee starts a game, or restarts it, after half-time, he sets it to the hour, and he knows the time is up when the one finger which these watches have, points at a quarter to the hour.

One of the many superstitions connected with this game of football is that it is unlucky to change colours. Obviously, however, if a club has had a run of bad luck, a change of colours, if it brings any alteration at all, must be for the better. That is why several of the big clubs have made a change in the colours worn by their players this season.

Notts County, for instance, having been in the Second Division for quite a long time, have discarded their familiar black and white striped jerseys, which caused them to be given the name of "Magpies," for chocolate and blue halves. Very distinguished-looking they appear in these jerseys, too, and they are also so unusual that they won't have to change them against any team they will meet during the season.

Let us hope that in this case a change of colours will bring the Notts County team better luck.

There was a time when the City of Nottingham had two clubs in the First Division, but now both clubs are in the second class. Bradford is another centre which had two First Division clubs at one time, and now has no representative among the elite.

"LINESMAN."

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,387.

They were feeling in a more hopeful mood now.

It was possible that there was nothing in the nabob's suspicion of the man Tiriddu; but the Co. had great faith in Hurreo Singh's penetration. And it was certain that there had been something suspicious in the man's actions and words.

Vague as it was, regarded as a clue, it was at least something to "go for"; like an uncertain spot of light in the darkness, and better, anyhow, than nothing.

As they walked away to the inn, the chums of Greyfriars had no suspicion that a lean, hard face watched them go, from the clump of trees.

They had no idea at all that Tiger Bronx was in the vicinity; and certainly it did not occur to them that he had been lurking in the trees, and listening to their talk.

There was a grin on the lean face of the gangster as he watched them go.

"Carry me home to die!" murmured Mr. Bronx. "I'll say I'm in luck! That dog-goned nigger is no fool, I'll tell a man! I guess I'm going to look for this here Mister Tiriddu—and if he knows anything about that fat piegan, I'm going to be the guy he talks to! Just a few!"

And having waited till the schoolboys were out of sight, Tiger Bronx walked back to his car, in as hopeful a mood as the juniors.

Harry Wharton & Co. reached the inn, where they found Jarvish smoking a cigarette in the arched entrance. They noticed that Bunter's valet looked less worried than when they had seen him last.

"Any news, Jarvish?" asked Harry. Jarvish respectfully removed the cigarette from his mouth.

"No, sir; none so far, I am sorry to say," he answered.

"I thought you looked rather bucked."

"Indeed, sir!"

Jarvish was not likely to explain to the juniors that he was "bucked" by the arrival of Tiger Bronx in the vicinity.

Of that they knew nothing, and he did not intend to let them know that the gangster was on hand if he could help it.

"Have you decided what to do about the demand for ransom?" asked Harry.

Jarvish shook his head.

"It is a very difficult problem to decide, sir! I am giving it very earnest thought, but I have not been able to come to a decision yet."

Wharton gave the valet a very sharp look.

There was some change in Jarvish; he could sense that the man had been eagerly keen on the search for Bunter. Now he was not so keen. Something had happened that day to change his views, somehow.

The old feeling of deep distrust, which Wharton had almost forgotten, came back in full force. The man was treacherous, and there was no following the tortuous windings of his foxy mind.

Harry gave him a curt nod, and passed on into the inn with his comrades. A glance at their faces showed him that they had the same impression as himself.

"That tick's got something up his sleeve!" grunted Johnny Bull. "What the thump is he up to now?"

"The upfulness to something is terrific!"

"Goodness knows!" said Harry. "I've never been able to make the man out—and I make him out less than ever now!"

Let's have some dinner—I hope poor old Bunter's getting some!"

"They won't starve the goose that's going to lay them golden eggs!" said Bob. "They'll feed him all right."

"Anyhow, I jolly well hope that we shall find the fat old bean to-morrow," said Frank Nugent. "The more I think about it the more I think that Inky's spotted the clue."

That conviction was growing in the minds of all the Co. They went to bed that night in quite a hopeful mood.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Man in the Car!

"TIRIDDU!" said Signor Pirandelli, shaking his head. "No! No, signore! Cattivo nomo!"

In the sunny morning after breakfast, Harry Wharton & Co. were "getting on with it."

Jarvish, they found, had left the inn early; perhaps to resume his search for his master; perhaps to keep out of their way. Anyhow, he was gone, and they were not sorry for it.

Now that their distrust of the mysterious valet had revived, they had decided to tell him nothing of their hopes and plans, and so they did not want his services as an interpreter.

Wharton remembered that the steward of the Kingfisher spoke the language of the country; and as the man was putting up at the osteria it was easy to call on his services.

The steward was quite willing to oblige; and now the chums of Greyfriars were talking to Signor Pirandelli, with his assistance.

It was explained to the innkeeper that Tiriddu, who called himself a guide, had offered himself in that capacity to the English signore; and they wanted to know whether he was to be trusted. That was enough to tell Signor Pirandelli.

From the expression on the innkeeper's face, it was evident that his opinion of Tiriddu was not high.

"Cattivo uomo!" repeated Bob. "What's that when it's at home, steward?"

"A bad hat, sir!" said the steward, grinning.

Signor Pirandelli, with many gesticulations, went on to explain, and the steward translated.

They learned that Tiriddu was a dealer in hay and other agricultural products, but that he did little work. Sometimes he served as a guide to foreign tourists in the vicinity, but there had been rumours of missing articles on such occasions. Twice he had been called up before the officers of the carabinieri to be questioned about robberies, though nothing had been proved against him. His father had been a bandit in the old days, and had been shot in a fight in the mountains long ago. Signor Pirandelli was evidently of opinion that Tiriddu followed in his father's footsteps, so far as the limited opportunities of more modern times permitted.

On the other hand, it seemed that Tiriddu when he had money spent it very freely, and was a good customer at such times in the wine-bar of the Osteria Aquila Nera. That was all the good that Mr. Pirandelli knew of him!

"Ask him whether Tiriddu has been spending more money than usual lately?" said Harry, struck by a sudden thought.

The steward stared a little, in surprise; but he repeated the question to the innkeeper in Italian.

The answer was more than sufficient to strengthen the suspicions of the juniors with regard to the young man with the curly black moustache.

Tiriddu had certainly been spending much more money of late.

He had ordered unusually expensive wines for himself and his friends, in the wine-bar of the osteria. But that was not all. He was dressed in new clothes, new boots, new hat, and had a gold ring on his finger. He must have gone to Perni and spent quite a large sum on his new outfit. Signor Pirandelli had already wondered where he obtained his unusual supplies of cash from, and supposed that he must have sold his horse and cart. He had not been seen driving the carro for the past few days, at all events. Generally he was glad to get a little work as a carrier, to earn a few lire. But only yesterday the innkeeper had had a package to send to Perni, and Tiriddu had declined to take it, telling him to find someone else.

He was growing quite "altiero," in fact "fiero," which meant proud and haughty, and seemed to disdain the work to which he had been accustomed.

"My hat!" murmured Bob. "It begins to look as if jolly old Tiriddu has come into money all of a sudden! We can guess whose money it was."

"What an ass to give it away by playing the goat!" said Johnny Bull.

Wharton inquired, through the steward, where Tiriddu was to be found. He was not at the wine-bar at the moment.

He learned that Tiriddu lived in a "capanna," a cottage or hovel, on the road to Perni, about a mile from the osteria. It was easy enough to find; but Signor Pirandelli warned the signore very earnestly not to have anything to do with such a dubious character.

Having thanked Pirandelli for his information, and the steward for his services as interpreter, the juniors left the osteria.

They took the road to Perni.

Suspicion was growing into a certainty now. They already suspected Tiriddu of having had something to do with Bunter's disappearance. Now they had learned that he had come into the sudden possession of wealth at the very time of that disappearance.

"It's Bunter's cash that he's been spending, ten to one!" said Bob.

"The ten-to-oneness is terrific!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed Tiriddu is the man we want."

"And he has—or had—a horse and cart," said Bob. "We know that Bunter got a lift in a cart when he vanished."

"It begins to look clear," said Harry Wharton. "Well, if the rascal knows where Bunter is we'll jolly well make him cough it up."

There was a buzz of a motor-car on the road behind the juniors.

They stepped to the roadside to let the car pass.

It was driven at a great speed, and it whirled past the group of schoolboys in a cloud of dust.

But fast as it went, they saw the man who was lounging over the wheel, and had a glimpse of a hard, lean face under a slouched hat.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob, staring after the car as it whirled on in the dust. "Did you spot that sportsman?"

"Bronx!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "The man from Chicago!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

They stood looking after the car. It



"You're the hombre I want!" said Bronx. "I guess there ain't nary a doubt! You're the hobo that cinched that fat gink Bunter!" "Bunter?" repeated Tiriddu. "You get me!" barked the gangster. "That fat guy Bunter! You've got his loot in your rags!"

disappeared in a few seconds up the road, leaving behind a scent of petrol and an ocean of flying dust.

"Well, my hat!" said Harry Wharton. "So that rotter has got on the track again! Did he see us, I wonder?"

"Hardly—under these trees and going so fast!" said Bob.

"He must have seen the plane, the way he came!" remarked Nugent. "It's big enough to be seen. I wonder he didn't stop there."

"He seems to be going to Perni," said Harry. "I don't think this road leads anywhere else. Well, I suppose he was bound to come rooting after us sooner or later. I knew he would follow on from Venice."

The juniors resumed their walk.

The sight of the gangster had startled them; but it was not, after all, surprising. Bronx had had plenty of time to learn about the forced landing of the Kingfisher, and they had no doubt that he had been seeking to pick up the trail of the Greyfriars billionaire ever since they had flown away from Venice.

Half an hour later they came on some scattered cottages near the road. They had dismissed the gangster from their minds, little guessing that he was ahead of them on the same quest. But as soon as they entered the little village they became aware that some unusual excitement was going on there. All the inhabitants were outside their cottages, talking and gesticulating.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Tough Luck for Tiriddu!

TIRIDDU sat in the doorway of the capanna, basking like a lizard in the bright sunshine, and smoking the most expensive cigar he had been able to buy at Perni with the Greyfriars billionaire's cash.

By his side was a flask of Asti. There was a cheery grin on his swarthy face.

Neighbours in the adjacent cottages, when they passed, gave him envious looks.

All Tiriddu's acquaintances knew that he was in good luck.

Fine feathers make fine birds; and Tiriddu was quite a dandy now. He was enjoying life.

He was clothed in new raiment from head to foot. A few days ago he had been dingy and almost tattered. All that was altered now.

It had not occurred to Tiriddu to wash, which would have been in keeping with his new and expensive outfit. Except for that he was quite a new Tiriddu. Every now and then he glanced into a pocket mirror, which was one of his new purchases. What he saw in it gave him great satisfaction.

"Buono!" said Tiriddu, apparently addressing his expensive cigar. "Buonissimo!"

Tiriddu was dreaming happy dreams. He had always wanted to follow the profession of his respected parent, the late bandit who had been shot by the carabinieri.

But times had changed; and there was no real opening for a bandit in modern Italy.

Having a constitutional disinclination to work, Tiriddu had been a guide and a pickpocket, and a smuggler of tobacco, and several other things; only taking jobs with his horse and cart when nothing else came his way.

Now, however, his chance had come. A "ricco signore Inglese" had fallen like a ripe plum into his mouth. Little as he liked work, Tiriddu realised that it had been a fortunate circumstance that he was carting hay that day when Billy Bunter suddenly appeared from nowhere.

The old days—the good old days—were over; he could not carry his captive off to a lair in the mountains and hold him to ransom in the good old-fashioned way. But he had an uncle who was a charcoal-burner, and lived in a remote hut in the wood up the hill; and Giacomo served his turn. At long last, Tiriddu found himself able to dabble in a little brigandage; and so far, he had found it pay.

His late parent, the bandit, had never made such a catch as Tiriddu had made. Tiriddu had hardly believed that there was so much money in the world, as the sum he had taken from the fat billionaire.

It had dazzled him and awakened endless greed in his breast. He was going to get an enormous sum in ransom for Bunter; and then he was going to get another, and another!

In his mind's eye he saw himself an exceedingly "ricco signore," rolling in his own automobile on the Pincio at Rome, dressed in the most expensive clothes, and smoking the most expensive cigars, and getting intoxicated on the most superb and expensive wines.

In the meantime, he indulged his infantile vanity by dressing in the best that could be bought at a provincial town, and dazzling his envious neighbours with his finery.

And there were other rich signors at the Osteria Aquila Nera; and if they were so ill-advised as to engage Tiriddu as a guide, he might be able to serve them as he had served the fat one! It did not occur to Tiriddu's simple mind that Bunter was the only rich one in the party. He had the simple belief of the Italian peasant that all the English were enormously rich.

With such golden dreams in his mind it was no wonder that Tiriddu grinned and curled his curly moustache with

great satisfaction. He was unaware that he was going to wake from those golden dreams very shortly.

A car came buzzing along the road, and he watched it carelessly. A long, lean foreigner in a slouched hat was driving.

The long lean man stopped the car at the first cottage and called out a question to an old woman who was plucking a chicken in the doorway.

Apparently he was inquiring for Tiriddu; for having received an answer, he drove on and stopped in front of the capanna.

He stepped from the car, stared at Tiriddu in his doorway, and came towards him.

Tiriddu rose to his feet and saluted him with Italian politeness.

Tiger Bronx scanned him and grinned. It was very unusual to find an Italian peasant in a dingy little hovel in such a highly decorated state as Tiriddu. As soon as he had given him the once-over, Tiger Bronx had no doubt that Hurree Janset Ram Singh had been right. The talk he had overheard among the Greyfriars juniors had given him the clue he wanted.

"You're Tiriddu!" he said curtly.

"Si, signore!"

"I guess I've been inquiring for a guide that speaks English!" said Bronx.

"Speak a small English, signore!" assented Tiriddu.

"You know this country well?"

"I am born here, signore."

"I guess you'll do," said Bronx.

"Hop into the auto."

Tiriddu hesitated.

Now that he was well supplied with money, with an unlimited prospect of more to come, he was not keen on even the easy work of a guide. He would have been glad to serve as guide to the schoolboys, certainly, in the hope of getting away with a little brigandage.

But brigandage with Bronx was quite another proposition. The tall, lean American could have picked up Tiriddu and pitched him over the roof of his own capanna.

That was not the sort of customer Tiriddu was looking for when he was brigandishly disposed.

He shook his head.

"Scusatemi, signore," he said. "Cio e impossibile! Oggi—to-day, I have other duty!"

"Hay!" barked Bronx, his lean jaw jutting.

"Some other day, if the signore wishes—"

"I guess I want you to-day, Mister Tiriddu," said Bronx. "I'll say I've been inquiring after you, even since sun-up, and now I've cinched you! You're a guide—I want a guide! Get into the auto!"

"No, signore! Non desidero—"

"Desidero be durned!" said Bronx. "I've said get into that auto! You getting in?"

Tiriddu gave him a stare of surprise and backed away a pace. He had dealt with foreigners before; but never with a foreigner who insisted on engaging his services in this high-handed way.

"Ma, signore—" he stammered.

Bronx, with knitted brow, followed him up as he backed.

"I guess I want you! Get into that auto! Name your figure, and I'll pay it!"

"Cento lire—hundred lire one day!" said Tiriddu, hoping by naming that high price to get rid of his importunate visitor.

"That goes!" said Bronx.

"B-but—" stammered Tiriddu.

The gangster jerked a hundred-lire note from his pocket and threw it to Tiriddu.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,367.

"Cinch that! Now hop into the auto."

Tiriddu's black eyes flashed, and he allowed the banknote to fall to the ground.

"Signore, I do not wish!" he snapped. "To-day I have other duty! You drive to Perni and you find many guides."

"I guess you're the guide I want, and no other will do," said Bronx grimly.

"You getting into that auto, you dog-goned dago? I'll say I'm ready to lend you a hand."

And without more ado, Tiger Bronx grasped the arm of the Italian, and jerked him out of the doorway.

With a blaze in his black eyes, Tiriddu groped in his pocket where his sheath-knife was kept.

But that weapon, which had so many terrors for Billy Bunter, had none at all for the Chicago gangster.

He twisted Tiriddu's arm till he dropped the knife with a yell of agony; and then jerked him bodily towards the car.

Five or six startled dusky faces looked from the other cottages in surprise at the scene. There was a babel of voices in Italian.

Bronx paid them no heed.

As Tiriddu was resisting and refused to get into the auto, the muscular gangster flung him into it headlong.

Tiriddu sprawled on the floor, yelling. He sat up and glared at Bronx, who stared in at him menacingly. The gangster's hand slid into the pocket of his loose jacket and the shape of a revolver showed through the cloth.

"You asking for it?" snarled Bronx.

"Iddio mio!" gasped Tiriddu, shrinking back into the farthest corner of the car, his swarthy face white with terror. He supposed that he had to do with a mad foreigner who was even madder than other foreigners!

"Stick there, you dog-goned dago!" snapped Bronx, and he sat at the wheel and stepped on the gas.

The car shot away from the little village, Bronx driving fast, the amateur bandit crouching on the floor, and all the other inhabitants staring after the flying wheels and cackling with excitement. It was in that state of uproar that Harry Wharton & Co. found the place when they arrived.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Heavy Hand!

"SANTISSIMA Maria!" groaned Tiriddu.

The car was whizzing.

Tiriddu crawled up from the floor and sat on the seat, his brain whirling.

At such a speed he dared not attempt to jump from the car. Neither did he dare think of touching the long lean man at the wheel.

He could only gasp with terror and amazement.

What this mad foreigner could want with him was a deep mystery to Tiriddu. Mad as foreigners were, it was unheard-of for the maddest of them to bag a guide in this extraordinary manner.

As the son of a bandit, ambitious to follow in his father's footsteps, Tiriddu ought to have been equal to the occasion. But he was very far from equal to it. He was scared almost out of his wits. Even had he still possessed his knife, he would not have dared to attempt to handle it. The lean, hard-faced American had put the terror of death into him. The theatrical Italian had come up against the hard, firm Anglo-Saxon, and it

was like the collision between an earthen pot and an iron pot. The hapless bandit was knocked into a cocked hat.

He sprawled on the seat, gasping for breath, quaking with apprehension. For the first time in his dishonest life, Tiriddu would have been glad of the sight of a carabinieri's uniform on the road. He realised that there was, after all, something to be said for law and order.

He wondered dismally where the mad Americano was taking him. If he kept on to Perni, Tiriddu would be able to yell for help, and the car would be stopped.

But Bronx had no intention of keeping on to a town.

He shot away from the little roadside village at a terrific speed; but at a distance of under half a mile he braked.

The car shuddered to a halt.

Here the road ran between woods, and it was solitary, with neither a vehicle nor a pedestrian in sight.

Bronx backed the car off the road, under the nearest trees. Farther back the trees were thicker, and he was only able to back it just off the road, out of the way of traffic.

He jumped down.

"Get out!" he snapped.

Tiriddu almost crawled out.

He made no resistance as Bronx grasped him by the arm and led him deeper into the wood. There was no resistance left in Tiriddu.

It was not necessary for Bronx to display the revolver that sagged in his pocket. His hard, lean face was enough, and the muscular grip of his steely fingers.

A dozen yards from the road they were out of sight of anyone passing. Then the gangster stopped and slammed Tiriddu against a tree.

Only the trunk prevented the wretched bandit from falling to the ground. His knees were knocking together.

"Now," said the gangster, facing him with grim brow and jutting jaw, "I guess we're going to talk turkey, Mr. Tiriddu!"

"Mercy, signore!" groaned Tiriddu. "I will guide you—I will serve you—ma, signore, di che cosa tratta—what mean?"

"I guess I'll put you wise, you dog-goned dago! Turn out your pockets!"

Tiriddu's black eyes opened wide in greater amazement than ever. He had a taste for brigandage himself; but he had never heard of such a taste on the part of foreign tourists!

"Signore! You rob me!" he gasped.

Tiriddu was utterly dismayed. He had most of his plunder from Bunter in his pockets, and this was an utterly unexpected outcome to his dabbling in brigandage.

"Forget it!" snarled Bronx. "I guess I want to see what you've got in your rags! Pronto!"

With trembling hands, Tiriddu turned out his pockets. But there were three things he did not turn out—two bundles of English and Italian banknotes, and a diamond-studded wrist-watch. He hoped that the mad foreigner would not suspect him of having such things in his possession. He was unaware, so far, that it was this evidence of which Bronx was in search.

"Is that the lot?" snarled the gangster, staring at the various articles Tiriddu had turned out.

"Tutto, tutto, signore!" gasped Tiriddu.

Bronx's hand dropped on the revolver in his pocket.

"Get on with it!" he snarled.

"Si, si, si, signore!" groaned Tiriddu; and the other articles came into view.

Tiger Bronx grinned at the sight of them.

To Tiriddu's astonishment, he did not touch either the money or the watch! A look at them, apparently, was all he wanted.

"I'll say that nigger's no slouch!" grinned Tiger Bronx. "He sure did ring the bell! You're the hombre I want! Stick your thievery back in your rags, you poor fish! I ain't cinching it!"

In blank amazement, Tiriddu replaced the plunder in his pockets. He felt as if his head were turning round with wonder.

"I guess there ain't nary a doubt now!" said Bronx. "I reckoned the nigger had got it right; but I wanted to make sure! You're the hobo that cinched that fat gink Bunter."

"Bunter!" repeated Tiriddu.

"You get me?" barked the gangster. "That fat guy Bunter! You've got his loot in your rags! I guess I saw that very watch on him, way back in Venice! You've got Bunter parked somewhere."

Tiriddu stared at him, his black eyes almost starting from his head. He was beginning to comprehend now.

This terrible American knew, or guessed, somehow, that he was the man who had seized the fat billionaire, and it was Tiriddu's hidden prisoner that he was after.

Why, knowing so much, he did not call in the police, was a mystery to Tiriddu. It would have been easy enough for him to pitch Tiriddu back into the car and drive him to Perni, and hand him over to the carabinieri.

That, however, was evidently not the lean American's intention. He did not even seem to want to touch the plunder taken from Bunter. All he wanted was the fat one himself!

That, so far as it went, was a relief to Tiriddu. But he was extremely unwilling to think of parting with his prisoner, hidden in the charcoal-burner's hut, and the prospect of boundless wealth to be derived from him in the shape of one ransom after another!

"You get me?" snapped Bronx.

"No, signore!" gasped Tiriddu.

"Nonso niente—I know nothing! The name you speak, I know it not!"

Bronx gave a savage grin.

"Never heard of Bunter?" he jeered.

"No, signore—mai, mai!"

"You didn't cinch him the day he hit the horizon from the plane, what?"

"No, signore."

"You ain't got him parked somewhere in the woods, and you ain't made him write this here billy-doo?"

Bronx jerked Bunter's letter from his pocket, and held it up before Tiriddu's startled eyes.

"Santissima Maria!" gasped Tiriddu.

"You don't know a thing about that gink, what?" said Tiger Bronx derisively. "Not a thing!"

"No, signore! Niente!"

"I'll say you ain't no George Washington, Mr. Tiriddu!" grinned Bronx. "And I'll mention that if you don't walk your chinks to the hide-out

where you've got Bunter, with me walking along with you, there'll be a dirty dago missing around these parts!"

"Signore, I swear—" groaned Tiriddu.

"You want me to begin by knocking your front teeth through the back of your cabeza?" asked Bronx. "You've only got to keep on telling lies!"

"Signore, I know nothing—"

"Not with his money and his watch in your pockets? You've sure lost your memory, Mr. Tiriddu! I guess I'll freshen it up some."

Tiriddu gave a yell, and made a desperate bound to escape, as the lean American grasped at him.

But there was no escape for the hapless bandit.

He crumpled up in Tiger Bronx's muscular grip. Swinging him almost off his feet, Bronx brought his head against the tree with a terrific bang.

Tiriddu's yell rang far through the wood.

"That enough to go on with?" demanded Bronx savagely. "The next'll crack your cabeza, and you'll sure want a noo head to match your noo hat!"

"Oh, signore, mercy!" howled Tiriddu. "I go—I take—I guide—I guide you very quickly—I desire very much to guide you, signore!"

"I guessed that one!" said Bronx. "Get down to it, you unwashed thief! And I guess I'll keep hold of your arm while we take a leetle paseo together. And if you don't want that nut of yours cracked into as many places as you could count in a month of Sundays, you'll mosey along straight to the spot—and do it in quick time! You get me?"

Tiriddu "got" him! With a dizzy, aching head, and a swarthy face sickly with terror, he led the way, winding by paths through the woods, the gangster's grip like a steel vice on his arm as he went.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Out of the Frying-pan!

"Oh lor'!" groaned Billy Bunter. Never had the Greyfriars billionaire been in lower spirits.

He sat on the bench in the hut of Giacomo, the charcoal-burner, and groaned—and groaned again, and yet again.

He was alone in the hut.

For the first day of his imprisonment Giacomo had remained within doors to guard him, and for most of the second day. After that, however, the old charcoal-burner had become fed-up with a life that was as much imprisonment for him as for the prisoner. He left Bunter alone now.

But that was no benefit to Bunter. He had no chance of getting away; for before leaving him alone in the hut, Giacomo made sure of him.

Sitting on the bench, Bunter was unable to move, his fat wrists being tied to the bench with strong cord.

The fat billionaire had to remain like that till Giacomo came back. Little as he liked the looks, or the company, of the shaggy, unwashed old charcoal-burner, Bunter would have been glad to see him return.

But he had been gone for hours now, and was apparently making a day of it.

It was getting towards noon, and Bunter was getting hungry.

The first day there had been nothing to eat but macaroni, which seemed to be Giacomo's chief article of diet. Since then, however, other things had been provided. Certainly Bunter was not getting either the quality or the quantity to which he had been accustomed at Grand Hotels. Still, the fare, though plain, was wholesome; and he was getting enough, though he did not feel as if he was getting half enough.

It seemed to Bunter that he had been weeks and months, if not years, in that dismal den in the dark, shadowy wood.

A hundred times he told himself he would sack Jarvis as soon as he saw him again for not having paid his ransom on the spot.

Yet even in Bunter's obtuse mind there was a suspicion that his captors would not be likely to let him go if they succeeded in obtaining such an enormous sum as ten thousand pounds.

It was only too probable that such a sum would whet their already greedy appetites, and that they would keep Bunter and demand more.

The prospect was really appalling. Jarvis must have called in the police. Even those beasts, Harry Wharton & Co., would be searching for him. But what chance had anybody of finding him in this desolate spot? Nobody would even guess what had happened to him, let alone where he was.

No wonder Bunter groaned dismally.

Worst of all, it began to look as if he would miss his midday meal. There was food on the table, but he could not eat with his hands tied. And Giacomo had made him quite safe before leaving him. He had wriggled for hours, without the slightest chance of getting his hands free.

"Oh lor'! Oh dear! Oh crikey!" groaned the hapless billionaire. "Oh jiminy! Oh crumbs!"

It was past noon. Even in the heart of the shady wood the heat was great. The dingy hut was rather like an oven.

There was a sound of footsteps at last. Billy Bunter pricked up his fat ears. Somebody was coming. Whether it was Giacomo or Tiriddu it meant a meal for Bunter, which was a consolation to the billionaire.

"E qui, signore! It is here!"

Bunter heard Tiriddu's voice outside the hut. He realised that there were

(Continued on next page.)

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two of them, and supposed for the moment that the other was Giacomo.

The next, however, he heard a voice that made him jump. It was a nasal voice with a strong American accent.

"That's the shebang, is it, big boy?"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"Si, signore! E fermato!" went on Tiriddu's voice. "Giacomo non e qui!"

"I guess you want to get that door open in short time."

"Ecco la chiave."

Evidently Tiriddu had a key to the rusty old lock on the door of the hut.

"Pronto!" snapped the nasal voice.

Bunter heard the key grate in the lock. The door was thrown open. The fat junior sat with his eyes and his spectacles fixed on it. His eyes almost bulged through his spectacles at the sight of a tall, lean figure that had to bow its head to step in at the doorway.

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter.

Giacomo and Tiriddu were bad enough. But Tiger Bronx was worse. The fat billionaire was about to fall out of the frying-pan into the fire.

Tiriddu entered first; the steely grip of the lean American on his shoulder forcing him in.

Bronx followed him in, still holding him.

His sharp eyes glittered round in the dim light of the hut. He grinned at the sight of Bunter on the bench.

"Say, bo! I guess I've found you at home!" chuckled Bronx. "You glad to see me—what?"

"Oh lor'!"

"Where's the other guy?" demanded Bronx. "Ain't there a guy here keeping tabs on you?"

"He's gone," groaned Bunter. "Been away for hours."

"I guess he's saving himself trouble, then. I might have had to drill a hole in him," grinned Bronx. "I reckon he left you safe, from the look of you. Here, you let that guy loose!"

Tiriddu gave him a look of hate, and obeyed. His dusky fingers untied the rope that fastened Bunter to the bench.

The Greyfriars billionaire rose to his feet.

He cast a longing blink towards the doorway. But Bronx was standing between him and the only exit from the hut.

The gangster grinned.

"I guess you're taking a leetle paseo with me, fat boy," he remarked. "You, Tiriddu, hand over to that fat gink what you cinched from him!"

Tiriddu breathed hard. But he dared not disobey. The banknotes and the wrist-watch were taken out of his pockets again, and handed over to their owner.

"Now, you fat gink, you take a turn of that rope round that jay!" directed the gangster. "I guess he can sit there, same as you was, and wait for his pardner to come back and let him loose."

"Signore—"

"Can it! You're sitting out this one!" growled Tiger Bronx. "You sitting down on that bench, or you want me to help you?"

Tiriddu sat down on the bench. He had had enough of the gangster's grip. Billy Bunter willingly took the rope and tied him there. Deeply alarmed as he was by the sight of the gangster, it was a consolation to get a little of his own back on Tiriddu.

He knotted the rope very securely round Tiriddu's arms and legs, Bronx watching with a grinning face. Tiriddu sat, his swarthy face a picture of rage and hate and fear. It was

dawning on Tiriddu's mind that brigandage was not wholly a paying game.

"I guess you're safe there—a picce," remarked Bronx. "Now, you Bunter, you're walking a picce with me. You—"

"I—I say—" stammered Bunter.

"You ain't got a speaking part in this! You jest get a move on!" said Bronx. "This way!"

"I—I'm hungry—"

"I guess that cuts no ice. You getting a move on, or you want me to soak you a few?" inquired Mr. Bronx.

"Oh dear!"

Bunter got a move on. He did not want Mr. Bronx to soak him a few. The gangster led him out of the charcoal-burner's hut, closed the door, locked it with Tiriddu's key, and threw the key away among the trees.

"Now you, Bunter!" He bent a grim look on the fat junior. "You got to walk some miles through this here wood; and then I got a car all ready for you—you get me?"

"Oh dear!"

"We ain't likely to run into anybody," went on Bronx. "But if we do, you want to keep your mouth shut. You give me any trouble—and you get yours so sudden—you won't know what happened."

"Oh crikey!"

"I guess it would suit me fine to wash you right out—here and now! And I'll say that that's what that double-crossing guy, Jarvis, would like. I guess that was his game from the start. But I guess I couldn't stand for it—I got a conscience!" said Mr. Bronx.

"Oh crumbs!" groaned Bunter. He was glad, at least, that Mr. Bronx had a conscience. He would never have guessed it, had not the gangster told him so.

"I got a leetle barker in this pocket," went on Bronx. "You try to get away, or you give a single yaup if we see anybody, and you get yours! You got that clear, fat boy?"

"Yes," groaned Bunter.

"Then come on!"

And Mr. Bronx walked away from the charcoal-burner's hut, the fat billionaire rolling dismally by his side. There was a very cheery expression on the gangster's lean face, a gleam of satisfaction in his slits of eyes as he tramped away through the wood by the way he had come with Tiriddu.

Billy Bunter's dismal fat countenance was quite a contrast. And more dismal than even Bunter's was the swarthy face of Tiriddu, left tied up in the charcoal-burner's hut to wait for the uncertain return of Giacomo. From the bottom of his heart, Tiriddu wished that he had kept to honest work with a horse and cart, and left brigandage alone.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

In Ambush!

"SOMETHING'S up!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"Looks like it!" The Greyfriars fellows seemed to have dropped into a hive of bees.

The little village on the Perni road consisted of about nine or ten scattered cottages and hovels. The whole population was in the road, buzzing with some inexplicable excitement.

Men, women, and children, with excited dark faces and rolling eyes, talked and gesticulated in a ceaseless buzz as the schoolboys came up.

The name of Tiriddu was on every tongue. The juniors exchanged glances as they listened to the excited babble. Evidently the man of whom they had come in search was in some way connected with this extraordinary uproar.

Something, it appeared, had happened to Tiriddu, and the word "Americano," constantly repeated, was easy to understand. The juniors caught also the word "automobile," though as it was pronounced in the Italian way with six syllables, it was not so easy to recognise.

An American in a motor-car! It brought Bronx to the juniors' minds at once. He had passed them on the road in his car.

"I suppose nobody here speaks English," said Nugent. "Cough up all the Italian you know."

Harry Wharton tapped one of the peasants on the arm to draw his attention.

"Tiriddu—una guida!" he said, coughing up all the Italian he knew, as Nugent put it. "Dov' e?"

The contadino rolled excited eyes.

"Non so—io non so, signore!" he answered. He pointed up the dusty road in the direction of the distant Perni.

Immediately a crowd gathered round the juniors, all explaining at once. As they all spoke Italian, it was rather difficult to disentangle the information they were quite willing to give.

"UnAmericano—un uomo fortissimo—"

"Un automobile grigio—"

"Il povero Tiriddu—"

"Partito—"

"Per forza—"

"Forse ammazzato—"

"Il poverino Tiriddu—"

The juniors made it out at last. An American—a big strong man—in a grey automobile, had forced Tiriddu to go with him. He had taken away the povero Tiriddu in the grey car, up the road towards Perni, and disappeared with him.

"Well, my only hat!" said Bob Cherry at last. "It's Bronx, of course! He wasn't going on to Perni when he passed us on the road—he was coming here—"

"After Tiriddu!" said Nugent.

"And he's got him!" said Johnny Bull.

"And we're too jolly late!" said Harry Wharton. "There's only one thing it can mean—that Bronx has somehow found out what Inky spotted—that that man Tiriddu knows where Bunter is."

"It can't mean anything else!" agreed Bob. "He hasn't collared Tiriddu just for the pleasure of his company."

"But how the dickens—"

"That doesn't matter much! He's done it!" said the captain of the Remove. "He's got the rascal; and it's pretty certain that he wants him for the same reason that we do. He can't want him for anything else."

"My esteemed chums—"

"Go it, Inky!" grinned Bob. "You spotted the clue all right, old man, but Bronx seems to have spotted it, too, and he got in early and avoided the crush! We're a day behind the jolly old fair."

"None of these esteemed dusky persons seems to have thought of following the car—"

"Not much good following a motor-car on foot, Inky!"

"Quitefully so, if the esteemed and rascally Bronx has driven a terrific distance," agreed the Nabob of Bhanipur. "But if he is in search of the absurd Bunter, with the ridiculous



"Hop in!" said Bronx, briefly, as he threw open the door of the car. Billy Bunter staggered into the car, and collapsed on the seat. Then, with startling suddenness, the unexpected happened! Three figures dropped from the branches above and landed on the gangster's head! "I say, you fellows——" gasped Bunter, from the car.

Tiriddu to guide him, the probability is preposterous that he has not gone far."

"Something in that!" agreed Harry thoughtfully. "Bunter's parked somewhere in this locality, of course."

"Let us walk on fully," suggested the nabob, "and we may catch sight of the absurd car and the ridiculous Bronx, if he has stopfully halted."

"By gum, perhaps Inky's put his finger on it again!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Wherever Bunter is, it's not likely to be a place where a car could go. It's a chance, anyhow."

Leaving the little village still in a buzz behind them, the Famous Five walked on up the road towards the distant town.

In a few minutes the winding of the road hid the village from view behind.

They walked on slowly, their eyes well about them.

If Bronx had driven to a distance, the thing was hopeless, and all that remained was to get in touch with the carabinieri and leave it to them.

On the other hand, if Bronx had seized Tiriddu as a forced guide to the hide-out of the missing billionaire, it was more probable that he had not gone far—very likely only out of sight and sound of the villagers.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" yelled Bob suddenly, when they had covered about half a mile.

He pointed to a grey car backed under the trees by the roadside.

The juniors knew it again at once. It was the car that had passed them on the road, with Bronx driving.

"That's his car!" said Harry.

The Famous Five turned off the road into the trees. It was Tiger Bronx's car that was standing there, there was no doubt about that. But there was no sign of the gangster, or of the Italian he had forced to go with him in the

automobile. The car was there, but Tiger Bronx and Tiriddu had vanished.

As a matter of fact, they had been gone a considerable time before the Greyfriars fellows arrived on the scene.

Hurree Janset Ram Singh smiled a dusky smile.

"My esteemed chums, it is terrifically clear what has happened," he said.

"The excellent and execrable gangster has gone with Tiriddu——"

"To look for Bunter?" said Bob.

"That is it, my absurd Bob! He has persuaded the ridiculous Tiriddu to guide him to the ludicrous Bunter."

"As we were going to do!" grinned Bob.

"Exactfully!"

"It jolly well looks like it!" said Harry Wharton. "I can't imagine how the man got on to it—but it looks like it! He's not just walking round the woods to see the scenery with Tiriddu as a guide."

"Hardly!" chuckled Bob.

"But getting after him——" said Nugent, with a doubtful glance at the thick wood back from the road. "Not much chance of picking up a trail in a forest like this."

"No need, my absurd Franky," said the Nabob of Bhanipur. "Let us waitfully linger on this delectable spot! If the execrable Bronx gets hold of Bunter he will bring him to the car to take him away. He will not want to walk him about on his idiotic legs, when he has a car handy."

"Inky, old man, you're a jolly old prize-packet," said Bob. "That's the idea, of course! All we've got to do is to wait for Bronx to come back to his car. If he comes alone we can let him rip—but if he's got Bunter with him, we jump on him."

"And the jumpfulness will be terrific!"

Harry Wharton nodded.

"That's the game!" he said. "We've got to get into cover and wait for the scoundrel to turn up. And if he's got Bunter, we've got to get him quick! Don't forget that the brute carries a revolver."

Hurree Janset Ram Singh pointed to the thick foliage overhead.

"Good egg!" said Bob.

In a few minutes the Famous Five had clambered into a tall, thick tree, close by the halted car. They made themselves as comfortable as possible in the thick branches, and hidden from sight by the foliage, waited. It was rather a tiresome vigil in the heat of the Italian day, with insects innumerable buzzing round them. But they waited and watched patiently, with eyes and ears alert for the gangster when he came back to his car.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Sudden Surprise!

"I SAY——" groaned Billy Bunter, "Can it!" "It's hot!" "Get on!"

"I'm tired!" "Hump it, you fat gink!" "And hungry——"

Tiger Bronx reached out at Billy Bunter, took him by the back of his collar, and shook him. He shook him till he wobbled like a fat jelly in the gangster's grip, gurgling for breath.

"Oooooogh!" "Now," said Mr. Bronx, setting the fat billionaire on his feet again. "Now, you hiking with me, or you going on chewing the rag?"

"Urrrggh!" gurgled the hapless billionaire.

"Quit it!" said Mr. Bronx. "Forget it, fat boy! And hit the trail, pronto!"

Bunter plugged on gurgling. He was, as he had stated, hot and tired and hungry. But these circumstances cut no ice, as he would have expressed it, with the man from Chicago.

Bronx was in a hurry. Bunter was not! But it was Bronx who was giving orders, and his method of enforcing them was distinctly unpleasant.

The thick wood swam with heat. Flies innumerable buzzed and stung. Bunter plugged wearily on. The gangster's long legs seemed tireless. That was far from being the case with Bunter's short fat ones.

How the gangster found his way through the bewildering trees was a mystery to Bunter. But Bronx never seemed at a loss. He had covered the ground once, guided by Tiriddu, and that seemed enough for him.

There were few paths, but, few as they were, Bronx did not keep to them. For the most part, they tramped through trees and bushes and brambles, the gangster making almost a direct line for the spot where he had parked his car on the Perni road.

He was anxious to get to that car and get away. His long legs never slackened in their stride, and Bunter had to hop and skip and jump to keep up with him.

As for bolting, that idea hardly occurred to the fat junior. If he had tried to cut and run, the long-limbed gangster would have overtaken him in two strides. And he was in deep terror of the revolver in Bronx's pocket.

In a clearing of the wood, they came suddenly on a group of Italian woodcutters, picturesque-looking peasants, with red handkerchiefs tied round their dusky heads.

Bunter gave them a longing blink. They looked like a lot of banditti to Bunter's eyes—but he would have been glad to yell to them for help, all the same.

Bronx hurried him on, and the woodcutters disappeared from sight in a few minutes.

A little later, as they tramped up a narrow path, a squat bearded figure appeared suddenly ahead of them.

Bunter gave a startled squeak. "Oh crikey! It's him!"

It was Giacomo, evidently on his way back to the hut in the wood. The old charcoal-burner jumped almost clear of the ground at the sight of Billy Bunter, whom he had left tied up in his hut. His black eyes gleamed at Bronx.

"You savvy that guy?" snapped Bronx.

"Oh lor'! It's Jackeymo!" gasped Bunter. "The beast who tied me up—"

"I'll tell a man!"

Giacomo stopped in the narrow path, blocking the way. His black eyes were glittering. He had a large bundle in one hand, which he dropped to the ground.

Bronx's sharp jaw jutted. "If that monkey off'n an organ guesses he's going to stop me, I'll say he's got another guess coming!" he remarked.

Giacomo evidently intended to make an attempt to recapture the valuable prisoner. His dusky hand went under his jacket and reappeared with a knife in it. He came on, sputtering Italian.

Bunter, in terror, staggered against a tree. He hardly knew whether he would have preferred recapture by Giacomo, or remaining in the hands of the gangster. He expected to see

Bronx draw his revolver and to witness a desperate affray.

But the gangster, though he whipped the revolver from his pocket, did not touch the trigger. He grasped the weapon by the barrel. Whether Giacomo really intended to use the knife, or was only flourishing it by way of threat, was never clear. Bronx, at all events, was taking no chance. He made a spring to meet the Italian as he came, and there was a crash as the pistol-butt met the knife, and knocked it out of the charcoal-burner's hand. The next moment it crashed on Giacomo's shaggy head.

Giacomo gave one gasping howl, and fell.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. Bronx grinned.

"I'll say he's got his!" he remarked.

The charcoal-burner gave one wriggle, and lay still. Bronx bent over him, and gave him a suspicious searching look. But he did not move; that crash on the head had stunned him.

"I guess," drawled Bronx, "that this bird won't get home to the nest in a hurry, and he'll sure have a head on him when he does! I should smile!"

"Oh lor'!"

"This here guy is Tiriddu's side-pardner, what?"

"Yes!" gasped Bunter. "He kept me in the hut—"

"And I guess he got his bibful in the divvy?"

"Eh! What! Oh, yes, he robbed me as well as the other beast—"

"I'll sure give him the once-over, then."

A bundle of banknotes and a diamond pin were turned out of Giacomo's pockets.

Bronx held them up. "Yourn?" he asked.

"Oh! Yes!"

"You sure was a prize-packet for these hoodlums!" grinned Bronx. "But I guess they've come out at the little end of the horn. Here you are, you fat guy—pack 'em away."

"I—I say," stammered Bunter, as he took the banknotes and the pin. "I—I say, I'll give you these, if you'll let me go."

Bronx chuckled.

"I guess I ain't no sneak-thief," he remarked. "I ain't picking your dog-goned pockets like them all-fired dagos! Put it away! You're going to cough up the Shook billions afore you say good-bye to this baby! I'll tell a man I'm after the big goods! Yep!"

"But I—I say—"

"That'll do from you."

Leaving Giacomo lying senseless in the path, the gangster tramped on with Bunter.

The fat billionaire groaned as he went.

On the whole, he would have preferred to remain in the hands of Tiriddu and Giacomo rather than to fall into the hands of the gangster. Unfortunately he had no choice in the matter.

He had recovered most of the loot that the two Italians had taken from him, but that was little comfort. It was evident that Bronx had some mysterious scheme for getting hold of the boundless wealth that the Fat Owl of the Remove had so mysteriously received from James Jarvish. The Greyfriars billionaire's last state seemed likely to be worse than his first.

Weary and perspiring, Bunter tramped dimly on. Glimmering sunshine through the trees announced at last that open space was ahead. They were getting near the Perni road.

Bronx glanced about him sharply, picking his way, winding among the

trees, till he sighted the spot where the grey car had been left.

"Say, fat boy, you tired?" he grinned.

"Ow! Fearfully! Wow!" groaned Bunter.

"I guess you'll be sitting down soon. There's the car!" said the gangster, jerking a thumb towards it. "Hop on, bo!"

Getting into the car meant being spirited away to parts unknown. But the fat billionaire was so aching with fatigue, that he hardly gave that a thought. He was more anxious to sit down than even to eat.

Bronx reached the car and threw open the door.

"Hop in!" he said briefly.

Billy Bunter staggered into the car and collapsed on the seat. And then, with startling and dramatic suddenness, the unexpected happened.

Something shot down from the branches over Bronx's head, landed on that head, and crumpled him up on the ground. He sprawled and yelled wildly, taken utterly by surprise. Before he even knew what was happening, four other figures dropped from the tree, all landing on Bronx. Billy Bunter, blinking from the car, wondered whether he was dreaming, as he saw the sprawling gangster struggling frantically in the grasp of the Famous Five of Greyfriars.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Rescue!

"I SAY, you fellows!" gasped Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. did not heed.

They had their hands full with the gangster for the moment.

Tiger Bronx was struggling fiercely.

He had no chance—not the ghost of a chance! The wind had been knocked out of him by the crash on the ground when Bob Cherry dropped on his head and bowled him over. He had more aches and pains than he could have counted. And in any case, he would hardly have been a match for five sturdy fellows.

But he put up a desperate struggle.

Again and again he strove to get at the revolver in his hip pocket. But the juniors were taking care of that; and he had no chance.

On the European side of the Atlantic, Bronx was not keen on using the "gun" that came so readily to his hand in his own happy city of Chicago. But at this desperate moment there was no doubt that he would have handled it could he only have got hold of it.

But he couldn't! Fiercely and savagely as he resisted, the chums of the Remove had him down, and they kept him down.

Both his arms were grasped and safely held, a knee was planted in his ribs, and his thrashing legs were grasped.

For a long two or three minutes the struggle went on, till the gangster, muscular as he was, was utterly exhausted, and lay gasping for breath in the grasp of the Famous Five. There was hardly a kick left in him at the finish, and the juniors were breathless, too.

But they had him! There was no doubt that they had him! He gasped and panted, and glared at them like a captured tiger.

"Our game!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Urrrgh! I guess—"

"Sit on him! Better tie his fins," said Harry Wharton. "That will make the brute a bit safer. He's got a pistol somewhere."

"I guess I'll soak you some! I guess— Urrrggh!"

Bob Cherry produced a whipcord from his pocket, and the gangster's hands were dragged together, and knotted securely at the wrists.

The juniors released him, and stood pumping in breath. That fierce struggle had rather winded them.

Bronx lay gurgling.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Bunter.

Even yet the fat billionaire could hardly believe the evidence of his eyes or his spectacles.

That sudden appearance of the Famous Five, in the nick of time, seemed rather like a miracle to Bunter.

The juniors turned towards him, grinning. Perhaps for the first time on record they were glad to see William George Bunter.

"Jolly old Bunter, at last!" said Bob.

"Glad to see you, old fat bean!" said Wharton.

"The gladfulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The sight of your ludicrous countenance is a boonful blessing, my esteemed idiotic Bunter."

"Here we are again, Fatty!" said Johnny Bull.

"Fat as ever!" said Frank Nugent. "They haven't starved you, Bunter."

"I say, you fellows, I'm hungry!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" howled Bunter. "I haven't had anything since brekker."

"Awful!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"I'm simply famished! I say, you fellows, I've had a fearful time! I've been a prisoner with a gang of bandits!" groaned Bunter. "They—they seized me, you know, when I got away from the plane before it caught fire—"

"It never caught fire, you funky ass! There wasn't any danger!" hooted Johnny Bull.

"Beast! I say, you fellows, have you got anything to eat about you? A bar of chocolate, or anything? I'm perishing of hunger!"

Bob Cherry chuckled, and produced a packet of chocolate. Bunter grabbed it, and proceeded to deal with it promptly.

Tiger Bronx sat up. With his hands securely tied he had no chance of renewing the struggle. He leaned back against the car and gasped for breath. His slits of eyes gleamed at the cheery Co. In the very moment of success sudden defeat had fallen on the Tiger, and all his schemes were knocked once more into a cocked hat. Not only had he lost his prisoner, but he was now a prisoner himself! It was an overwhelming blow for Tiger Bronx.

"I say, you fellows." Bunter's mouth was full, but that did not check the flow of his chin-wag. "I say, I've been through it. They were holding me to ransom, you know. Did Jarvis get that letter?"

"Yes."

"There won't be any ransom now!" said Bunter. "That beast Bronx got me away from the hut. He was going to kidnap me in this car. Not that I should have gone with him, you know. I was going to knock the brute down when—when I got a chance, you know!"

"You pie-faced piecan!" growled Bronx.

Bunter blinked at him.

"You shut up!" he said. "I don't want any cheek from you, you lanky American! Hold your tongue!"

"By the great horned toad—"

"I've told you to shut up, Bronx!" said Bunter darkly.

Now that the gangster was a tied prisoner, even Billy Bunter had lost his terrors of him.

"I guess—"

"Kick him, Bob!" said Bunter. "Kick the beast hard! I'd show the rotter whether I'm afraid of him or not!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle!" snapped Bunter. "I've been through fearful dangers, and all you fellows can do is to cackle now you see me safe again. Captured by desperate bandits, and—"

"What did you let them capture you for?" inquired Johnny Bull.

"Well, look at the odds!" said Bunter. "A swarm of them—two or three dozen fearful brigands, armed to the teeth."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I put up a fight, of course! I knocked them right and left! I fancy some of them were pretty badly

damaged! But they got me at last—the whole gang of them, you know, piling on a fellow!"

The Famous Five gazed at Bunter.

"The whole gang of them!" repeated Wharton.

"Yes, about twenty—"

"That afternoon you hooked it from the plane—"

"Yes! You see, I fell into an ambush," explained Bunter airily. "They rushed on me—thirty of them, at least—"

"You piffing prevaricator!" roared Bob Cherry. "There was only one of them, and he gave you a lift in a cart."

Billy Bunter jumped.

"How—how did you know?" he gasped.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, stop cackling!" hooted Bunter. "I think you fellows might have looked

(Continued on next page.)

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS.

Always glad to hear from you, chums, so drop me a line to the following address: The Editor, The "Magnet" Library, The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

WHO WAS THE TALLEST MAN WHO EVER LIVED?

That is what Jack Walters, of Govan, asks me. According to history, if we can believe the old legends, there were several men who attained the height of 30 feet. One legend goes so far as to say that a human skeleton was discovered in the fourteenth century in Sicily, and that the dead man must have been at least 300 feet in height!

But I am afraid that modern scientists rather query the truth about this particular gentleman! Giants of from 8 to 9 feet, however, have been frequent in our own country. John Middleton, who was born at Halo, in Lancashire, was 9 ft. 3 ins. in height. Irish giants have been numerous, and all of them were over 8 feet in height. At the College of Surgeons, in Cockspur Street, London, there is a skeleton of an Irish giant who was 8 ft. 4 ins. in height. Another skeleton of 8 ft. 6 ins. is preserved in Dublin.

Perhaps the most curious giant who ever lived, however, was Thomas Hall, of Willingham. He was 3 ft. 9 ins. tall at the age of three! Therefore, he certainly deserves the record of being "the smallest giant in the world."

Several of my readers have written to me asking if we can have

A PEN PALS' SECTION

in the MAGNET. Well, at the present moment, I am afraid there is not room to squeeze one in. But I will bear this request in mind, and see what I can do later. Still, most of my readers are also readers of our companion paper, "The Gem," which already has a pen pals' section, so I commend this to those of you who wish to get into touch with readers in other parts of the world.

NOW for a few RAPID FIRE REPLIES to briefer queries.

Is the Name "Milne" Italian? ("Val," No address given): No, this is a purely British name. You are probably mixing it up with Milan, the proper Italian name of which is Milano.

Why are Metal Funnels Fixed on Ships' Mooring Ropes? (John K., of Southampton): These peculiar-looking funnels are to prevent rats from climbing up the ropes on to the ship. Rats are great spreaders of disease; therefore, ship-masters do all they can to prevent them getting aboard.

How Far Can the Human Voice be Heard? ("Rex," of Islington): Not very far in London, I am afraid. But polar explorers have found that human voices will carry as far as a mile and a half.

How Can Soap Bubbles be Made to Last a Long Time? ("Curious," of Colchester): Glycerine added to the soap-and-water solution makes bubbles last much longer. The best solution for soap bubbles is ten parts of water to one part of a saturated solution of soap and water. Then add a half part of glycerine.

Now to answer a question you are all anxious to know: "What is in store for readers of the MAGNET next week?"

First of all there is:

"RUCTIONS IN ROME!"
By Frank Richards.

It is another of our extra-long yarns of the chums of Greyfriars, and I venture to predict that, long as it is, you will wish it was still longer. Our grand series of yarns featuring Bunter the Billionaire have proved immensely popular, and next week's story is going to be one of the most popular yet published. Tell all your chums about these extra-length yarns. They won't want to miss a good thing like this.

Then there will be another full-of-chuckles "Greyfriars Herald" supplement, while I am getting out some more interesting paragraphs to pass on to you in my little chat.

And now I'm going to let you into a secret! The MAGNET will VERY SHORTLY be giving away handsome FREE GIFTS TO EVERY READER! But more about this next week! Take a tip from me and get the MAGNET regularly. You'll miss something really good otherwise.

YOUR EDITOR.
THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,387.

for me and got me away from those beasts, after all I've done for you! I really think that!"

"Well, we've got you away from this beast, at any rate!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Now we'll get you along to the osteria. Jarvish has been very anxious about you."

"So he ought to be! I've a jolly good mind to sack him for not finding me before this!" growled Bunter. "I've had hardly anything to eat. I say, you fellows, have you got any more chocolate?"

"No!"

"Silly ass! Well, look here, I'm hungry! Let's get where there's something to eat, for goodness' sake!"

"What are we going to do with this beauty?" asked Johnny Bull, with a nod towards the scowling gangster.

"I guess you want to let a guy beat it!" snarled Bronx. "You ain't got nothing on me—not a thing!"

"You were kidnapping Bunter when we jumped on you!" said Harry.

"Aw, forget it! The pesky guy ain't kidnapped, anyhow!" jeered Bronx. "You going to charge me with getting him out of the claws of them dagos? That's agin the law? Forget it!"

The Greyfriars fellows looked a little perplexed. There was no doubt about what Bronx had been going to do. But so far as his proceedings had proceeded, so to speak, he was on the right side of the law. Certainly he could not be handed over to the carabinieri on the charge of having rescued Bunter from the lawless rascals who had been holding the fat billionaire to ransom!

"I say, you fellows, don't you let him go!" exclaimed Bunter, in great alarm.

"Aw, can it, you fat gink!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"He's got a gun!" said Harry Wharton, feeling the revolver in Bronx's pocket. "That's against the law in Italy. Nobody's allowed to carry firearms here. We can't charge him with what we can't prove; but a gun's a gun, and he can explain it to the police. We'll borrow his car and take him to the osteria, and hand him over to the carabinieri."

"Good egg!"

"You can drive, Bob! We can all pack in, somehow."

"Look here, you dog-goned gecks—"

"Rats to you!" said Bob. "Stick him in!"

The gangster was heaved into the car and left on the floor. The juniors packed in after him, and Bob sat at the wheel.

Bunter grunted.

"I say, you fellows, give a fellow room!" he said, peevishly. "I'm not accustomed to being squeezed like this!"

"Fathead!"

"Look here, a fellow wants room!" roared Bunter. "There's not room in this car for the lot of you. Can't some of you walk?"

"Walk!" repeated Johnny Bull.

"Yes, walk!" hooted Bunter. "Don't be so jolly lazy. Blessed if I ever came across such a lot of slackers!"

"Right-ho! We'll all walk," said Harry Wharton. "Get out, you men, and leave Bunter and Bronx—"

"Hold on!" yelled Bunter, in alarm.

"Don't you leave me with that beast! I—I say, you fellows, I—I was only j-j-joking. I say, don't get out! I say, I don't mind being crowded."

"Shut up, then, you fat image!"

Billy Bunter shut up, and the car, packed rather like a sardine-tin, rolled away for the Osteria Aquila Nera.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Jarvish is Not Pleased!

JAMES JARVISH stared blankly. He was standing outside the osteria, smoking a cigarette and talking with the inn-keeper.

Since his encounter with Bronx, the sleek valet of Bunter the Billionaire had taken no further steps in the search for his missing master.

For secret and mysterious reasons of his own he seemed to be willing to leave that matter to the gangster, now that he knew that Bronx was on the scene.

That the Famous Five had gone out to look for the fat junior he was aware, but the idea of the Remove fellows finding him made him smile.

And so he stared in blank astonishment as a packed car drove up to the osteria in a cloud of dust.

Packed in it were the Famous Five of Greyfriars—and another fellow, whom, certainly, Jarvish had never dreamed of seeing with them—William George Bunter, the billionaire!

There was another passenger in the car, whom he could not see, that passenger being on the floor. There was no room for Tiger Bronx on the seats. He lived, and moved, and had his being, so to speak, among boots and dust.

Bob Cherry sounded a terrific solo on the horn as he drove up and halted. It was a sort of pæan of triumph, allegro and fortissimo, though not grateful or comforting to the ear.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob. "Here we are again, Jarvish! We've got him!"

"Ecco!" ejaculated Signor Pirandelli. "Ecco!"

The juniors swarmed out of the car. Jarvish, recovering himself, ran forward. He helped Billy Bunter down.

"My dear, dear Master William!" he exclaimed. "I am delighted—"

He broke off at the sight of the sprawling, panting gangster in the car.

"Who—who—what—Bronx!" stammered the valet.

"Jolly old Bronx!" grinned Bob.

"The Bronxfulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"You dog-goned ginks!" roared Bronx. "I'm saying that I want to get out of this! I'll say I'm choked with dust! I say—"

"Roll him out!" said Johnny Bull.

"Make sure he's safe, you fellows," yapped Billy Bunter anxiously. "Mind his paws don't get loose!"

Bronx was rolled out of the car. Signor Pirandelli stared at him, the cameriere came out to stare at him, loungers from the wine-bar came out to stare. Bronx, wrenching at his hands, sat up and panted. Signora Pirandelli and the little Pirandellis came out to stare. Contadini from the fields came and stared. It was quite a staring match.

"But—but—how—" stammered Jarvish, quite thrown off his balance. "How—how—who—"

"Bronx got Bunter, and we got both of them, Jarvish!" explained Harry Wharton.

His eyes were keenly on the valet as he spoke, and he did not fail to note the savage gleam that came into his eyes.

"I'll say you gotter let me beat it!" roared Bronx, staggering to his feet. "You hear me whisper?"

"You'll beat it—with a policeman in charge of you, you rascal!" said the captain of the Remove. "Jarvish, is

that officer of the carabinieri here still?"

"No, he has gone. I—I think he has gone back to P'erni," stammered Jarvish. "What—what charge have you to make against this man?"

"Well, we can't charge him with kidnapping Bunter, because we stopped him before he did it," said Bob Cherry. "But he's armed, and that's against the law. He can be jugged on that."

"I fear, sir, that that does not concern us, and perhaps it would be better to release the man!"

"Do you?" said Harry grimly.

"Yes, sir, I think so. In the circumstances—"

"You can think exactly as you like, Jarvish," said Wharton. "But this matter isn't in your hands. The scoundrel is going to be handed over to the police. And that will keep him quiet till Bunter clears out of here, at any rate."

Jarvish set his lips.

"Really, sir—" he began.

"That's enough!" snapped Wharton, and he turned his back on the valet. "Keep an eye on that rascal, you men."

"You bet!" said Johnny Bull.

Billy Bunter had already rolled into the osteria. He was less concerned about Bronx than about a feed. Some fellows, after Bunter's experiences, would have wanted a wash before dinner, but with the fat billionaire dinner came first. Signor Pirandelli and the cameriere were both kept busy attending to his wants for quite a long time. Jarvish, however, did not follow his master in.

A man in uniform was coming up the road, doubtless attracted to the spot by the excitement going on outside the osteria. It was the officer of the carabinieri, who, according to Jarvish's statement of a few minutes ago, had gone back to P'erni. Evidently James Jarvish had departed from the straight and narrow path of veracity!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's the jolly old bobby!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "We don't want him to find Bunter now, but he can take Bronx off our hands."

Jarvish breathed hard.

"Very good, sir!" he said. "I will act as interpreter."

"You'll hold your tongue, Jarvish!" said Harry Wharton tersely. "Do you think we can't see that you want this scoundrel to go?"

"Really, Master Wharton—"

"I don't know what your game is," said the captain of the Remove, with a look of contempt. "You were keen enough to get Bunter back from the bandits, but you want Bronx to get hold of him, for some reason. You won't get away with it while we're on the spot."

"I assure you, sir—"

"Ring off!"

The officer came up. He stared at the scene and asked questions in Italian. As he did not speak English and the juniors understood very little Italian, it was rather a difficult conversation. An interpreter would have been useful; but the steward was not on the spot, and Jarvish was not to be trusted. So the juniors did their best. Bob Cherry tapped the pocket in which Bronx kept his six-shooter, and the Italian officer picked out the weapon.

That seemed to be enough for him. The law against carrying firearms is very strict in Italy. The policeman's brow grew very stern. He rained Italian at Bronx, who answered in the

same tongue, but he did not seem to be able to satisfy the officer. Indeed, the possession of a loaded firearm was enough to settle the matter, to the extent of the gangster being taken into custody.

The outcome of the matter was satisfactory to the juniors, if not to Bronx and Jarvis.

Bronx, with his hands still tied, was forced to get into his own car, which the carabinieri drove away to Perna.

The chums of the Remove smiled after it as it disappeared in a cloud of dust in the distance.

"That's that!" remarked Bob Cherry. "We're done with the brute for the present, at all events."

"It will only be a matter of a fine, sir," said Jarvis, in his smooth tones, with a faint sneer in his voice.

"They'll keep him long enough for Bunter to get away from here, anyhow," said Wharton. "What about a spot of lunch, you men?"

"The spotfulness is the proper caper!" agreed Huree Janset Ram Singh.

The Famous Five went to the sala di pranzo, where Bunter was already busy. He had already parked one "pranzo," and was busy on another. He gave the chums of the Remove a blink through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows, this duck is good!" he said. "I can tell you, the duck is jolly good! Prime!"

And Bunter proceeded to show his appreciation of the duck in the most unmistakable manner.

He was still going strong when the Famous Five finished. By that time he had arrived at sticky puddings, for which he seemed to have a practically unlimited cargo space.

"The plane's all right now, Bunter," said Harry. "And the weather's perfect. What about getting off?"

"I wonder where they get this jam?" said Bunter.

"Eh?"

"There's jam in this rice pudding. It's jolly good jam—absolutely ripping."

"We'd better get off this afternoon, Bunter."

"Oh, all right! A fellow must have something to eat first."

"You don't want to stick here till Bronx gets loose again, do you?"

"No! Oh, no! Still, a fellow must have something to eat. Have you chaps had some of this pudding? The jam in it is absolutely spiffing!"

"Br-r-r-r!"

Harry Wharton & Co. went out, and walked to the aeroplane field to warn the pilots that the Kingfisher was to take off that afternoon. They gave Bunter an hour to finish his gargantuan repast.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

OH!

S NORE!

That familiar sound greeted the ears of the Famous Five when they came back to the Osteria Aquila Nera.

Bunter had finished his feed. Now he was sleeping.

He was extended in a hammock, under a tree in the courtyard of the inn. Jarvis sat by the hammock, brushing away flies from his master's fat face. The valet's sly, shifty eyes glanced round at the juniors as they came.

"Please do not disturb my master, young gentlemen!" he said softly.

"Just what we're here for!" answered Bob.

"He desires to rest—"

"Bow-wow!"

"Neither does he desire to take the plane this afternoon," went on the valet calmly. "He has decided to remain here a few days for the rest he needs after his very disagreeable experiences."

"We're not staying!" said Harry curtly. "Bronx will be around again before long, and Bunter's not safe from him in a solitary quarter like this, as you know very well."

"If you desire to go, sir, I am sure there is nothing to prevent you," said Jarvis smoothly. "My master, however will remain. Kindly do not speak loudly and awaken him."

Wharton gave the sleek man a grim look.

"It would suit you for us to leave Bunter unprotected in your hands, Mr. Jarvis!" he said. "Well, we're doing nothing of the kind."

"My master has every faith in me, sir—"

"No fool like a born fool!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"I am afraid, sir, that I cannot listen to you speaking of my master in such very disrespectful terms," said Jarvis.

"Chuck it!" said Johnny Bull. "Look here, you men, we're ready to go. The bill's paid; the things taken on board the plane; everybody tipped, to the thirtieth and fortieth generation; and now—"

"Now we're going, and Bunter's going!" said Harry.

"I forbid you to disturb my master, sir! He has given me very definite instructions that he is not to be disturbed."

Heedless of the valet, the chums of the Remove grasped the hammock, and shook it. Jarvis set his lips, and his shifty eyes glittered. He laid a restraining hand on Harry Wharton's arm.

Wharton knocked it aside without ceremony, and the sleek man gave a yelp. Another heave to the hammock, and Bunter's eyes opened.

"Beasts!" he gasped.

"Turn out, old fat man!"

"Shan't!"

"We're going—"

"Go, and be blowed! I'm going to sleep!" roared Bunter angrily.

"Where's my specs?" He groped for his spectacles, and jammed them on his fat, little nose, and blinked ferociously at the Famous Five. "Lemme alone! I'm tired! Sleepy! I'll talk to you presently! Get out!"

"You fat idiot!" roared Bob Cherry. "They'll let that man Bronx go by tomorrow. Do you want to wait here for him?"

"Rubbish! Jarvis says he will be sent to prison for carrying firearms," answered Bunter. "That's all right! We shan't see him here in a hurry!"

Besides, I'm not so funky of him as you fellows are."

"So you've told Bunter that, have you, Jarvis?" said Harry quietly.

"Look here, Bunter—"

"Can't you let a fellow have his nap out?"

"Fathead! I tell you—"

"I'm not going to-day! I'm not going to-morrow, either! The grub here is good—quite good! The duck—"

"You shut up!" growled Johnny Bull. "Turn that fat dummy out, you men!"

Five pairs of hands grasped the hammock again. It swung, and a fat figure rolled out.

"Yarooooooooh!"

Billy Bunter was hooked to his feet. The Famous Five marched him off by the gateway out of the osteria, loudly protesting. Jarvis followed.

"Jarvis! Make 'em leggo!" roared Bunter.

"Release my master at once!" panted Jarvis. "You have no right—"

He made a grab at Bunter to pull him away. Bob Cherry took the valet by the collar, spun him round, and sat him down with a heavy bump in the dusty road.

Leaving the valet gasping, the Famous Five walked Bunter into the aeroplane field, and towards the waiting machine. The pilots were already in their places, and the steward stood at the cabin door.

"Roll in, Bunter!"

"Shan't!" roared Bunter. "I tell you I'm not going—"

"Bunk him up!"

"Yaroooh! Beasts!"

Bunter was bunched up the steps! The steward stared as the fat billionaire rolled into the cabin.

Bunter rolled and roared.

"All serene," said Bob. "Now we can get off!"

There was a patter of running feet in the field. Jarvis came up breathlessly and clambered in. Bunter evidently was going; and his faithful valet did not want to be left behind.

The steward closed the door. Bunter glared at the Famous Five.

"Look here, you beasts—" he gasped. "It's my plane, ain't it? We jolly well shan't go till I give the word, and I jolly well shan't give the word, so there! I jolly well won't—"

"Right as rain!" said Bob cheerfully. "I shall tap your head on the table till you do—like that—"

"Yaroooh!"

"And like that—"

"Whooop!"

Bunter gave the word.

That night, a lean, hard-faced man skulked in the shadows round the Osteria Aquila Nera. But he skulked in vain. The birds had flown.

Literally, they had flown! High in the clouds, the plane soared away for Rome; and Tiger Bronx was left once more the task of picking up the trail of the Greyfriars billionaire.

THE END.

(Next week's extra-long story of the chums of Greyfriars: "RUCTIONS IN ROME!" is better than ever. Make sure of reading it by ordering your MAGNET now!)

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3d FOR 2

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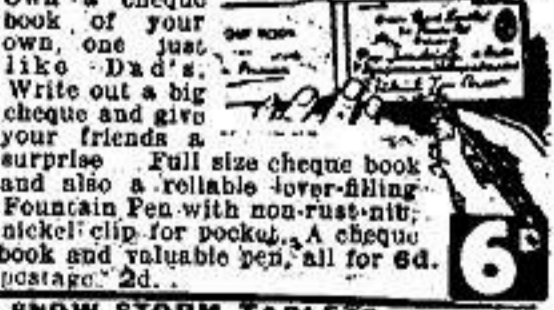
Your victim cannot understand why everybody laughs when he takes the scoop away from his eye. He looks as though he has taken part in a prize fight, and rubbing makes it worse. Postage 2d.



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The invention of the year! Officially approved by the Greyfriars Anti-Noise Society. Fits easily into the roof of the mouth. The simple little device that turns a yell into a mere whisper. Insist on your fag wearing one!—Partics. from the inventor, D. MORGAN, Study No. 6, Remove.



THE NEW Greyfriars Herald



No. 102 (New Series), EDITED BY HAROLD WHARTON. September 15th, 1934.

YOU WANT THE BEST SEATS— WE GET THEM
Bring us your old chairs and name the man you want to swop with. Our skilled staff will see that he gets yours and you get his in less than an hour! Fees very low—considering the risks we take!—G. TUBB & CO., Third Form.

THE CRISIS

He realised that a decision had to be made. The critical moment had come. He had to do one thing or the other. Which should it be?
It was a problem to try the wit of a super-man. Either of the two alternatives involved hardship. He had to choose the lesser of two evils. *But which was the lesser?*
His brain almost roiled as he tried to arrive at the fateful decision. Almost he groaned aloud. It seemed hard that he, a mere kid, a mere Greyfriars Third Former, should have such a fearful problem to solve. But life, as bitter experience had already taught him, often was hard.
A roar in the distance reminded him that only a fraction of time remained in which he could decide. It was the climax now, right enough! Well, anything was better than this tortured inactivity.
He took a half-step forward on the pavement. Then, with sudden resolution, he stepped back again. The bus roared past. George Tubb glanced at the two pennies in his palm and sighed.
"Well, I've got to walk now I've lost the last bus," he remarked. "It's chocolate, after all!"
And he inserted the coppers in the automatic machine and pulled out a packet of best nut-milk!

PROOF POSITIVE

Owing to dizziness caused by smoking a cheap cigarette, Private Snoop, of the Remove Cadet Corps, found difficulty in keeping inside the ranks.
Which only proves what we've always maintained—that he's a "rank outsider"!

Harold Skinner on—

MY DEADLY SIN

There is one sin my pater will never forgive, and that's playing darts. It would make your heart ache to hear of the subterfuges to which I have to resort to get in a game of darts during the vac.
If my pater ever does find out that I play darts, it will probably prove fatal to him. Thank goodness, up to the present, he has no suspicion.
Mind you, I've had some narrow squeaks. I remember one day when he caught me in the garden, on my way to a board I'd fixed up in the greenhouse, with three darts in my hand. Fortunately, I had the presence of mind to tell him I was merely going to stick them in the legs of the next-door neighbour, who was asleep in his hammock, and the pater was appeased.
Another time, he spotted me coming out of a disreputable country inn, where I'd been for a game, and taxed me fiercely with having gone there to play darts. I denied all knowledge of the game, and explained that I'd simply been there to play roulette with a gang of underworld crooks. The relief on the pater's face was wonderful to watch.
The nearest escape of all came when he

INKY'S BIRTHDAY GUIDE

This Week:
Herbert Vernon-Smith

The stars certainly had a night out when the esteemed Bounder was born, my faithful and chuckle-headed readers! As your Shakespear might have put it, the starry night-outfulness was truly terrific!
"Complex" hardly describes him account-fully—he is a wedged mass of complications and contradictions!
With the esteemed and idiotic Bounder, anything is possible. Honoured and praiseful acts of virtue come just as easily to him as fearful and disgusting villainies. He is a smoky blackguard gay-dogfully at the same time as he is a terrific sportsman true-bluefully!
The pigheadedness of this fascinating and ludicrous character is terrific. Compared with the Bounder, the esteemed and ridiculous mule is a model of tractability.
What can be prophesied forecastfully of the honoured and peculiar Smithy? Well, one thing is cinchfully certain—he will attain fame scrofulfully. Nothing can prevent the forcefulness of our esteemed pal from getting him somewhere. But whether he will get to the top of the tree climbfully or to a Dartmoor cell fallfully, I am regretfully unable to say. Whichever it is, he will attain it whole-hogfully—for the half-measurefulness of the esteemed Bounder is NOT terrific!
Personally, I have a hopeful feeling that it will be the former. There is a lot about Smithy that I dislikefully detest—but there is a lot more that I like!
May the stars coursefully direct your vigourful and frenzied ways into the correctful channels, my esteemed and fatheaded Vernon-Smith!

actually found a dartboard under my bed. My nimble wit rose to the occasion, however, and I glibly informed him that I used it at school as a bludgeon with which to attack masters and prefects in the dark. He almost wept with joy.
So, you see, the pater still continues to regard me as a model son.
I only hope he never finds out I play darts!

WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?



The Famous Five do not confine their "hiking" to the summer. Bob Cherry affirms that a tramp through the autumn woods or even winter snow is just as enjoyable as a summer tramp.

LETTING DOWN ST. SAM'S!

By Dicky Nugent

"Play the game, ref!"
The cry went up from a hundred throats around the junior football pitch of St. Sam's. The Fourth Form, led by Jack Jolly, were playing the St. Bill's juniors, and Dr. Birchmall, the revered and majestic Head of St. Sam's, was referee. For reasons best known to himself, Dr. Birchmall was giving all his decisions against the home team. Hence, the crowd was beginning to egg-spress its disapproval.
The Head did not appear to hear the spectators' angry yells. Apart from the fact that he turned garstly white



and looked strangely furtiv for a minnit or two, he remained his usual calm self.
"Goal!"
It was a sudden roar from the crowd. Jack Jolly had just scored the first goal of the match—a wonderful goal from 25 yards range.
But the cheers changed to cries of amazement as Dr. Birchmall shook his head.
"Goal disallowed!" he said coolly. "You were offside, Jolly!"
"Offside?" gasped Jack Jolly. "B-b-but, sir, I drib-

bled the ball down the field myself—and anyway there were half-a-duzen of the other side in front of me!"
Dr. Birchmall larfed sardonically.
"That duzent matter in the slitest, my dear Jolly. I am referee—and the decision of the referee is final!"
"Grate jolly!" mormered Jack Jolly, his one in a dream.
A brawny St. Bill's back took the free kick, and the ball went sailing down the pitch towards the St. Sam's goal. Loyle, the St. Sam's right-back was just about to clear it, when the ref's whistle sounded. To the astonishment of everybody Dr. Birchmall was pointing to the centre of the field.
"Goal!" he said, calmly.
"First blud, St. Bill's!"
"But it didn't go anywhere near the goal, sir!" yelled severral egg-spress St. Sam's players.
"Ratts!" retorted the Head cheerfully. "I saw it with my own eyes—and anyway, the decision of the referee is final!"
Dr. Birchmall's amazing decision was snuff to take the hart out of Jack Jolly and his merry men. But they set to work, undawied, to avenge the pekuliar "goal" which had been given against them, and evenchally, "rank Fearless scored an equifiser which even the Head could find no egg-souse for disallowing.
With the scores level again, Dr. Birchmall seemed to do his utmost to put St. Bill's ahead once more. He gave free kicks and penalty kicks galore against the home side, got in their way when they were attacking, pushed them over when they were defending, and generally did everything that a referee shouldn't do. But, try as he would, he couldn't make St. Bill's score.

At last, in sheer desperation, he grabbed the ball in his own hands, tore down the field with it, and herled it into the St. Sam's goal.
"Goal!" he cried, triumphantly. Then he blew a long blast on his whistle to show that the game was at an end.
"But you put the ball in the goal yourself!" objected Frank Fearless, indignantly. "And anyway, there's still ten minnits to go!"
"To argue the toss is useless, my dear Fearless," was the Head's bland retort. "I have already stated that the decision of the referee is final!"
And so, St. Bill's ran out winners of the eggstraordinary game by 2 goals to 1—and immediately afterwards, the Fourth found out the egg-splanation of Dr. Birchmall's behaviour. For the Head went straight up to the Head of St. Bill's, who had been watching the game from the pavilion, and shook him warmly by the hand.
"Well, I mannidged it for you, Dr. Lashwell," he said, with a sly wink. "The gub-vernors of St. Bill's won't be able to criticise your juniors' prowess on the footer field after this, I fancy, my dear sir!"
"You're right, Dr. Birchmall!" said the Head of St. Bill's, gratefully.
And Jack Jolly & Co., to their disgust, then saw him slip a silver coin into the Head's hand!
"Bump him!" yelled Jack Jolly, unable to control his feelings any longer.
There was a rush, and, a minnit later, Dr. Birchmall felt himself lifted clean off his feet.
"Yaroooooh! Help! Per-lice!" howled the Head of St. Sam's furiously.
"Bump!"
"Woooooop! Yarooooooh!"
Dr. Birchmall fairly yelled for mersy. But Jack Jolly & Co. were deaf to his pleas. They carried on with the punishment the Head had so richly earned!

George Tubb on THE LIFE OF A FAG

Unhappy is the life of a fag. You old fogeys in the Remove have no idea of what we have to endure.
From the time we get up till the time we go to bed, we're completely at the beck and call of the seniors. They can do just what they like with us, and we're not allowed to lift a finger in our own defence.
That's the galling part of it. A chap feels so utterly helpless when he knows that all the weight of authority is at the back of his oppressors!
When Loder kicks me down the stairs, I realise only too well that I can do absolutely nothing about it. Apart from putting soot in his coffee and soap with his cheese, I must take it lying down.
When Walker whacks me, it is idle for me to think of getting redress for it. Except for wrecking his study, I must leave it completely unavenged.
When Wingate gives me a box on the ears, what's the use of my getting my mad up about it? I know full well there's nothing I can do—after, of course, I have fixed up a booby-trap that will send him to the sanny for a month.
The utter helplessness of it! Even the slaves of old could get their own back on their masters sometimes. But we just resign ourselves to injustice, because it's downright certain that we can do nothing—apart from making the senior's lives a misery for them!

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Absolutely guaranteed by the Stott Method. Cannot be rubbed or washed off. Fags! Why be despised for your cleanliness when you can look inky for the rest of your schooldays on one application of Stott's Blue-Black Blobs? 6d. bottle lasts a lifetime.

Alonzo Todd bleats— LOVE YOUR FORM-FELLOWS

Oh, my dear friends, I beg of you not to heed those unkind youths who wax gleeful over fist-cuffs and see no harm in school-boys living in unbrotherly rivalry! Be kind to your dear colleagues, my friends; and love your dear Form-fellows!



But you think it is impossible to be kind to people who bully you and pick quarrels with you? Ah, my dear friends, that is just where you are wrong! My experiences prove it!
I remember one day when I walked around the school, determined to show affection to all and sundry, however much their behaviour might tempt me into unkindness.
The first man I met was Bolsover. Quite without provocation, this youth seized my nasal organ between his thumb and forefinger and tweaked it with exceeding violence, laughing brutally as he did so. For a moment, I was sorely tempted to slap his face; but, with a great effort, I overcame the temptation and shook him warmly by the hand instead.
The result surpassed my most sanguine expectations. Bolsover immediately burst into tears!
Continuing on my walk, I encountered Skinner, who, for reasons I cannot fathom, hurled a ripe tomato at me, striking me therewith on one of my aural appendages. I might easily have turned round and reproached the youth; but I smiled at him and gave the remains of the tomato to a hungry cat instead. Skinner at once collapsed, sobbing broken-heartedly!

A little later I inadvertently tripped up Hilton, of the Fifth, who, most unreasonably, turned round and kicked me. There was a brick lying at my feet with which I might easily have "brained" him; but, resisting the impulse, I patted him on the back and assured him of my undying regard and esteem. Hilton's aggressiveness at once departed, and, with a strange, half-frightened glance at me, he rushed away—obviously too overcome with remorse to speak!
I have even found that form-masters will respond to evidence of genuine fellow-feeling if they are given opportunity. Quite recently, when I explained to Mr. Quelch that I had been unable to do prep, because I had been studying a very excellent book entitled, "The Anatomy of a Newt," he ordered me to write out five hundred lines. Instead, I did five thousand, and he was so touched that he allowed me two days in the sanatorium, where I could read my book without any disturbance.
Trivial experiences, these, perhaps, my friends, but do they not prove what can be accomplished when you love your dear schoolmates?
Cousin Peter says that Bolsover and Skinner were shedding tears of mirth and that Hilton evidently thought I had "gone up the loop," whatever that may mean.
An extraordinary fellow, Peter; is not he?

GREYFRIARS FACTS WHILE YOU WAIT!



Eusebius Twigg and Bernard Morrison Twigg, the brother masters, are both of a somewhat timid nature. They are eager listeners when Mr. Prout brags about the "grizzlies" he's shot!

Greyfriars accounts show that the boys ate 200 pounds more sugar this term than last. Peter Todd attributes this increase to a night raid made by Billy Bunter on the school pantry.

A sailing race for a silver trophy, held in Pegg Bay, was won in spanking style by Tom Redwing, sailing his own dinghy, like the sailorman's son that he is! Well done, Tom!

Watching Bunter drying himself after a bathe, Peter Todd suggested that the reason Bunter dislikes the water is because he has twice as large an area as any other fellow to wipe dry!

Like every successful leader, Harry Wharton has his enemies—but they are outnumbered by his friends by something like four to one! Wharton ignores the sneers of Skinner and Co.!