

“THEY CALLED HIM A FUNK!”

A Gripping Cover-to-Cover Yarn of Your
Old Favourites — HARRY WHARTON & CO.

The Magnet 2^d



ATTABOY!



COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS - AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. A stamped, addressed envelope will ensure a reply.

SOME few weeks back I referred in my chat to a letter I had received from a reader whose nom-de-plume was "BLOATER" and who was rather displeased with the introduction of girls in our Greyfriars yarns. In view of this, I decided to put the question to the vote and let you know the result. As the MAGNET goes to press some few weeks in advance, I have been unable to publish the result until now.

So many readers sent in their opinion that it would be absolutely impossible for me to acknowledge their letters through the post, and to print their names and addresses on this page—well, my chat would again be crowded out! I therefore take the opportunity now of thanking all those staunch readers who have written to me. The result of the voting, chums, is as I fully expected—an overwhelming majority in favour of Marjorie Hazeldene & Co., the girls of Cliff House, being featured on the occasion in our yarns. "They bring a touch of novelty into the stories and improve them vastly" is the general impression. And that's that!

That our cover-to-cover yarns have filled a much needed want is proved beyond doubt by the letters of praise which reach me by every post. Some of my chums even go as far as to ask me to publish the MAGNET twice a week! This is, of course, impossible. Even an Editor and his staff need a rest!

Be that as it may, however, you can rely on our united efforts to keep the Old Paper which, incidentally, reaches its fifteen hundredth issue this week—in the forefront of all other boy's papers!

Wait until you read

"THE SCHOOLBOY SMUGGLER!"

By Frank Richards,

the next yarn in our present series. It's a top-notch, believe me! Ever since the mysterious Valentine Compton risked his life by swimming out on the tide to rescue Billy Bunter and his sister Bessie, he has been rather a hero in the eyes of the Greyfriars fellows. In this super story Compton comes to Greyfriars as a Fifth Former and receives a very warm welcome from everybody, with the exception of Horace Coker, who is nursing a grudge against the new boy. But even Coker, important personage as he is, has a lot to thank Compton for, as you will learn in next Saturday's topping tale of Harry Wharton & Co. Need I advise you to order your copy early?

HAVE you ever wondered why the steersman of a boat is called a "coxswain"? Harry Dunn, of Shortley, asks me to tell him. It dates back to the days

WHEN BOATS WERE CALLED COGGES.

The word swain merely meant a man, and therefore, a man in charge of a boat was called the Cogge Swain. Gradually, THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,500.

the word became changed to "cock," and that name was generally given to a small boat. In old-fashioned sea stories you can still read about "cock-boats." Naturally, the man in charge of the cock-boat took on the job of steering it, and was called a cockswain, which, at the present time, has been shortened to coxswain, pronounced by sailors as "koxsn."

Here's an interesting paragraph concerning a man who has been

FIFTY YEARS A CAVE DWELLER!

That's a long time to be underground, isn't it? A guide to the St. Clement's Caves, under the West Hill at Hastings, has just completed fifty years of service. During that time he has conducted countless thousands of visitors over the caves, and the underground passages. He estimates that the total amount of walking that he has put in through the caves during his career must be somewhere in the neighbourhood of twenty thousand miles! His kitchen is a queer, circular room, hollowed out of the rock near the entrance to the caves.

Looking for treasure is always exciting, and one of the greatest treasure hunts in the world is now being organised. The proposal is to recover the treasure which lies

SIXTY FATHOMS UNDER THE ATLANTIC

in the hull of the torpedoed liner, Lusitania. The Lusitania was torpedoed by a German submarine in 1915, and the salvage vessel Ophir has located the wreck. The Ophir is equipped with the very latest salvage apparatus, and work would already have commenced had it not been for the fact that extremely high-powered lamps are required to allow the divers to see at such a great depth. As soon as the lights are ready, the expedition will commence. A film cameraman, with a camera capable of taking films under the sea, will accompany the expedition. So before long, we may be able to see the sunken Lusitania on the screen at our cinemas!

R. Larkin, of Tunbridge Wells, who has written to me asking for certain back numbers, reminds me of the fact that Christmas will soon be here and that he is looking forward to another bumper Christmas Number of the MAGNET. Rest assured, my chum, this particular issue is already under consideration.

Talking about Christmas brings to my mind the "Holiday Annual." Many of you have got aunts and uncles who will be asking what you would like in the way of a Christmas present. Take my tip and choose the "Holiday Annual." This budget of reading matter will drive away the blues when the dark evenings come

along. Your newsagent will be only too pleased to let you see a copy of this world-wide favourite Annual, if you ask him, and when you've once seen it, you can take it from me you'll want one on the spot.

NOW for a few RAPID-FIRE REPLIES

to other questions sent in by readers.

When was the first Air Raid on England? (P. D., of Wembley): On December 24th, 1914, when an aeroplane dropped a bomb in a garden at Dover. The first Zeppelin raid was on January 19th, 1915, when four people were killed in Yarmouth and King's Lynn.

What is Shagreen? ("Inquirer," of Nottingham). Shark's skin. The word is also applied to a leather of peculiar grain made from the skins of wild asses, camels and horses.

When were Surnames first used in England? (R. W., of Canterbury): Just after the Norman Conquest. The Normans used the word "Fitz" to signify "the son of." After that, surnames generally had reference to either the occupation, the dwelling-place, or the personal characteristics of the people to whom they were applied.

What are "Travellers' Trees"? (John White, of Middlesbrough): A peculiar type of trees found in Madagascar. The leaves are several feet in length, and their stalks are full of water, thus providing a cooling and refreshing drink for travellers.

What are Trappists? ("Curious," of Southwark): Members of a very austere Monkish order, who are not allowed to talk, study, eat fish or drink wine. There are Trappist monasteries in France, Belgium, Italy, Algeria, Ireland, and the United States.

From Where did the word "Volt" Come? (H. F., of Gravesend): From the name of the man who discovered the voltaic pile, Count Alessandro Volta, an Italian professor.

What is "Suttee"? ("Len," of Bradford): The name given to an ancient Hindu practice of women burning themselves to death on the funeral pyres of their husbands. Although it has been banned by law, it is still sometimes carried out.

THIS MAY CONCERN YOU

as well as Charles Faraday (Woodford), Wallace Walters (Stourbridge), Clem Sergeant (Watford) and the host of other readers who have been writing to me asking for stories of St. Frank's. A special number of the "Schoolboys' Own Library" containing a book-length yarn of the old-time favourites—Nipper & Co., of St. Frank's—is now on sale everywhere. This issue is No. 282 and the title of the story "The Mystery of St. Frank's!" The other two issues of the "Schoolboys' Own Library" on sale this month are No. 280, "Captain and Tyrant!" a magnificent yarn featuring Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars; and No. 281, "St. Jim's in Revolt!" introducing Tom Merry & Co., the cheery chums of St. Jim's. The price per copy is 4d.

Before winding up this chat I should like to bring before your notice our companion paper—the GEM, which contains, in addition to a grand long yarn of Tom Merry & Co., of St. Jim's, an amusing story by Frank Richards, entitled "Grand Opera at Greyfriars!" which deals with the early adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. Why not sample it, chums?

YOUR EDITOR.

MEET THE CHUMS OF GREYFRIARS IN THIS SPARKLING SCHOOL STORY!

THEY CALLED HIM A FUNK!

By FRANK RICHARDS



They called Harry Wharton a funk because he wouldn't break bounds. But when it came to a test of real nerves, the junior captain of Greyfriars made his accusers sing small!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Who's Going?

"I'M going!"
"You're not, Smithy!"
"I jolly well am. You coming, Reddy?"
"No, ass!"
"You coming, Bob?"
"No, fathead!"
"You, Inky?"

"The answer is in the absurd negative, my esteemed idiotic Smithy!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, glanced round the Rag, with a sarcastic sneer on his face.

There were a good many Remove fellows in the Rag. Some of them were looking rather disgruntled.

Harry Wharton, the captain of the Form, was frowning. His comrades, the famous Co., did not look pleased.

Something, evidently, had occurred to ruffle the serenity of the Greyfriars Remove that November morning.

The weather, certainly, was not enjoyable. A drizzle of rain was falling in the quad and pattering on the windows. The playing fields were drenched, and even Bob Cherry was doubtful about footer.

But it was not the weather that disgruntled the Removites. It was an order that had been placed on the notice-board after third school, evidently in view of the half-holiday that afternoon.

"Everybody here got cold feet?" asked the Bounder.

"Oh, don't be an ass, Smithy!" grunted Johnny Bull. "It's a Head's order, and we've got to toe the line."

"It's rotten, but it can't be helped," said Frank Nugent.

Harry Wharton did not speak. His frowning brow looked as if he rather agreed with the Bounder, who had

announced that he was "going," in spite of the order of the Great Beak.

"Well, I'm going!" said Vernon-Smith. "I'd like some of you fellows to come, as you know the place; but I'm going on my own if you're all funky!"

"Fathead!" said Bob Cherry.

"It's utter rot!" said Vernon-Smith. "If the Head fancies we can't take care of ourselves, he's got another guess coming. Last Wednesday you fellows explored the smugglers' cave; it wasn't out of bounds then. You got stranded there through that born idiot Bunter clearing off with your boat—"

"Oh, really, Smithy!" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"Shut up, Bunter! You'd have got landed for a night out if you hadn't found the secret passage leading to the school! Well, you did find it," said Smithy, "and ever since half the school's been waiting for the next half-holiday to explore the jolly old spot. And now the Beak comes down with a bump and puts it out of bounds!"

"Silly rot!" said Skinner.

"You'll come?" asked the Bounder.

"Oh, no fear!" said Skinner promptly.

"Any offers?" asked the Bounder, with a sneer. "I'm jolly well going—and that's that! I'm going to walk down after dinner, and I'm going into the smugglers' cave, and I'm going to follow that jolly old secret passage along to Greyfriars, and—"

"Better wash it out, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton slowly. "We're all jolly keen on it. But the Head takes the view that it's not safe for fellows to root about there, and he may be right—"

"You know he's right!" said Johnny Bull, in his calm, stolid way. "I'm as keen to explore the place as any chap;

but what's the good of making out that it's safe when you know it isn't?"

"Is 'safety first' the Yorkshire motto?" jeered the Bounder.

"If you want a thick ear, Smithy, you won't have to ask for it twice!" said Johnny. "I'm saying that the Head's right in taking the view that it's not safe. I don't care a brass button whether it's safe or not, but the Head does. He's right!"

Johnny Bull was the happy possessor of a fund of solid, stolid common sense. Irritating as the headmaster's order was to enterprising juniors, Johnny could see the matter as it looked to the official eye.

"That day we were stranded in the sea-cave," went on Johnny, "we did find the secret passage—right! And how did we find it? By Bob falling head-first into the pit it opens out of. He fell on a soft spot—"

"His head?" asked Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There was a lot of soft sand in the pit, and Bob dropped on it," said Johnny, passing Skinner's little joke unheeded. "If he'd fallen on rock, he would have broken a limb. There may be dozens of such pitfalls in the place. The Head knows that. And that underground passage leading to the school might get blocked by a fall of chalk. There was a lot of fallen chalk about when we went through. A fellow shut in there would be in a pretty scrape. I'm not saying I don't want to go, as you jolly well know, Smithy, with all your swank; but I say the Head's right that it's not safe, and, if I were a schoolmaster, I'd jolly well put it out of bounds."

This was an unusually long speech for Johnny Bull, who was a fellow of few words.

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It had a convincing effect on some of his hearers.

Smithy, who was utterly reckless either of danger or of authority, listened impatiently, with a sneer on his face.

"Is that all?" he demanded.

"That's all!"

"Thank goodness for that! I was beginning to think you were wound up!"

"Well, Johnny's right!" said Bob Cherry. "I'd like to go—and I don't care whether it's safe or not—but schoolmasters don't look at these things as we do. After all, it would be a bit of a worry to a headmaster to have a fellow brought in with a broken leg."

"I'm going!" said Vernon-Smith. "It's all rot, and the Head's not going to keep me in a handbox!"

"It's a special order about bounds, Smithy," said Tom Redwing. "It would mean a flogging if you're spotted."

Herbert Vernon-Smith snapped his fingers.

"That for the flogging!" he said contemptuously. "If you're afraid of a flogging, Reddy, stick in!"

"You know I'm not. But—"

"Oh, rats! By gum, I'd never have thought the Remove such a crew of funks!" sneered the Bounder. "Here, Mauly—will you come, Mauly? You've got pluck enough, if you could manage to keep awake a whole afternoon!"

Lord Mauleverer shook his head.

"Head's order, Smithy!" he said. "Can't jib at the Head's order! Bad form, dear man!"

"If you tell Smithy it's bad form, you'll make him all the keener on it," remarked Peter Todd.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I'm going!" said the Bounder angrily. "You said this morning that you'd come, Wharton, and show me what you'd found there."

"I'd be glad, Smithy. I'm keen on it," said the captain of the Remove. "But it's been put out of bounds since then."

Smithy shrugged his shoulders.

"And you're head boy of the Form and can't do anything wrong—what?" he jeered. "Dear little Eric, saying 'Yes, sir!' and 'Oh, sir!' and 'Please, sir!' and 'No, sir!'"

Some of the Remove fellows laughed, and Harry Wharton flushed with anger. But he made no rejoinder.

"I say, you fellows, that's tiffin!" said Billy Bunter, as a bell began to clang. It was the dinner-bell.

Bunter made a move for the door. Bunter was often late for class, but he was never late for a meal.

Herbert Vernon-Smith gave a mocking, vaunting look round at the crowd of fellows in the Rag.

"I'm going after dinner!" he said. "Nobody else going?"

There was no answer.

"Funks!" said the Bounder.

And, flinging that unpleasant word over his shoulder, the Bounder of Greyfriars stalked out of the Rag.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter Bumps!

"PUTRID weather!" granted Bob Cherry.

"Not nice!" agreed Nugent.

"It doesn't look like footer."

"It doesn't."

"All right for a trip to the smugglers' cave, though," said Harry Wharton.

"A splash of rain needn't stop that!"

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"That's barred!" said Johnny Bull.

"The barfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Wharton was silent, frowning.

After dinner there was deep and prolonged grouching in the Remove. Other fellows in other Forms were grouching also. There was no doubt the Head's order, placing the Shoulder and the sea-cave out of school bounds, was extremely unpopular.

Hobson of the Shell declared that it was rot. Temple of the Fourth expressed the opinion that it was piffle. Coker of the Fifth was heard to state that he had a jolly good mind to go, all the same. In the Remove they grouched loud and long.

Johnny Bull could see that the Head was right. Perhaps a few other fellows could, but they were in a minority.

That sea-cave under the mighty Shoulder, the great chalk cliff that jutted out into the North Sea, had always had some interest for the Greyfriars fellows. They had heard many stories of the smugglers who had once haunted its shadowy depths, running cargoes of French silks and kegs of brandy from luggers that slid silently into Pegg Bay under cover of night. In the summer term fellows would explore the cave, or picnic there. Certainly it was not very attractive, as a rule, in the winter.

But it had a very special attraction now. On Wednesday afternoon, Harry Wharton & Co. had gone there, and, stranded by the fatuous Bunter clearing off with the boat, they had returned to the school by a secret passage.

Every fellow in the Remove had been thinking about that secret passage since.

The juniors had discovered it by accident—a lucky accident, as it had enabled them to return to the school from the sea-cave. They had traversed it, spotting here and there signs of the old smugglers. Probably a good many interesting relics were to be spotted, if a fellow had more time.

Naturally they had intended to go again, the next half-holiday, and explore the place thoroughly. Nearly all the Remove had intended to go, as well as an army of other fellows. And the Head's order, placing the sea-cave out of bounds, put "paid" to the whole thing.

It was fearfully annoying, and it was no wonder that the fellows grouched. And it was like the Bounder to declare that he was going. Head's order, or no Head's order. A much less reckless and rebellious fellow than the Bounder—Harry Wharton, the captain of the Form—was thinking the very same thing.

It was all the more rotten, because the weather, which had started the month fine and sunny, had turned rainy and misty. There was no footer that day which would have been a welcome alternative. The juniors felt sore about it, though few were likely to imitate the reckless Bounder and ask for trouble with their headmaster.

The Famous Five were standing by the window on the Remove landing, looking out at the drizzle, at the bare, weeping branches of the old elms, and the playing fields drenched and dripping. It was not a heavy rain, but it was steady, and did not look like leaving off.

"Rotten sell!" groaned Bob Cherry.

"Not a man out of doors; but look here, we can't stick in! What about a walk?"

"Such lovely weather for walking!" said Nugent.

"There goes old Quelch!" said Bob, pointing from the window at an angular figure visible in the quad below. "If

old Quelch can chance it, rheumatism and all—"

The juniors glanced down at the Remove master. In hat and macintosh and umbrella, Mr. Quelch was heading for the gates.

Quelch was a great walker, and generally, on a half-holiday, he walked. The dismal weather, evidently, was not inducing him to abandon his usual manners and customs. Generally, Mr. Prout or Capper walked with him; but he was alone now. The other beaks, perhaps, jibbed at the weather.

"Look here," said Harry Wharton abruptly, as Quelch disappeared, "I don't see cutting out our trip. I told Smithy I'd show him what we found in the cave—"

"That was before—"

"I know all that. All the same—"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, buzz off, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Wharton, you needn't snap a fellow's head off because a fellow's got more pluck than you have!" said the fat Owl, blinking scornfully at the captain of the Remove through his big spectacles. "I'm jolly well going!"

"You!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five stared at Billy Bunter.

They were not surprised at any recklessness in Smithy. The fact that the sea-cave was out of bounds probably gave it an added attraction in the Bounder's eyes. But Billy Bunter was not the man to ask for trouble, especially with the Chief Beak.

"Gammon!" growled Johnny Bull.

"The gammonfulness is terrific."

"I can tell you, I mean it!" said Bunter. "No funk about me, I hope! Pluck's my long suit, as you fellows know. I'm jolly well going with Smithy! You needn't think it's because he's packing a bag of tuck in his study, either. I don't care two straws about his tuck."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I'm going to back up Smithy," declared Bunter. "Who's afraid of the beaks? Not me! I say, Wharton, will you lend me your raincoat?"

"No."

"Beast! Lend me yours, Franky?"

"Not to go to the sea-cave in," said Frank, laughing. "Does Smithy know you're going with him, old fat man?"

"I haven't told him yet. But he'll be glad, of course," said Bunter. "He doesn't want to go alone. If it's not safe in the sea-cave, as the Head thinks, he will want a plucky pal with him to see him through—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I say, you fellows, my raincoat's got holes in it. Can I have yours, Harry, old fellow? Be a pal! You won't want it, as you're afraid to go," said the fat Owl persuasively.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Co.

Billy Bunter wanted that raincoat, but really he was not putting it tactfully.

"You blithering, bloated bandersnatch!" exclaimed Wharton.

"Oh, really, old chap!"

"Buzz off, you fat bluebottle!"

"Well, it's a bit thick, refusing to lend your raincoat to a pal, when you're sticking indoors, funking going out," said Bunter. "Dog-in-the-manger, I call it. I say, can I take it out of the lobby?"

"No!" roared Wharton.

"Beast!" hooted Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes Smithy!"

The Bounder came swinging out of the Remove passage. He had a bag in his hand, and the chums of the Remove, after what Bunter had said, guessed

what it contained. If Smithy was going to explore the sea-cave and the secret tunnel, he would have to cut tea, and he was taking provender with him. That was what inspired William George Bunter with his unusual pluck and reckless disregard of authority.

Vernon-Smith gave the group of juniors a mocking look.

"Reddy's turned me down," he said. "Any of you coming?"

"I say, Smithy, I'm coming!" gasped Bunter.

"Fathead! Clear off!" snapped the Bounder. He wanted company on his exploring trip, but not that of the fat and fatuous Owl.

"Look here, you beast," hooted Bunter indignantly, "if you don't want me, you cheeky cad—"

"You've got it! Buzz!"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter gave the Bounder a glare that almost cracked his spectacles. He was the only fellow in the Remove who was prepared to back up the reckless breaker of bounds, and this was Smithy's gratitude.

"Yah! I fancy it's only gas!" sneered Bunter. "You're going to make out that you've been to the smugglers' cave. Yah! I'll bet you're going to sneak in at the back door of the Three Fishers, and play billiards with those Highcliffe cads, and then come back here bragging that you've been to the cave! Yah!"

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

Herbert Vernon-Smith's face crimsoned with rage.

Two or three fellows in the Remove passage laughed as they heard Bunter, and Skinner winked at Snoop, who giggled.

Smithy, in point of fact, was far from being the fellow to "swank" about having done what he lacked the nerve to do. Still, if a fellow went alone, he could say what he liked when he came back.

"Why, you—you—" gasped the Bounder.

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter. "I know your game—he, he, he! You ain't going within a mile of the cave, and you're coming back to say—Yarooooooop!"

The Bounder swung round the bag in his hand, interrupting Bunter. It crashed on the fat junior, sending him spinning.

"Look out!" yelled Bob.

Bump, bump, bump!

Wild yells floated back from Bunter as he rolled over the edge of the Remove staircase. He yelled and squirmed and grabbed and clutched, and bumped from stair to stair.

"Ow! Yaroooh! Help! Yoo-hoop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Ow! Oh crikey! Yarooooop!"

Fortunately for Bunter, it was a short staircase. But it seemed quite long enough to Billy Bunter.

He bumped on the next landing, and rolled and roared. On that landing were three Fifth Form men—Coker, Potter, and Greene. They stared round at the rolling and roaring Owl.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Coker. "Do that again, Bunter!"

"Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

Billy Bunter was not disposed to do it again. He picked himself up, and disappeared down the lower stairs, leaving Coker chortling.



"Look out!" yelled Bob Cherry. Bump, bump, bump! "Ow! Yaroooh! Help! Yoo-hoop!" Wild yells floated back from Bunter as he bumped from stair to stair. On the landing below were three Fifth Form men—Coker and Potter and Greene. They stared round at the rolling Owl. "Ha, ha, ha!" roared Coker.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Wharton, Too!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH scowled at the Famous Five. They were grinning—but the Bounder was evidently angry.

Smithy liked to do wild and reckless things, to make other fellows stare, and remark to one another what a devil of a fellow the old Bounder was. All the more, for that reason, he was intensely irritated by Bunter's fatuous gibe.

A fellow like Skinner might have taken a walk that afternoon, in a safe direction, and "told the tale" when he returned. The bare idea of being classed with such a fellow made Smithy

intensely angry. And, after all, if he went alone, there would be only his word for it that he had gone to the sea-cave at all. Other fellows could believe him or not, as they liked. Some of them, at least, it was very likely, would take Bunter's view.

"You rotten funks!" said the Bounder, between his teeth. "Letting a man down! Hasn't one of you got as much pluck as a bunny rabbit?"

"The pluckfulness is terrific, my esteemed Smithy!" said Hurrec Jamsct Ram Singh mildly. "But—"

"But the butfulness is just as terrific as the pluckfulness!" explained Bob Cherry, with a grin.

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"Better cut it out, Smithy!" said Frank Nugent, laughing.

"Oh, shut up!" snarled the Bounder. "Look here, Wharton! You said you'd come! If you don't come, you're a rotten, sneaking funk!"

Harry Wharton coloured uncomfortably. He was more than ready to take the risk of breaking bounds. But, as Mr. Quelch's head boy, he had a certain responsibility. Head boy of a Form at Greyfriars was in much the same position as head of a House in a school divided into Houses. It was not for a fellow in such a position to set an example of defiance of authority.

"I can't do it, Smithy!" he said. "I'd like to, but—"

"You've been through the place once, without an accident—"

Wharton's face flamed.

"You cheeky fool, you know I don't care a bean whether it's dangerous in the cave or not! By Jove, I—"

"What are you afraid of, then?" sneered the Bounder. "A flogging? It's not such a jolly long time since old Quelch called you the worst boy in the Form, and you were up for floggings. You didn't care a lot then."

Wharton set his lips.

"Shut up, Smithy!" growled Johnny Bull.

No member of the Co. liked to be reminded of the troubled term when Harry Wharton had been out of hand, in constant trouble with Form-master and headmaster. Neither would Smithy have reminded him in a less angry mood.

"You know it's not the flogging I care about, Smithy!" said the captain of the Remove. "But, as head boy—"

The Bounder gave a scoffing laugh.

"Any excuse is better than none!" he

mocked. "You said you'd come, and you're letting me down! I'm going, and that fool Bunter, and worms like Skinner, will make out that it's only swank, and that I never went at all! You're going to let me in for that, you rotter!"

"I can't—"

"You're a cur, then!" snarled the Bounder savagely. And, without waiting for any rejoinder to that, he stamped away down the stairs.

Wharton clenched his hands, with a crimson face.

"If you want a tip from me," said Johnny Bull quietly, "you'll go after that cheeky cad, and give him such a hiding that he won't feel like breaking bounds."

Wharton looked at his friends, breathing hard. He had been doubtful before, but he was no longer doubtful. The Bounder's taunt had struck too hard.

"I'm going!" he said curtly.

Frank caught his arm.

"You can't, Harry! Look here—"

"I told Smithy I'd go, and he's holding me to it!" snapped Wharton.

"But, since then—"

"I'm going!"

"You know you ought not to go!" said Frank tartly.

"I know I'm not going to have Vernon-Smith calling me a cur for letting him down!"

"Oh, bother Smithy! He's got his own pals, and if they won't back him up, let him rip!" snapped Nugent. "But you—"

"I'm going, I tell you!"

"Well, look here! Let's all go!" said Bob. "Sink or swim together!"

"I'm not going!" said Johnny Bull stolidly. "Smithy can rag Wharton

into making a fool of himself, but he won't get away with it here."

"My esteemed Johnny—" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Johnny's right!" said Harry. "Besides, I don't want you fellows to come! No need for one fool to make many! I'm going with Smithy—and I'm jolly well going to punch his head when we get back!"

And, jerking his arm away from Nugent, the captain of the Remove tramped down the stairs, leaving the Co. in a worried and dubious frame of mind.

In the lobby downstairs he found the Bounder getting into cap and raincoat.

Smithy gave him a black look. Rather than have gone alone, he would have preferred to take even Bunter, if only as a witness to his exploit. But the fat Owl of the Remove had vanished.

"If you've come here to jaw me!" he said savagely, "you can cut it out! Don't give me any of your head boy pi-jaw!"

"I'm coming!"

"Oh!" The Bounder's scowling brow cleared. "That's right, old bean! Get into your mac—it's pretty wet out!"

"Where the blump is my mac?" grunted Wharton, searching along the pegs. "I left it here! Some silly ass must have borrowed it!"

"Borrow somebody else's, then!" said Smithy.

Wharton grunted, and searched for his macintosh. He was dissatisfied with himself, dissatisfied with the Bounder, and far from being in a good temper. The fact that his mac was missing was an added irritation.

But it could not be found.

"I'll take Nugent's," said Harry. "He won't want it—"

"Not in the present state of funk in the Remove!" said the Bounder sarcastically.

"Oh, shut up!"

Smithy laughed. He was in high good humour now. In a risky expedition, Harry Wharton was the companion he would have chosen, and it rather amused his sardonic nature, too, to lead Quelch's head boy into a reckless escapade. And the captain of the Form was the best possible witness that he really had flouted the headmaster's order, and gone to the sea-cave.

"Come on!" he said.

He tramped out, with the bag hidden under his raincoat, and Harry Wharton followed, in Nugent's mac.

In the quad the rain was drizzling down. Two prefects of the Sixth—Wingate and Gwynne—were going down to the footer ground, no doubt to see whether there was a chance of games practice that wet afternoon.

Wingate glanced at the juniors, and gave them a nod and a smile.

"Chancing the rain?" he said. "Good! Better than sticking indoors!"

Wharton compressed his lips a little, as he walked on with the Bounder. The Greyfriars captain had no suspicion that they were going out of bounds. He would have turned them back fast enough, had he known their intention.

Harry paused a second—then he tramped on.

"Hallo, there's Prout!" grinned Smithy, as they came down to the gates.

Mr. Prout was standing at the door of Gosling's lodge, speaking to the porter. Prout's ample form was wrapped up in his well-known purple overcoat, conspicuous from afar. A hat was clapped down over his plump brow, and an umbrella elevated above it.

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Prout seemed doubtful whether to venture out in that uninviting weather.

He glanced at the two juniors as they came along. It was one of the weaknesses of Mr. Prout that he never could remember that he was at Greyfriars to manage only the Fifth Form, and not all the other Forms as well. He had nothing to do with Remove boys; but he barged in, all the same.

"Here! Wharton!" boomed Mr. Prout. "Vernon-Smith!"

"Yes, sir!" said Harry, without taking the trouble to conceal a touch of impatience.

"I trust," boomed Prout—"I trust that you have seen the Head's order, posted on the board this morning!"

"I've seen it!"

"And I trust," boomed Prout, "that you have no idea of disregarding that order!"

Wharton did not answer that. Prout, of course, knew that nearly every fellow in the school was keen to visit the sea-cave that half-holiday, and explore the secret passages that the juniors had discovered a few days ago. No doubt the sight of the two fellows plunging out into the rain excited his suspicions—especially as Wharton was one of the discoverers of the secret of the smugglers' cave, and Vernon-Smith was well known to be the most reckless young rascal at Greyfriars.

"What—what?" boomed Mr. Prout. "Answer me, Wharton!"

"I will answer my own Form-master, if he questions me, sir!" said Harry Wharton, coolly.

"What?" gasped Prout.

"We're walking over to Cliff House, sir!" said the Bounder hastily. "Hazel-dene's sister asked us to tea."

Wharton's lip curled.

"Oh, come on!" he snapped.

They walked on, leaving Mr. Prout staring after them very suspiciously. Outside the gates, the Bounder gave the captain of the Remove a glare.

"You silly ass!" he snapped. "Do you want to start old Prout jawing to Quelch about us?"

"I'm telling Prout no lies!" said Wharton savagely. "You've called me a funk, but I'm not funk enough to skulk behind a lot of lies."

"Oh, rats! Beaks are fair game. Prout shouldn't barge in! Did you want to tell him that we're heading for the sea-cave?" sneered the Bounder.

"I'd rather tell him that than tell him lies."

"Well, you're a fool!"

"And you're a rotter!"

"I say, you fellows!"

A squeak interrupted them, and they stared round at a podgy figure, enveloped in a raincoat, much too long. Billy Bunter blinked at them through wet spectacles.

"I say——"

"You fat villain!" roared Wharton. He knew what had become of his missing raincoat now! "That's my mac!"

"Is it, old chap?" asked Bunter. "I didn't notice that it was yours when I borrowed it. Besides, I asked you! If you can't lend a fellow a mac on a rainy day—I say, you fellows, don't walk on while a fellow's talking!"

Billy Bunter, evidently, had borrowed that mac and lain in wait for the Bounder, when he came out of gates. And there he was!

"Sheer off!" snapped Smithy.

"I'm coming, old chap——"

The Bounder reached out and gave Bunter a sudden push on a podgy chest. The fat Owl tottered, slipped in the mud, and sat down.

Splash!

"Ow!" gasped Bunter as he sat in a puddle, splashing water and mud on all sides. "Ow! Beast! Oh crikey!"

Wharton and Vernon-Smith walked on, leaving him sitting.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Quelch Wants to Know!

MR. QUELCH stopped under the old porch of the Anchor Inn, at Pegg, shut his umbrella, shook rain from it, and grunted. Quelch was not enjoying the weather.

From where he stood, he had a view across the rugged old street of Pegg, towards the sea. Just in front of the Anchor, the ancient stone quay jutted, with several boats tied up to the steps, covered with tarpaulin. The bay rolled grey and misty, and, farther out, the white-caps chased one another on the open sea. High over the rolling waters, at the extremity of the bay, rose the mighty Shoulder, half-hidden in November mist, the surf booming on the rocky ledges and ridges that ran out from its base.

There was hardly a living being to be seen. Mr. Quelch had a glimpse, for a moment, of two rosy faces, as two Cliff House girls, wrapped in macs, passed, and his crusty face broke into a crusty smile at the sight of Marjorie Hazeldene and her friend Clara. They went along the road to Cliff House School and disappeared. After which, in all the village facing the misty, rolling bay, he beheld only one human being—a bronzed, bearded old fisherman, in oil-skins, tramping on the stone quay.

And Mr. Quelch wondered why old Dave Trumper was tramping to and fro there, in the rain!

It was not wholly for the sake of his usual walk that the Remove master had turned out that rainy afternoon. Knowing quite well how keen the boys in his Form were to explore the smugglers' cave, Quelch had a misgiving that some of them might be tempted to disregard the Head's order on the subject. He considered it judicious to keep an eye open.

Quelch did not want Remove boys to be called on the carpet before the headmaster. So his walk had taken him down to Pegg, and there he was, sheltering from the rain under the old porch of the Anchor Inn.

Quelch had seen—or thought he had seen—signs of the weather clearing. But it had not cleared yet, at all events. The rain came dripping down in the rugged old street of Pegg, washing along in little rivulets. Heedless of it, old Dave Trumper tramped on the quay, every now and then glancing up the shore, as if in expectation of an arrival—a fact that Mr. Quelch grimly noted.

He had little doubt that old Dave's boat had been hired that afternoon. If a Remove fellow was coming to sail in it, that Remove fellow was going to meet with a surprise.

Mr. Quelch did not desire to be severe. He had been a boy himself, once upon a time, and he knew how smugglers' caves and secret passages appealed to the youthful mind. He could make allowances. But no boy of Quelch's Form was going to be "up" before the Head, if Quelch could help it. Still less was he going to get away with defiance of the headmaster's order. Some reckless young rascal like Vernon-Smith—perhaps some thoughtless young sweep like Bob Cherry—might have hired that boat and planned to carry on, all the same, in spite of the Head's notice on the board. In which case,

Henry Samuel Quelch was there to put "paid" to it.

Two figures in wet macs came tramping up the street and turned in the direction of the quay. Mr. Quelch's eyes glinted as he recognised Vernon-Smith. Then he started a little as he recognised Vernon-Smith's companion.

The Remove master stood frowning and hesitating. The Shoulder and sea-cave were out of bounds. But the village of Pegg and the beach were not. Neither was there any law against Greyfriars men going for a run on the bay, if disposed so to do.

Obviously, however, no fellow in his senses would have chosen a misty, rainy November afternoon for a sail, unless with an ulterior object. If those two juniors had come down for Trumper's boat there could be little doubt of their intended destination.

Utterly unaware of the angular figure under the inn porch, Smithy and his companion stepped on the quay and approached old Trumper. The old sailor-man touched his hat, and Quelch saw that the juniors were speaking to him. Then old Dave went down the wet, slippery stone steps to the boat that was tied below, rocking on the water.

That left no doubt on the subject. Forth from the inn porch, rather like a lion from his lair, strode Henry Samuel Quelch.

Wharton and Smithy, with their eyes on Dave, had their backs to the inn, and did not see Quelch coming. The Bounder was speaking as Quelch reached the quay.

"Safe as houses, old bean! Not likely to be a beak or a prefect about in this jolly weather—what?"

"Hardly!" agreed Harry.

"That ass Coker was going. I heard that he was making up a party in the Fifth, and asked Blundell, and Hilton, and Fitzgerald, as well as Potter and Greene. But they've chucked it."

"They've got more sense in the Fifth than we have in the Remove, then!" said Harry dryly.

"Wharton! Vernon-Smith!" barked a sharp voice.

"Oh, gad!" gasped the Bounder.

He spun round and stared at his Form-master.

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath. They gazed at Mr. Quelch. That he had gone out of gates, as usual, on a half-holiday, Wharton had known. But it had not occurred to him that Mr. Quelch had walked down to Pegg. Now he knew—and guessed why!

A bitter look came over Wharton's face. There was a strain of obstinacy and hasty temper in his nature; but he was very far from being a reckless rebel, like the Bounder. Merely to set himself up against authority gave Smithy a thrill of excitement. Wharton did not share it in the least. But here he was, caught with the scapegrace of the Form, tarred with the same brush, as it were. And he could have kicked himself. Still more he would have liked to kick Smithy!

"Why are you here?" asked Mr. Quelch, very quietly.

Wharton did not speak. But the Bounder recovered his cool assurance in a moment. He could not deny that they were going out in a boat, for at any moment old Dave might come up the steps to say that the boat was ready. But, so far, at least, no law had been broken.

"We're going for a sail, sir!" said Vernon-Smith calmly.

"On a day like this!" said Mr. Quelch, raising his eyebrows.

"Looks like clearing up later, sir!"

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said the Bounder smoothly. "Anyhow, we're not afraid of a spot of rain." Wharton did not speak. He was prepared to enter into the Bounder's escapade, and take the risk. But he was not prepared to adopt the Bounder's system of "fooling the beaks."

Smithy's idea of school life was rather that of a war between boys and masters. And his view was that anything was fair in war. Among his fellows, he would have scorned to lie. To a master or a prefect he would have lied without scruple. It was up to them to catch him out, if they could; and then he would take his gruel with cool hardihood. But they were not going to catch him, if he could help it.

Wharton's view was that a lie was a lie, and he would have had his tongue cut out sooner than utter one. With their views thus as far as the Poles asunder, he was not likely to pull well with the Bounder.

The captain of the Remove stood silent. He knew that Quelch's keen eyes were searching his face, and he lowered his own—with intense annoyance. He hated not to be able to look a man in the face.

"If you are merely going for a sail, Vernon-Smith, no harm is done," said Mr. Quelch. "But if it is your intention to visit the sea-cave—a dangerous place to visit, especially in this unpleasant weather—"

"It's out of bounds now, sir!"

"What?"

"Perhaps you haven't seen the Head's notice, sir?" said Smithy, with cool effrontery. "There's a paper on the board, putting the sea-cave out of bounds."

Mr. Quelch looked at him long and hard. The Bounder spoke with innocent calmness; and for the life of him the Remove master could not tell whether this was cool impertinence or not.

"I am aware, Vernon-Smith, that Dr. Locke has placed the sea-cave out of bounds," said Mr. Quelch, after a pause. "I am asking you whether it is—or was—your intention to disregard the Head's order?"

"Oh, sir!"

"Yes or no, Vernon-Smith?"

"No, sir!" said the Bounder coolly.

Wharton's cheeks reddened. He was in a position of the deepest discomfort. If Quelch repeated that question to him, what was he to say? Certainly, he could not give the Bounder away, after joining up with him. Neither could he answer untruthfully, as Smithy had done. It was rather a dilemma.

"Wharton!"

"Yes, sir," said Harry, in a low voice.

"It is so very singular for any boy to choose such weather as this for a sailing trip, that I cannot help suspecting another intention."

"Indeed, sir!"

"I shall take your word without question, Wharton. If you assure me that you are not going to the sea-cave, that ends the matter."

Harry Wharton breathed rather hard. He saw a way out of the difficulty now, without giving the Bounder away.

"I am not going to the sea-cave this afternoon, sir!" he said very distinctly.

"Very well, Wharton, I am satisfied!" said Mr. Quelch, and he walked back to the porch of the Anchor.

The Bounder grinned—when his back was turned!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Coming to Blows!

"READY, sir!" called out old Trumper.

"Right! Come on, Wharton!"

Harry Wharton did not stir.

"Chuck it, you ass!" he said. "Let's get back!"

Vernon-Smith stared at him.

"What the dickens do you mean?" he asked irritably. "We're going out to the sea-cave—"

"You heard what I said to Quelch."

"I heard you stuff him, if that's what you mean! It's all right—he'll never see us in this mist, once we're out on the bay. Come on!"

"Don't be an ass!" said Wharton. "I've told Quelch I'm not going to the sea-cave! That settles it! You can tell all the dashed lies you like, but you can leave me out of it!"

"You weak-kneed fool!" said the Bounder, between his teeth. "You can't let me down now! Quelch shouldn't ask questions, if he wants to be told no fibs! I can't go without you now! If I go alone, under his eyes, what will he think? He will know at once!"

"Cut it out, then!"

"I won't!"

"Please yourself!"

With that, Harry Wharton turned and walked off the quay. The Bounder stared after him savagely as he tramped away on wet sand.

"You rotter!" he breathed. "You rotten funk!"

Vernon-Smith had taken it for granted that the captain of the Remove had joined in his game of "stuffing the beaks." He realised now that that was a mistake. Wharton had told Mr. Quelch that he was not going to the sea-cave—and he was not going!

The Bounder breathed hard and deep. Both juniors were still under the sight of the Remove master, across the beach at the Anchor porch. Only too well the Bounder knew that Quelch would have understood, at once, had he carried on with that trip alone. Quelch would have known that they had come there with the intention of going out to the sea-cave, that Wharton had changed his mind, and that the Bounder had not.

The Bounder's reckless nature urged him to carry on, in spite of the gimlet eyes under the Anchor porch. But it was not a question of risk now, but of certain discovery. It was not good enough even for the reckless Bounder.

Old Trumper looked up from the steps.

"All ready, sir!" he said.

Old Dave knew nothing, of course, about Greyfriars school bounds; that was no concern of his.

Smithy hesitated. Wharton was already at a little distance, tramping up the sand, in the dripping rain. Across at the Anchor, Quelch was sheltering from the downpour, and Smithy knew on what, and whom, the gimlet eyes would be fixed. If he went without Wharton—

Quelch would guess at once how the matter stood. But that was not all. If he went alone, he went without the witness to his exploit, and left himself open to the jeering of Skinner & Co., and the derisive cackling of Billy Bunter. The Bounder thought it out, with a corrugated brow and glinting eyes. Then he stepped towards the old sailorman and spoke in a low voice:

"My pal's had to go back for something, Trumper! Look here, you run

the boat out and pick us up on the other side of the Shoulder, see? We'll come round by way of Friar-dale."

"Ay, ay, sir!" said old Dave. "Mebbe I'll have to keep you waiting a bit, sir—it ain't quick work beating round the cliffs in this wind."

"That's all right—I'll be there."

"Jest a you say, sir!"

Old Dave went down to the boat again. Smithy watched him, with a sullen brow, as he cast off and slid out to sea.

In a few minutes the boat was a blur in the November mist.

Vernon-Smith tramped off the old stone quay and cut along the beach after Wharton.

Mr. Quelch, from the Anchor porch, watched him grimly as he went.

They had given up that sail on the bay. Possibly, because of Mr. Quelch's observations on the state of the weather; more probably, because Mr. Quelch was on the spot. Henry Samuel Quelch was no fool. Wharton had told him that he was not going to the sea-cave—and, evidently, he was not going. But he had not told him that he had not intended to go. Quelch had a fairly accurate idea of the intention with which the two juniors had arrived at Pegg.

However, that intention had not been carried out. If his head boy had thought of disregarding the Head's order, he had, at all events, disdained to tell a falsehood on the subject; he had given up the expedition rather than do so. Quelch did not expect perfection, even in head boy; and on the whole he was satisfied. Anyhow, the matter was at an end!

From Smithy's point of view, however, it was far from being at an end. He cut along the beach and disappeared from Quelch's sight. Harry Wharton was walking quickly, and had reached the road that ran past the gates of Cliff House School, which was the nearest way back to Greyfriars. The Bounder had to run to overtake him.

"Hold on, you swab!" panted Smithy's voice behind the captain of the Remove, and Wharton slowed down—but he did not stop.

"Well?" he rapped over his shoulder. "Coming back?"

"No!" snarled the Bounder. "I've said that I'm going to the sea-cave, and I'm going! You've said that you're coming with me—"

"You heard what I said to Quelch."

"I heard you stuffing him, same as did!"

Wharton's eyes gleamed. He came to a halt, facing the angry Bounder. He was angry himself and not in a mood, by any means, to take any more "lip" from Herbert Vernon-Smith.

Now, look here, Smithy," he said quietly. "I had to answer Quelch. Did you want me to tell him we were going out to the sea-cave?"

"No, you fool!"

"Then I had to tell him I was not going—and having told him that, I can't go. Leave it at that!"

"Don't give me any pi-jaw now! Look here, we can get to the sea-cave the other way, on the other side of the Shoulder. Quelch can't see through a mountain of chalk, so you're quite safe!" sneered the Bounder. "Do you think he can see across the bay, through the Shoulder, to the beach on the other side?"

Wharton walked on.

"Safe as houses!" went on Smithy, following him. "I've told Trumper to



"I say, you fellows——" squeaked Billy Bunter, blinking at Wharton and Vernon-Smith through wet spectacles. "You fat villain!" roared Wharton. "That's my mae you're wearing!" "Is it, old chap?" asked Bunter. "I didn't notice that it was yours when I borrowed it. If you can't lend a fellow a mae on a rainy day——" "Sheer off!" snapped Vernon-Smith.

take the boat round the cliffs and pick us up on the other side. We cut through Friardale Wood and get to the beach that way——"

"I've said I'm not going."

"Funk!"

Wharton's eye blazed. But he controlled his temper and tramped on more quickly.

Vernon-Smith followed him.

They were near the opening of the footpath now, through Friardale Wood, which was Wharton's way back to Greyfriars, and Vernon-Smith's way to the shore north of Pegg Bay, on the safe side of the jutting Shoulder.

Neither of them noticed, at the moment, a fat figure, in a muddy raincoat much too long, sitting on the stile, panting for breath, in the drizzle under the leafless trees.

As Wharton did not stop, the Bouncer grabbed him by the shoulder. With an angry exclamation, Wharton dashed his hand away.

"Will you stop?" hissed Vernon-Smith. "Listen to me! I keep on telling you that it's perfectly safe. Quelch is sticking at Pegg, and never dreaming that old Dave's gone out to pick us up along the beach. It's safe——"

"You know as well as I do that I don't care a straw whether it's safe or not!" snapped Wharton. "Tell all the lies you like—I'll tell none!"

"Beaks are fair game——"

"Oh, chuck it!"

"You can't lot me down! I can't go back to the school now for somebody with a little more pluck to come with me——"

"Nobody else is fool enough to come with you, anyhow. You asked a good many before you started! Redwing's

got too much sense, and Skinner's afraid, and——"

"And you're as afraid as Skinner."

"Will you shut up?"

"There's no time for me to pick up another man! I'd rather have taken Bunter than nobody——"

Harry Wharton gave a scoffing laugh.

"You want to show off, and have a witness that it's not all gammon," he said contemptuously, "and you think that's reason enough for me to tell barefaced lies to a man who trusts me!"

"Will you come?" snarled the Bouncer.

"No!"

"You rotten coward!"

Harry Wharton had held his temper in check so far. Now it blazed out. He turned on the taunting Bouncer and struck him across the face with the back of his hand.

Smack!

The next second, the Bouncer was leaping at him like a tiger and they were fighting.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Bunter the Bold!

"HE, he, he!"

Billy Bunter chortled.

Sitting on the stile, panting for breath, the fat Owl of the Remove was taking a much needed rest.

He had followed the two juniors' as far as that—crawling on their trail rather like a fat snail. But at that point, Bunter's wind had given out. He sat on the stile to rest and recover his wind, in a state of the deepest wrath and annoyance. He had no doubt that,

while he was sitting there, Wharton and Vernon-Smith had reached the boat and started—leaving him out. So it was quite a surprise to Bunter to see the pair of them coming back, engaged in an angry argument as they came.

Bunter was amused.

These beasts had left him out. They had given him a long walk for nothing, with the prospect of another dreary tramp back to the school in the rain—all for nothing. So it was quite amusing to Bunter to see them punching one another's heads.

"He, he, he!" cackled the fat junior.

Hardly a dozen feet from him the two juniors were fighting furiously, heedless of the rain, slipping in wet mud.

Billy Bunter blinked at them through his big spectacles, grinned, and chortled.

"He, he, he! I say, you fellows, have you chucked it? He, he, he!"

There was a splashing bump as Vernon-Smith slipped over and went down, helped by a hefty punch that landed on his jaw.

He sat in the mud and panted.

"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter.

Harry Wharton glanced round at the fat junior. He had forgotten Bunter. The fat Owl grinned at him.

Vernon-Smith staggered to his feet. He gave Wharton a bitter, evil look. Then he, too, glanced at Bunter.

"This will keep, Wharton!" he said between his teeth. "We'll finish this another time!"

"Any time you like!" said Wharton disdainfully.

The Bouncer picked up his bag, which he had dropped when the fight began, and hurried on to the stile where Bunter sat.

Billy Bunter's eyes, and spectacles, fastened on that bag at once. The fat junior's interest was entirely centred in that bag of tuck.

"I say, Smithy—" he began. He kept a wary eye on the Bounder. Smithy had rolled him down the Remove staircase and tipped him over in a puddle—but Bunter was not the man to bear grudges—not against a fellow who had a bag of tuck! He was prepared to be friendly, if Smithy was—but he doubted whether Smithy was, so he was very wary.

And Smithy did not look good-tempered—he looked in his blackest mood. He had by no means had the best of that brief "scrap"—but he would have been glad to carry it on to the bitter end, but for other and more pressing matters. A scrap with Wharton could wait, but a trip to the sea-cave could not, unless Smithy was to return to the school and own up to an empty boast.

"Like to come, Bunter?" he asked.

"Eh?" ejaculated Bunter. "No larks, you know!" This was so very unexpected that the fat Owl was suspicious.

"Oh, don't be a fat fool, if you can help it!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "Wharton's got cold feet, and let me down! Like to come?"

"What-ho!" said Bunter promptly.

"Hold on, Bunter!" broke in Harry Wharton. "Don't play the goat, you fat ass! Quelch is at Pegg—"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

"We're going the other way!" said Vernon-Smith. "Old Trumper's getting his boat round for us."

"Oh! That's all right, then!" said Bunter. "I'll come! Like a shot! I say, what have you got in that bag, Smithy?"

"Hold on, you fat dummy!" said Harry. "You know that the sea-cave is out of bounds now, and it means a flogging if you're spotted."

"Fat lot I care for that!" jeered Bunter. "I've not got cold feet, old chap. No funk about me!"

Harry Wharton gave an angry laugh. Billy Bunter was about the last man in the Greyfriars Remove to take risks that the other fellows preferred to avoid—or to take risks at all, for that matter. Yet here was Bunter, recklessly prepared to join up with the Bounder and chance it. It was a case of fools rushing in where angels feared to tread.

But that bag of tuck drew Bunter like a magnet. Moreover, the fat and obtuse Owl never looked ahead. Bunter was not afraid of a flogging, as he declared, so long as the flogging was not actually in the offing! William George Bunter was, in fact, afraid of nothing, so long as there was nothing to be afraid of!

"Don't you worry, old bean," said Bunter airily. "I don't care tuppence for the beaks! Nor the prefects, either! Blow 'em! I say, what have you got in that bag, Smithy?"

"You fat chump—" snapped Harry.

"Oh, draw it mild!" said Bunter. "You needn't call a fellow names because he's got more pluck than you have! I ain't afraid, Smithy. I'll see you through, old chap! I say, what have you got in—"

"Look here, Bunter," said Harry quietly, "you were in the sea-cave with us last Wednesday when you cleared off in the boat and left us stranded. You got carried out to sea in the boat, and Bessie with you, and if a stranger hadn't swum out and saved you, what would have happened to you? Do you want to go into danger again?"

"Oh!" said Bunter.

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Apparently he didn't!

"Bunter won't clear off again in a hurry in a boat by himself!" sneered Vernon-Smith. "It's all right, Bunter! Old Trumper will be in the boat with us, and it will be safe as houses."

"Right!" said Bunter, reassured again. "Not that I care for danger, you know. In fact, I think a spot of danger makes a trip really interesting. What?"

"You fat fool!" roared Wharton.

"Yah!" retorted Bunter. "I haven't got cold feet, like you, Wharton! Besides, I wasn't in danger the other day, really. I hope I can manage a boat all right. That fellow Compton swam off to me and sailed the boat in, but I should have been all right if he hadn't barged in. A fellow with plenty of pluck, and presence of mind, and all that—"

"Look here, Bunter, come back to the school with me."

"I'll watch it!" grinned Bunter.

"Come on!" said Vernon-Smith.

He vaulted over the stile and started tramping up the drenched footpath. Billy Bunter rolled off the stile and followed him.

Harry Wharton stood looking after them. Smithy was taking Bunter with him, for no reason except that he wanted a witness to his exploit, knowing perfectly well that it might result in a flogging for the fat and fatuous Owl. For that, the Bounder cared nothing at all.

But the captain of the Remove had done all he could. He could not prevent Bunter from joining in Smithy's escapade, if he chose.

The Bounder glanced back at him with a sneering grin as he stood frowning at the stile.

"Come on, Bunter, old fat bean!" he said.

"What-ho!" said Bunter. "I say, Smithy, what have you got in that bag?"

They disappeared from Wharton's sight, through the dripping wood.

With a knitted brow, feeling utterly dissatisfied with everything generally, the captain of the Remove turned and walked back towards Cliff House.

He was in no hurry to return to Greyfriars, and face the questions of the Remove fellows and the sneers of some of them.

There was a gleam of sunshine through the watery clouds, and the rain was thinning. If Marjorie Hazeldene came out, he might find more agreeable company than the Bounder's till it was time to return to the school. So he walked back to Cliff House School, and dismissed the Bounder and all his works from mind.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Boy Who Searched the Beach!

"I SAY, Smithy—"

"Oh, shut up!"

"But I say, what have you got in that bag?"

It was a question of the deepest interest to Billy Bunter. Smithy did not even trouble to answer it.

There was no doubt that he was in a bad temper. There was rather a pain in his nose—the result of a punch! He was half regretting that he had not carried on with the scrap, though that would have meant throwing up his plans for the afternoon. He was irritated by Bunter's companionship—Bunter being about the last fellow in the Remove he would have chosen for a comrade in a reckless escapade.

And as he emerged from Friardale Wood he had spotted, in the distance,

a portly figure in a purple overcoat—and knew that Mr. Prout was not far away. If that old ass came along the beach, he might spot the juniors boarding old Trumper's boat, and in that case it was absolutely certain that he would mention it to Quelch.

However, the portly Fifth Form master disappeared in the drizzle, and Smithy hoped that he had not seen them from afar.

He tramped down to the beach, with Bunter puffing and blowing at his side—heedless of the fat Owl's repeated requests to go slower.

Smithy was fit as a fiddle, Bunter, as usual, was short of wind; and the Bounder had no consideration whatever to waste on a lame duck! He was taking Bunter with him, from what he regarded as necessity; but he was feeling more inclined to kick the fat junior than to accommodate his pace to Bunter's crawl.

A good deal of time had been expended by coming away from Pegg and rounding the Shoulder on the landward side. That meant less time to spend in the sea-cave when he got there. Smithy had intended to follow the secret passage as far as the school; but he was not likely to have time enough for that now, unless he cut call-over. He could hardly venture to do that, in the circumstances—which was an added irritation.

He tramped on savagely, heedless of Bunter.

The rain was still falling, though less heavily. A glimmer of sunshine was rather cheering. The sea boomed on the shingly beach, and broke in masses of spray on the rocks of the Shoulder. Outside the bay it was rather a perilous coast, and the Shoulder was now between them and Pegg Bay.

"Ow!" howled Bunter, as he slipped on a ridge of wet chalk, and sat down with a bump. "Ow! Wow!"

Vernon-Smith glared round at him. "What are you up to, you fat chump?"

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Give a fellow a hand up!"

"Go and eat coke!"

Smithy tramped on, and Bunter scrambled to his feet without a helping hand.

"Beast!" he gasped. "I say, Smithy, stop for me!"

Vernon-Smith did not stop. The fat junior panted and puffed after him.

Bunter was getting tired and breathless. Long walks did not agree with Bunter—especially in the rain and over wet sand and chalk. Bunter was getting peeved. He was beginning to doubt whether Smithy's bag of tuck was worth all this exertion. And the bad-tempered beast wouldn't even tell him what was in the bag—as if that was a trifle that did not matter! It mattered a lot to Bunter.

"Look here, Smithy—" he gasped.

"Oh, shut up!"

"Beast!"

But Vernon-Smith came to a halt at last. The rain had now nearly stopped, and the sky was clearing a good deal. It looked as if it might be a more or less fine afternoon, after all.

Standing on a ridge of chalk, the Bounder stared at the sea, past the jutting Shoulder, for old Trumper's boat. But it was not yet in sight. Smithy had to wait.

Bunter, glad of a halt for any reason or no reason, puffed and blew. It was by no means a warm day, but Billy Bunter's uncommon exertions had made him extremely warm. Perspiration rolled down his fat face and dimmed his big spectacles.

Vernon-Smith took off his raincoat

and folded it over his arm, and Bunter, after blinking up at the sky to make sure that the last drops had fallen, followed his example. It was a relief to get out of Wharton's raincoat, which flopped round his fat ankles, being about a foot too long for him.

"I say, Smithy—"

"Shut up!"

"Can you see the boat, you beast?"

"No, fathead!"

"What are you staring at, then?"

"There's somebody on the beach, fathead. If it should happen to be a Greyfriars prefect—"

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter.

Vernon-Smith had spotted a figure on the beach—the only one to be seen, that wet and dismal day.

The back was turned to him, but he could see that it was the figure of a boy, about the size of a Greyfriars senior.

The thought came into his mind that while Quelch was at Pegg, on one side of the Shoulder, some prefect of the Sixth might be keeping an eye open on the other side of the great cliff, for breakers of bounds. Some meddling cad, like Loder of the Sixth, for instance!

The Bounder watched the figure anxiously.

If it was as he feared, the game was up, for he could not enter Trumper's boat under the eye of authority. At Pegg, he had told Mr. Quelch that he had planned a sail on the bay—which the Remove master had doubted. But he could hardly tell a prefect that he was going for a sail at this spot, where a boat had to come round specially from Pegg.

The game was up if that fellow was a Sixth Form man of Greyfriars. And, in that case, he had brought Billy Bunter with him, not to witness his reckless daring, but to witness him backing out, and scuttling off at a prefect's order—quite an unpleasant thought to the Bounder.

"I say, what's the chap up to?" asked Bunter. Bunter had not seen the figure till Smithy pointed it out, but now his spectacles were fixed on it. "I say, he seems to be looking for something."

Smithy had already noticed that,

The fellow, whoever he was, wore a grey coat and a cap. He moved to and fro over the rugged beach, half bent, scanning the shingle and the clefts in the chalk rock—which were innumerable.

It looked as if he had dropped something, and was in search of it—rather a hopeless task in such a spot. Even a large article might very easily have got lost to sight.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed the Bounder suddenly.

The figure, moving round, turned its face towards the juniors. The sun was shining now through a rift in the clouds, and it shone full on a handsome, boyish face, with clear, keen eyes—not a face that Smithy had ever seen before.

It was certainly not the face of any Greyfriars fellow.

"It's all right!" said the Bounder, with a breath of relief. "Nobody that knows us!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He was blinking at the handsome face under the cap, with his little, round eyes almost bulging through his spectacles.

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter. "That chap!"

Vernon-Smith stared at him.

"Have you seen that chap before?" he asked.

"Yes, rather!" gasped Bunter. "That's him!"

"He? Who?"

"His name's Compton!" said Bunter. "That's the chap who swam out to the boat last Wednesday, when Bessie and I were—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Vernon-Smith.

He gazed at the stranger with renewed interest.

All Greyfriars knew of that perilous adventure of Billy Bunter's. The fat Owl was too obtuse to realise how much he owed to the fellow who had swam out from the Shoulder to save him. But every other fellow knew that Valentine Compton had taken his life in his hands when he started on that swim, and that, if he had not succeeded in reaching the drifting boat, he must have sunk to death in the sea.

He had reached it, and saved Bunter and Bessie; and Billy Bunter remembered the incident, chiefly because he had been fearfully, frightfully hungry when he got back to Greyfriars!

But the fat Owl knew that handsome face again at once. And Smithy was interested. With all his faults, Smithy had heaps of pluck, and he could admire pluck in others. And that fellow had risked his life to rescue strangers!

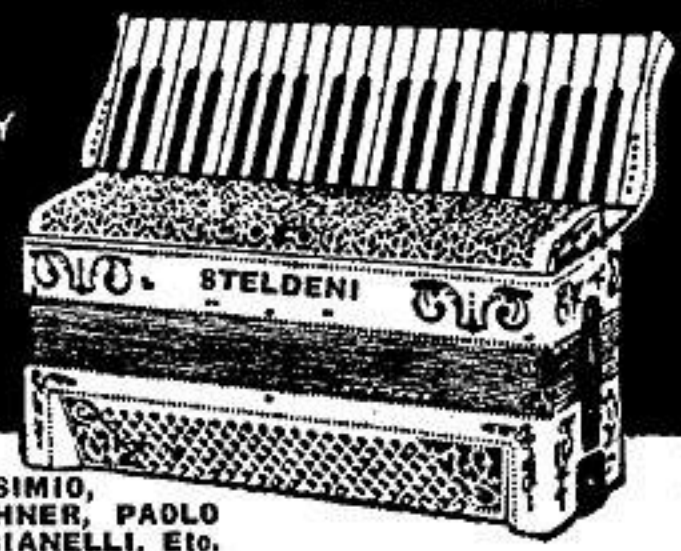
"I know him all right!" said Bunter. "He was on a yacht in the bay, you know, and afterwards he came to the sea-cave in a boat with his uncle. I think his uncle was skipper of the yacht. I heard them talking in their boat. His name's Valentine Compton. I heard his uncle say that he was an Old Boy of Greyfriars, and used to go to the cave—"

(Continued on next page.)

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"He seems to know you!" said Vernon-Smith.

The boy on the beach had caught sight of the two juniors. He gave a little start and straightened up instantly, almost as if he did not desire it to be observed that he had been in search of something.

Then he smiled as he looked at Bunter. Evidently he recognised the fat junior—perhaps as much by his extensive circumference as by his podgy features. He gave the fat Owl a nod.

"Chance to thank him for what he did for you the other day, Bunter!" said Vernon-Smith sarcastically.

"Oh, rot!" said Bunter. "He didn't do much. I expect I should have got back all right."

"You fat idiot!"

"Oh, really, Smithy, I know he kept out at sea hours and hours, though I kept on asking him to get me ashore, and I was fearfully hungry. I say, Smithy, that reminds me—what have you got in that bag?"

Without answering, Vernon Smith walked across towards the handsome stranger.

Bunter rolled after him.

He was not specially keen on speaking to the fellow who had saved him from the tide. He did not, as a matter of fact, think very much of Valentine Compton.

Compton had been a jolly long time getting Bunter and Bessie ashore in the drifting boat, and Bunter had got fearfully hungry; and he did not even understand that Compton had displayed great seamanship in getting the boat back to land at all. And at the best of times, gratitude was not tremendously developed in members of the Bunter clan.

Smithy was more interested in the fellow.

"Hallo!" he said cheerily. "Looking for something?"

"Eh—why?" asked Compton.

"Well, I've been watching you for ten minutes or so groping over the beach," answered Vernon-Smith, with a grin. "If you've lost something, I'll help you find it. I've got to wait here for a boat."

The keen grey eyes in the handsome face fixed on him very sharply for a moment. Then Valentine Compton nodded.

"Right-ho!" he said. "If you see a penknife lying about, give it to me. Not much chance of spotting it here, though, I'm afraid."

"Hardly. I'll look, though."

"I say, Smithy"—Bunter arrived, panting—"I say, if you're going to look for something, I'll mind that bag—"

"You won't!"

"Beast!"

"This is the chap you swam out for the other day, Compton," said the Bounder. "Your name's Compton, I think? Bunter says so."

"That's right!" Compton glanced at the panting fat Owl. "Feeling all right after your sea trip?" he asked, with a smile.

"Eh—oh, yes! I say, Smithy, what have you got—"

"Help to look for this chap's penknife, fathead, while we wait for the boat!" said Smithy.

He moved along the beach, Compton doing the same.

Billy Bunter blinked after both of them with a devastating blink. Bunter was tired already, and certainly not inclined to join in a search for a lost penknife or anything else.

The Bounder—like the distrustful beast he was—kept his bag in his hand

instead of leaving it in Bunter's charge. No doubt he foresaw what would happen to its contents if the Owl of the Remove took charge of it.

"Beast!" breathed Bunter.

He leaned against a chalky rock to rest.

He threw Harry Wharton's raincoat down on the rock while he rested his fat limbs. It had already collected a good deal of mud, and perhaps Bunter saw no reason why it should not collect a little more, and a few stains of wet chalk. It was not Bunter's raincoat!

Leaning on the rock, the fat Owl puffed for breath, and mopped the perspiration from his fat face with a grubby handkerchief. And a few minutes later the patched old brown sail of Dave Trumper's boat came dancing into view round the jutting Shoulder.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

A Narrow Escape!

VALENTINE COMPTON stood gazing at the sail as it danced on the sea.

Vernon-Smith glanced at him sideways, with a curious expression on his face.

There had been a great deal of talk at Greyfriars on the subject of Bunter's gallant rescuer. Coker & Co. of the Fifth had seen him start on that desperate swim to the drifting boat—a swim that the most powerful swimmer in the school could not have brought off. Everybody admired his pluck, and most of the fellows would have been glad to see him—but nobody expected to see him.

The yacht Firefly had put into Pegg Bay for a single day. Compton had for some reason landed on the rocks at the foot of the Shoulder, and there he had seen Bunter's peril and gone to the rescue. He had had to sail the boat as far down the coast as Hawkscliff before he could get ashore, and there, after getting Billy Bunter and Bessie a lift home in a cart, he had gone on his way, wherever that might have led him.

The Firefly had not reappeared on the coast since then, and it was a surprise to Smithy to see the fellow there at all.

Herbert Vernon-Smith was not in the least afflicted by Bunter's vice of inquisitiveness. But he was an observant fellow, and as keen as a razor.

He was at the present moment rather cynically amused.

He knew, from the first quick look the fellow had given them, that he was not pleased to see anyone on that lonely beach. Although the Bounder had offered to help him in his search for the lost article, he would have preferred to be alone there. Smithy knew that.

He noted that Compton, who had hitherto been searching the beach with such keenness that he had not observed the approach of the juniors, had lost all his keenness in the search.

He was glancing about him in a desultory way, that was all; he was, in fact, keeping up the appearance of still searching without actually doing so.

And now that the boat was in sight, he gave up even that pretence of searching, and stood looking at the patched old sail as it danced in to the shore.

It was no business of Smithy's, and he did not concern himself about it; but he had a very strong suspicion that it was not merely a penknife that young Compton was looking for, and that, whatever it was, he did not want to find it while other eyes were on him.

That was very curious, to say the least; and it amused Smithy to think that the fellow fancied that he was pulling the wool over his eyes.

"That's the same boat," Compton remarked—"the one that young ass was adrift in the other day!"

"Yes. That's old Dave Trumper in it," said Vernon-Smith. "It belongs to him. The fellows had it out on their own the other day, and that fat chump cleared off with it, and left them stranded in the sea-cave."

Compton looked at him.

"I never knew that," he said. "I saw that young ass in the cave when I went in with my uncle in the boat from the yacht. I saw no one else there but the schoolgirl who was with him—his sister, I think he told me."

"The rest of the party were exploring the cave," grinned the Bounder. "When they came back, the Bunters were gone in the boat. They were jolly nearly landed with a night out, as nobody knew that they were there. It was close on bed-time when Bunter got back to Greyfriars. If they hadn't found the secret passage—"

"The what?"

"There's a jolly old secret passage leading from the cave as far as the school, and they tumbled into it," said Vernon-Smith. "That's why I'm going there now—to explore it. You can bet every man at Greyfriars is fearfully keen on giving it the once-over."

Compton looked at him hard.

"A secret passage—from the cave to your school!" he said. "Are you pulling my leg, young 'un?"

"Not at all. It's there all right, and they came back by it," said Smithy. "It's always been known to exist, but nobody knew where to put a finger on it till Bob Cherry fell into it head-first—the sort of thing he would do!"

"It's a good distance from the shore up to the school."

"By the roads, yes; but not more than a mile as the crow flies," said Vernon-Smith. "The smugglers used it once upon a time."

Compton started.

"Smugglers?" he repeated.

"There used to be lots of smugglers about here—more than a hundred years ago, of course," said Smithy. "Before my time!" he added, with a grin.

Compton laughed.

"I say, that's awfully interesting about that secret passage," he said. "You're going into the cave to look at it in that boat?"

"Yes. That's why I'm here."

"Like to give me a lift in your boat and let me see it?"

"Glad to," answered the Bounder—"that is," he added, with a sarcastic grin, "if you're not keen on going on looking for that penknife you've lost?"

Compton did not appear to hear that remark. His gaze was turned on the boat again. Dave Trumper was bringing it in with the oars under the lee of a jutting mass of chalk. The boat ran in under the rock and disappeared from sight.

"Trot down to it, if you'd like to come," said Vernon-Smith.

And Compton walked down to the water, while the Bounder turned to wave his hand to Bunter, still leaning on the rock at a distance.

"Come on, fatty!" he called out.

The next moment he gave a jump.

At a distance, beyond the rock on which Bunter was leaning, a portly figure in a purple overcoat loomed into view.

"Prout!" breathed the Bounder.

It was the Fifth Form master, coming



"Safe as houses to go to the sea-cave, old bean!" said Vernon-Smith. "Not likely to be a beak or a prefect about this weather, what?" "Hardly!" agreed Harry Wharton. "Wharton! Vernon-Smith!" barked a sharp voice. "Oh, gad!" gasped the Bounder. He spun round and stared at Mr. Quelch, his Form-master. Wharton drew a deep breath.

on slowly and majestically, rather like a galleon under full sail.

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth.

He had wondered whether Prout had spotted him coming out of Friardale Wood and heading for the beach. He fancied now that Prout had. And there was no doubt that Prout must have seen the boat running in to the shore, though it was now hidden under the jutting chalk.

"Bunter! Quick, you fat fool!" snarled the Bounder.

Prout was still too far off to hear, but any moment the Fifth Form master's eyes might turn on him.

At the distance he would hardly recognise him. Smithy was not quite so conspicuous an object as the portly Form-master in his remarkable overcoat. But Smithy was anxious not to be seen at all.

He cut back towards Bunter, panting. The fat Owl blinked at him through his big spectacles.

"I say, Smithy, what have you got—" he began.

"Quick, you fat Owl!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Old Prout's coming down to the beach!" hissed Smithy. "Do you want to be spotted, you fat fool?"

"Oh crikey! I say, leggo! Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter, as the Bounder grabbed him by a fat arm and fairly dragged him away down the beach. "I say—"

"Quick!" hissed the Bounder.

"But I—I say—" gasped Bunter. "Oh crikey!" He stumbled as the Bounder dragged him fiercely onward, and howled: "Beast! Leggo! Ow!"

Still dragging at the stumbling, squeaking Owl, Smithy cast a quick glance over his shoulder. A ridge of chalk shut him off from Prout's view;

over it, in the distance, he had a glimpse of Prout's hat.

"Keep your silly head low!" he hissed.

"Ow! Beast! I've knocked my knee! I—ow!"

Bunter stumbled wildly along, over wet sand and chalk, with the Bounder dragging savagely at his fat arm. They reached the boat, under the lee of the jutting chalk. Compton was already on board, and the Bounder hurled the fat Owl headlong in.

"Wow!" hurled Bunter, as he sprawled.

"Shove off, Trumper!" panted Smithy, as he scrambled in after Bunter. "Get going—quick!"

"Ay, ay, sir!" said old Dave, and he shoved off, the boat rocking out into deep water.

Bunter sat up, spluttering.

"Ow! I say, Smithy! Ow!"

"Shut up, fathead!"

"But I say—ow!—I've left my raincoat there. Ow! I say, I shall have to go back for it! Wow! Wharton will kick up a row if it's lost! Wow!"

"Oh, you born idiot!" hissed the Bounder.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"It's too late now, chump! Keep low under the gunwale, fathead! Do you want Prout to spot you? He will be watching the boat."

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter huddled low, the Bounder crouching at his side. Old Dave gave them a look, but he was busy with the boat as the sail picked up the wind, and if he was puzzled—as no doubt he was—he made no remark.

Valentine Compton, sitting in the stern sheet, stared at the two juniors and laughed.

"Is this a game of hide-and-seek?" he asked.

"There's somebody on the beach I don't want to see us," answered the Bounder. "Can you see him? Fat old sportsman in a purple coat. Is he looking this way?"

Compton laughed again as he glanced across the rolling water and the beach beyond at a majestic figure.

Mr. Prout had come to a halt, and was staring seaward at the dancing boat.

"Yes," said Compton.

"Well, he can't see us, I fancy, and his eyesight's none too good, anyhow. It doesn't matter if he sees you. You're not a Greyfriars man." The Bounder chuckled. "We're all right."

"Breaking bounds, or what?" asked Compton. "Is that a man from your school?"

"Sort of."

"Oh dear!" gasped Bunter. "I say, if old Prout spots us he'll tell Quelch, and—and— Oh crikey!"

"He won't spot us now, fathead! We're all right," said Vernon-Smith.

He lifted his head over the gunwale. The beach was far off now—Prout a purple spot on it.

"Safe as houses!" said Smithy cheerfully. "A jolly narrow escape, but a miss is as good as a mile! Right as rain now, fatty!"

"I—I say, Smithy!" gasped Bunter.

"Well, what, fathead?"

"What have you got in that bag?"

"You blithering idiot!"

The boat danced on, and Dave Trumper ran it into the rocky channel that led to the sea-cave under the Shoulder.

Smithy grinned as he dropped into the seat beside Compton.

"Right as rain!" he said.

Prout had seen neither of them. He was sure of that. It mattered nothing

(Continued on page 16.)

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THEY CALLED HIM A FUNK!



(Continued from page 13.)

if he saw Dave Trumper and Compton. It was, as Smithy said, right as rain, and a miss was as good as a mile. He was feeling quite bucked as the boat ran into the cove on the flowing sea. So was Bunter—safe from Prout's eye, and concentrating his fat thoughts on the bag of tuck, soon to be sampled.

But neither, perhaps, would have felt so easy had Mr. Prout's further proceedings been visible to them.

The Fifth Form master stopped at the rock on which Bunter had been leaning. He picked up the raincoat that Bunter had left lying there when Smithy dragged him away. All such articles at Greyfriars had to have the owner's name on them. Prout looked for the tag bearing the owner's name, and read "H. Wharton."

Prout snorted.

"One of Quelch's boys!" said Prout. "I had no doubt of it. Undoubtedly one of Quelch's boys!"

And Mr. Prout put that raincoat over his arm as he rolled away.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

At Last!

"WHAT have you got—"

"Dry up!"

"In that bag?"

Vernon-Smith did not trouble to answer.

Billy Bunter had asked that question twenty times at least. At the twenty-first repetition he received no more satisfaction than before.

The Bounder and Valentine Compton stepped ashore in the sea-cave where the boat stopped at a ledge of rock over high-water mark. Bunter remained in the boat. He had no intention of clambering over rugged rocks and fissures, tumbling into chalk pits, or tramping along clammy underground passages. Such strenuous stunts appealed to most of the Remove fellows, but not at all to William George Bunter. The fat Owl's whole interest in the trip was centred in Smithy's bag and what it contained. That, and that alone, had drawn Billy Bunter into this reckless adventure.

"Look here, Smithy, I'm hungry!" hooted Bunter.

Smithy did not "look there." He did not heed the Owl of the Remove at all. He moved up the sea-cave with Compton.

Bunter was there simply as a witness to the Bounder's exploit. As a companion he was of no use whatever. Smithy was very glad to exchange him for Compton. He ruthlessly disregarded the indignant Owl.

"This is the jolly old place," he said. "Our beak's put it out of bounds for Greyfriars fellows, but I'm jolly well going over it, all the same!"

Compton glanced at him with a rather grave expression.

"You're a young ass, then," he said

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blantly. "A fellow at school ought to toe the line."

"Thank you for nothing, old bean!" said Smithy. "I've never toed the line yet, and I'm not beginning now. Did you toe the line at school?"

"I haven't been to school since my prep school. If I had, I hope I should have toed the line."

"Tastes differ," drawled the Bounder. "I rather like kicking over the traces and giving the beaks a fall now and then. Never mind that now. This way to the secret passage."

"I say, Smithy," yelled Bunter, "leave the bag here!"

"So that you can scoff the tuck, you fat fraud? Wait till we get back."

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

The Bounder laughed and walked on with Compton.

Billy Bunter glared after him from the boat with a devastating glare, which produced no effect on the back of the Bounder's head.

Old Dave Trumper sat on the gunwale to wait. Billy Bunter sat in the stern seat in a state of indignation to which no words could possibly have done justice. In a few minutes the explorers disappeared up the cave, the gleam of Smithy's electric torch vanishing in distant shadows.

The Bounder kept his eyes well about him as he tramped up the cave. He knew, from the description given by the Famous Five, where to look for the entrance of the secret tunnel. But it was not easy to spot in the shadowy, extensive cavern, with its rugged walls rived by innumerable fissures and cavities.

Had one of the Co. been with him, as a guide, it would have been easy enough. Had not Harry Wharton, as he was pleased to consider it, let him down! He scowled as he thought of that.

Again and again, he flashed the light into some fissure in the rocky walls, and found nothing. But suddenly he uttered an exclamation:

"Here we are!"

He turned the light into a deep cavity in the rock.

Compton glanced into it with an obviously keen interest.

The light gleamed into a shadowy pit. As the Bounder turned it downward, a bed of sand at the bottom was revealed, with ample signs on it of having been recently trampled by many feet.

"That the place?" asked Compton.

"That's it! Drop in here!" said the Bounder. "It's an easy drop!"

"Not so easy to get out again, I should think."

"They found iron pegs in the rock for climbing out. Just as the jolly old smugglers left it, a century or two ago," grinned Smithy. "Look!"

He held the light over the verge, and it was possible to discern the pegs projecting from the rock. It was easy enough for any active fellow to climb out of the pit by holding to the pegs.

"All serene—what?" chuckled Smithy. "Drop in, old bean!"

He dropped into the pit, landing on his feet on the soft bed of sand.

Compton dropped after him.

"Here's the jolly old tunnel!" said Vernon-Smith.

His light gleamed into an arched opening in the side of the pit, hidden from above by bulging rock.

"By gad!" said Compton, his eyes gleaming.

It was clear that he was deeply, intensely interested in that strange discovery.

"Follow your leader!" said Smithy.

He led the way into the tunnel with the light. Compton followed at his heels. The tunnel through the chalk led them into a stone-walled passage.

Smithy flashed the light over the damp, stone blocks of the walls. Compton looked about him with keen interest.

"And that leads to the school?" he asked.

"That's the way they came out of the cove last Wednesday," answered Vernon-Smith. "It's close on a mile to the school. At the other end they found a spiral stair, leading up to the ground level, and a door they couldn't open. They had to kick up a fearful row to make themselves heard. And you can bet it was a surprise in the House when they did." He laughed. "There's a secret door in the library passage. Nobody over knew it; but old Quelch spotted it, through those fellows kicking up a row on the other side."

"I'd like to see it."

"No time to go through now," said Smithy. "If I cut call-over, Quelch will smell a mouse, and I shall be up before the Head."

"Couldn't you get in that end, as you say those fellows did?"

"Hardly. There's an oak door, bolted on the House side, before you get to the panel in the library passage."

"I see. Better get back, then."

Valentine Compton stood for a few moments staring along the dim, stone passage. Then he turned back with the Bounder.

They returned to the rocky pit, and found it easy enough to climb back to the cavern by the iron pegs in the rock.

"I'm jolly well going through it another day!" said Vernon-Smith, as they walked back towards the cave-mouth. "Too late to-day, but another time—"

"Didn't you say it's out of your school bounds?"

"Fat lot I care about that!"

Compton made no reply to that; and they walked on to the cave-mouth, and the boat.

Billy Bunter greeted the Bounder with an almost ferocious blink. The explorers had been more than an hour absent, and every minute of that hour had seemed like a whole hour in itself to the hungry Owl.

But the bag was opened at last. And the clouds rolled by from Billy Bunter's fat visage as he beheld the contents. At long, long last, there was an answer to that urgent question—what had Smithy got in the bag?

Gobble, gobble, gobble!

Billy Bunter started at once.

Smithy had packed the bag on a liberal scale, on the chance of taking a party with him to the sea-cave, so there was plenty, even for Bunter. Perhaps he felt a qualm of alarm when Smithy invited Compton to join in the picnic—an invitation that the handsome stranger accepted with a cheery nod and a smile—and another qualm when Smithy handed a share out to old Dave. But if Bunter had rivals, he beat them all in point of speed.

Smithy and Compton talked while they ate; but from Bunter there came nothing in the way of conversation, his fat jaws were too busy for that. Bunter's contribution was an incessant sound like a turkey gobbling.

And that cheery sound lasted till it was time to go. And when the boat ran out of the sea-cave again, Billy Bunter was still gobbling. That well-packed bag was quite empty, when at last Bunter ceased to gobble. Bunter

on the other hand, was far from empty—in fact, he had rather a feeling of being, perhaps, a little too full. From Billy Bunter's point of view, at least, that trip out of bounds had been a complete success.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Prout Butts In!

"MY dear Quelch—"

Mr. Quelch barely suppressed a grunt.

It was nearly time for call-over, and the Remove master was to take roll in Hall. In the meantime, he was enjoying the warmth of a glowing fire in his study—very grateful and comforting after an afternoon out of doors in November. He heard the elephantine tread of Mr. Prout in the passage, and hoped that it would pass his study. Greyfriars masters lived in a state of dread of Prout dropping into their studies for a chat.

That elephantine tread did not pass Quelch's door. It stopped at that door, which opened, to reveal the portly Prout.

Quelch breathed hard. Prout had come in, of course, to talk. And the Remove master's only comfort was that roll-call was soon due, and would interrupt Prout.

He noticed, without heeding much, that the Fifth Form master was looking extremely grave. Prout had a way of looking portentous about nothing in particular. He noticed, too, that Prout had a boy's raincoat over his arm, damp with rain, which made him wonder a little.

"I have, my dear Quelch, a somewhat serious report to make to you," said Mr. Prout ponderously.

Quelch's eyes glinted. He had come back from his walk with several twinges of rheumatism, due to the rainy weather. If Prout had chosen that inauspicious moment to make some complaint about the Remove, Quelch was ready to be unpleasant.

"Indeed!" he yapped.

"Far be it from me," said Prout, "to overstep the province of another member of Dr. Locke's staff—far indeed! But in a serious matter such as this, my dear Quelch, a direct disregard of the headmaster's orders—"

"Please come to the point, Prout!" said Mr. Quelch tartly. "If you have any complaint to make of any member of my Form—"

"Nothing of the kind, Quelch! I feel it my duty to bring this matter to your notice, that is all. The headmaster having, very properly, placed the caves at Pegg out of school bounds, I feel sure that you would scarcely approve of boys of your Form directly disregarding such an order—"

Mr. Quelch's eyes glinted. He remembered Vernon-Smith and Wharton at Pegg that afternoon. Wharton, he was certain, had kept his word, but the Boulder—he knew exactly what reliance was to be placed on that member of his Form.

"If you have seen anything of the kind, Prout—"

"I have, sir," said Prout. "During my walk this afternoon, I noticed two junior boys coming out of Friardale Wood, and taking the direction of the beach, on the northern side of the Shoulder—"

Mr. Quelch started. Was it possible—was it barely possible—that Wharton and Vernon-Smith, stopped on the Pegg side, had gone the other way to the sea-cave?

"Remove boys!" he rapped.

"At the distance, sir, I could not be sure of that," said Mr. Prout. "But, at all events, juniors. On that point I have no doubt."

"In all probability, Fourth Form boys—"

"I think not, sir. I may mention that I had already seen Wharton and Vernon-Smith going out of gates, and Wharton answered a question I put to him with deliberate impertinence. In fact, he refused to answer me, stating that he would answer his own Form-master, if questioned."

Wharton was within his rights in making such an answer, sir," said Mr. Quelch grimly. "I see no reason whatever why you should question boys of my Form."

"Really, Mr. Quelch—"

"Really, Mr. Prout—"

Prout breathed hard. Far as it was from him to overstep another master's province, he was continually doing so; and a master like Quelch was likely to snub him for his pains. Prout did not like being snubbed, earnestly as he asked for it.

"I regarded Wharton's answer, sir, as evasive, as well as impertinent!" he boomed. "And I had little doubt—no doubt, sir—that he was going out with the intention of disregarding the headmaster's order. And when, some considerable time later, I saw two junior boys heading for the beach, I had no doubt that he and his companion were carrying out that intention. I followed those two boys to the beach near the Shoulder, sir."

"That beach is not out of school bounds, Mr. Prout."

"I am aware of that, sir. But when I saw a boat run in I had no doubt why they were there. I did not actually see them step into the boat, as it was hidden from my sight by rocks; but undoubtedly they did so, for I failed to find them on the beach at all."

"Indeed!"

"I saw the boat put to sea again and sail round the Shoulder," pursued Mr. Prout. "I could not clearly discern who was in it at the distance, but there was at least one boy, as well as the fisherman who was sailing it. Others may have been on board, out of my view; I can make no statement as to that. But one boy certainly was in the boat."

"You did not recognise him?"

"At the distance—no."

"Then why do you imagine that it was a Remove boy?"

"Because, sir, he left his raincoat behind," said Mr. Prout. "I already had no doubt as to Wharton's intentions. His companions may have left him—I cannot say. They were both out of my sight for a considerable time, and Vernon-Smith may have gone elsewhere. I make no statement as to that. But Wharton—"

"I cannot believe—"

"Here, sir, is the raincoat the junior left behind," said Mr. Prout with dignity. "I came on it thrown over a rock after the boat had gone. The rain had ceased some time previously, and the boy had naturally taken off his raincoat when the sun came out. He may have forgotten it after laying it on the rock; or more probably, to my mind, he caught sight of me in the distance, and made his escape so quickly in the boat that he had to leave the coat behind. I cannot say. At all events, sir, I found the coat and brought it back with me to the school—and here, sir, it is."

Mr. Prout laid the damp raincoat on the Remove master's table.

A glance at the tag with the name on it showed Mr. Quelch to whom it belonged, as it had shown Prout on the beach.

The Remove master compressed his lips.

"That is Wharton's raincoat," he said.

"Precisely, sir. He was wearing a raincoat when he went out of gates, under my eyes and refused to tell me where he was going. This is the coat."

Mr. Quelch's lips set harder. He did not need telling that; he had seen his head boy in a raincoat at Pegg.

And this was Wharton's raincoat—indubitable evidence that the wearer thereof had gone round the Shoulder from the landward side and taken a boat there.

"This boy is, I understand, head boy of your Form, sir," said Mr. Prout. "Such an act of direct defiance and disobedience on the part of a head boy—"

Quelch's eyes glistened. If his head boy had been guilty of such an act, Quelch was the man to deal with him; but he was quite aware that Prout was deeply annoyed and incensed by Wharton's curt answer to him at the gate, and that his view was coloured by that annoyance.

"You will, I presume, take the boy to his headmaster, Quelch—"

"I shall question Wharton, Mr. Prout. You will oblige me by leaving the matter entirely in my hands."

"In such a very serious matter, sir—"

boomed Prout.

"I repeat, sir—"

The clang of a bell interrupted—perhaps, rather fortunately.

Mr. Quelch rose to his feet.

"That is the bell for calling-over, Mr. Prout. I am due in Hall," he said curtly, and he left the study without waiting for a reply.

Prout grunted and rolled after him.

Prout was regarded in the Fifth as not a bad old bean. The Fifth were right; he was, in fact, quite a good old bean. But Prout's sense of dignity—not to say self-importance—was tremendously developed. Impertinence from a Lower boy was simply intolerable to Prout, and Wharton had as good as told him to mind his own business—a thing Prout seldom did, and never wanted to do.

He was deeply, intensely annoyed with Wharton of the Remove. That, of course, would not have made him unjust. But it made him extremely keen to see strict justice very strictly administered. He was far from satisfied with the way Quelch had received his portentous report.

Still, even Quelch could not disregard plain evidence—and the evidence of the lost raincoat was overwhelming.

In Hall, Prout looked at the Remove, while Mr. Quelch called the names. He granted when Harry Wharton answered "Adsum" to his name. The young rascal had got back in time for roll-call, then! No doubt he was quite unaware that his raincoat had been found by a Greyfriars master, and never dreamed that his delinquency was known.

Every man in the Remove answered to his name, Vernon-Smith winking at the other fellows as he did so, and Billy Bunter gasping out "Sum" breathlessly.

Bunter had had a long walk back to the school, and, with most of the contents of Smithy's lunch-bag packed inside, he had found it exhausting. Bunter had tottered into Hall in time for calling-over, gasping rather like a fish out of water.

Harry Wharton certainly had no idea

that no was suspected of any delinquency. He answered quite cheerfully to his name, and did not even suspect that Prout's eye was on him grimly from a distance.

But that eye was on him, rather like the eye of a basilisk. Prout was, in fact, so interested in a delinquent in another Form that it never occurred to him that there might be delinquents in his own who were worth watching. Mr. Prout spent so much time minding other people's business that he hardly left himself enough to mind his own. Prout would have been quite surprised to learn that Hilton and Price of the Fifth had spent the afternoon playing billiards at the Three Fishers. He would not have been pleased to learn that Coker of the Fifth had gone about twenty miles out of school bounds, collecting mud on his motor-bike. But Prout was not likely to learn these things, or suspect them, while he concentrated on things that did not concern him.

When the roll had been called, and the school dismissed, Prout joined Mr. Quelch.

The knitted brow and glinting eye of the Remove master conveyed no warning to Prout.

"My dear Quelch, if you desire me to accompany you to the Head—"

"I desire nothing of the kind, Prout!"

"My time, sir, is at your disposal in this extremely serious matter," said Prout, with dignity.

Quelch did not answer that in words; he grunted.

Prout coloured with vexation. He did not like being grunted at.

"I am bound to say, Quelch, that an act which amounts to direct and deliberate defiance of the headmaster—" Prout boomed. "Such an act, sir, on the part of a boy in your Form—"

"Boys in my Form, sir, are under my authority!" Quelch almost snarled. "I will request your assistance, Prout, as soon as I feel the need of it! At present, such is not the case."

"My dear Quelch—" boomed Prout.

Mr. Quelch whisked out of Hall, and left the master of the Fifth booming.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Funk!

"WHARTON funk'd it!"

"He, he, he!"

The remark came from the Bounder; the cackle from Billy Bunter.

Most of the Remove were in the Rag after calling-over.

Harry Wharton was with the Co., in a cheerful mood.

After the rain that afternoon he had met Marjorie and Clara of Cliff House, had had a walk with them, and returned to Greyfriars with most of his annoyance walked off. The Co. were also in a cheery mood. Frank Nugent had been helping Wibley of the Remove with some of his theatrical stunts; Hurree Janset Ram Singh had written a long letter, in a language that made Remove fellows dizzy to look at it, to his respected relative the Jam Bahadur, at Bhanipur; and Bob and Johnny had joined some strenuous fellows in pick-up football after the rain—which made them fearfully muddy, but made them feel good. And all the Co. were glad to learn that their leader had not, after all, gone out of bounds with Smithy.

Harry Wharton wondered whether Smithy would renew the row when he came in, and hoped not. He did not

want a scrap with the Bounder if it could be helped, especially in view of the fact that Smithy was a tower of strength in the Remove football team. He was prepared to meet Vernon-Smith more than half-way if Smithy chose to let the matter drop.

Smithy's remark made in a loud tone to reach all ears in the Rag, showed how little the Bounder intended to let it drop.

Wharton's eyes flashed as he heard it. Some of the fellows laughed. Skinner & Co. glanced at him to see how he would take it.

The amiable Skinner was quite ready to cast doubt on the Bounder's exploit that afternoon if there was room for doubt. But as Billy Bunter had been with Smithy in the forbidden cave there was, of course, no room for doubt.

Bunter was bragging right and left of his nerve and daring in breaking bounds, regardless of beaks. Indeed, to listen to Bunter, one might have supposed that the whole trip was Bunter's doing, and Smithy merely an "also ran." But the fat Owl's chin-wag proved, at least, that Smithy had made his boast good and gone to the sea-cave.

There was no room in that direction for Skinner's jeers. But the excellent Skinner did not mind much at whom he jeered so long as he jeered at somebody. He fastened on Smithy's declaration that Wharton had funk'd it, and let him down, rather like a dog on a bone.

Frank Nugent touched his chum on the arm as Wharton turned towards the Bounder and the group of fellows surrounding him.

"Don't bother about that swanking ass, old chap!" murmured Frank.

"I'm not bothering about him. But if he doesn't shut up I'll shut him up fast enough!" said Wharton between his set lips.

"Tell us about it, Smithy!" said Skinner. "We all thought that Wharton had gone with you. What scared him off?"

"Quelch!" answered Smithy. "The old gorgon was on the watch at Pegg. I took Bunter with me, instead. He had more nerve than Wharton!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The idea of Billy Bunter having more nerve than Wharton made the Remove fellows chortle.

Billy Bunter blinked round him through his big spectacles with quite a vaunting air!

"I say, you fellows, I jumped at it!" he said. "No funk about me, I hope! You were afraid to go, Skinner—"

"You fat ass!"

"Well, I heard Smithy ask you, and you wouldn't! You were funky, too, weren't you, Redwing?"

Tom Redwing laughed.

"You can think so if you like, old fat man!" he answered.

Redwing was not deeply worried by the fat Owl's opinion.

"Smithy knew where to come for a plucky chap to see him through!" said Bunter. "Pluck's my long suit, really! Who cares for beaks?"

"Is that Quelch coming in?" asked Peter Todd, glancing round.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter, in sudden alarm.

Pluck, although his long suit, deserted him on the spot.

He spun round towards the door, like a fat humming-top. He gasped with relief as he saw that it was only Bolsover major coming in.

"You beast, Toddy!" he gasped. "Making a fellow jump—"

"So you do care for beaks, after all?" grinned Peter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Rats! Who cares for Quelch?" said Bunter, valiant once more, now that he was sure that Quelch was not in the offing. "Fat lot I care for beaks! I jolly well backed Smithy up when Wharton funk'd and let him down. Didn't I, Smithy?"

"You did!" said the Bounder.

"What utter rot!" remarked Lord Mauleverer. "How did you get Bunter along, Smithy? Did you hold a jam tart just in front of his nose?"

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"Smithy had a bag of tuck," said Squiff. "I spotted it—and so did Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, Bunter came, anyhow!" said Vernon-Smith. "Wharton chuck'd it from pure funk! Quelch frightened him off, and he let me down."

Every eye in the Rag turned on Harry Wharton.

Most of the fellows knew that he had started with Vernon-Smith for the sea-cave, and were surprised to learn that he had not carried on with it.

"Why did you chuck it, Wharton?" asked Hazeldene.

"Echo answers why!" grinned Skinner.

"It was a rotten idea," said Tom Brown. "Wharton oughtn't to have gone, in the first place. But, having started—"

"Might have seen it through," said Bolsover major.

"Lots of people suffer from cold feet in November!" remarked Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton breathed hard.

"I'll tell you men why I chuck'd it," he said. "Quelch asked me out plain whether I was going to the smugglers' cave. I had to say yes or no. Smithy didn't want me to say yes, I fancy."

"Ha, ha, ha! Not likely!"

"And, as I said no, I couldn't go! Smithy can please himself, but I can't and won't tell rotten lies!" snapped Wharton. "There's the long and the short of it. Having said so, I had to cut it out. I'll go another time, if that swanking ass wants to show off, with a witness to prove that he did it!"

"I cannot tell a lie!" sighed Skinner.

"He did it with his little hatchet, you fellows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the Removes.

"Any excuse is better than none, isn't it?" remarked Snoop, with a giggle.

"Another time will be long in coming, I think!" sneered the Bounder. "Easy enough to gas! You funk'd it—"

Harry Wharton clenched his hands and made a stride towards the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith faced him with a cool sneer. He was quite ready to renew the scrap that had been left unfinished in Pegg Lane. The fact that he was hardly a match for the captain of the Remove made no difference to Smithy. He had tried his luck more than once, and failed, but he was always ready to try it again.

Tom Redwing hastily interposed.

"Look here, shut up, Smithy!" he exclaimed. "You know perfectly well that Wharton did not funk—"

"I know he did!" answered the Bounder coolly.

"Stand aside, Redwing!" said Harry quietly.

"Yes, get out of the way," said the Bounder. "That dear man isn't afraid of me, though he's fearfully afraid of Quelch—"

"Rotten funk!" said Billy Bunter, with a scornful blink at his Form captain. "Sneaking funk! Yah!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Harry Wharton pushed Redwing aside, with a blaze in his eyes.

At that moment there was a warning yell from a junior near the door:

"Ware prefects!" Wingate of the Sixth came into the Rag.

Harry Wharton dropped his hands. The Greyfriars captain glanced round. "Wharton here? Oh, here you are! You're wanted in your Form-master's study, Wharton!"

"Oh, all right!" The captain of the Remove left the Rag. He left in a buzz. His cheeks burned as he went.

He knew that he could not have acted otherwise than as he had done. His friends agreed with him, and were, indeed, extremely glad that he had done so. But there was no doubt that a good many fellows took the Bounder's view. It was a disagreeable position, and the sardonic Bounder evidently intended to make the most of it.

Harry was feeling far from amiable as he headed for masters' studies, to see what Quelch wanted, and his manner could not possibly have been described as meek or respectful when Mr. Prout stepped in his way and told him to stop.

"Wharton—" began Prout ponderously.

"Will you let me pass, sir, please?" said Harry.

"I desire to know," boomed Prout, "whether you have yet been called to account for a deliberate and direct act of— Bless my soul!"

What Prout was driving at Wharton did not know. Neither did he want to know. He walked round Prout and walked on.

Prout stared after him. "Wharton!" he gasped. "Impertinent boy, do you hear me?"

The impertinent boy heard, but did not heed. He walked on to his Form-master's study, leaving Prout staring, with thunder in his portly brow.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Called Over the Coals!

MR. QUELCH was looking rather grim as his head boy arrived in the study. The gimlet eyes fixed steadily on Wharton's flushed face.

On the study table lay a raincoat. Wharton noticed it, without giving it any heed.

"You sent for me, sir?" he asked. "I sent for you, Wharton!" said Mr. Quelch. "I have received a surprising—I may say extraordinary report from a—a colleague! This afternoon, Wharton, when I saw you at Pegg, you assured me that you were not going out of bounds."

"I hope you can take my word, sir!" said Harry.

"I hope so," said Mr. Quelch. "You are my head boy, Wharton, and I trust you. But I am bound to inquire into this. I will not ask you whether you went to Pegg this afternoon with the intention of breaking bounds. If such was your intention, I was satisfied, after you had given me your word, that you had abandoned it."

Wharton made no reply to that. Evidently, Quelch had guessed how the matter actually stood.

"But," went on Mr. Quelch, in a deeper voice, "if you carried out that intention, Wharton, without my knowledge—"

"I did not." "You did not arrange with the boatman to pick you up on the other side of the cliffs, out of my sight?"

"Certainly not."

"You did not go round the cliffs and approach the sea-cave from the northern side of the Shoulder?"

"I did not." "You did not go out in a boat there?"

"No." "Then you must explain, Wharton, how it was that Mr. Prout found your raincoat on that very spot!" said the Remove master.

Harry Wharton started.

"My—my raincoat!" he stammered. Mr. Quelch tapped the raincoat lying on the table.

"This is your raincoat, Wharton! Your name is in it! It was picked up by Mr. Prout on the spot where he saw some boy take a boat, evidently with

the intention of going to the sea-cave."

"Oh!" gasped Harry. He was taken quite by surprise. He had not missed the raincoat, so far, having taken it for granted that Bunter would hang it on the peg in the lobby when he came in. He had not looked for it, or indeed given it any thought at all.

Evidently, Bunter had not brought it in with him. He had left it somewhere, no doubt having taken it off when the rain stopped. And Prout, rolling ponderously on the trail of the truant, had found it where the fat and fatuous Owl had left it.

"Well, Wharton?" rapped Mr. Quelch.

(Continued on next page.)

GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

This week our clever long-haired poet winds up his series of Interviews with a few snappy verses written around THE VILLAGERS.

(1)

And now my final interview
Is reached at last! (Loud cheers!)
I've written eighty of them. Phew!
They've seemed to run for years.
With towels round my aching head
I've burnt the midnight oil,
And now, at last, I'm off to bed,
Farewell to pain and toil!

(2)

To finish with, I made a round
Of Friardale village folk.
I thought this easy, but I found
The task to be no joke.
I first dropped in on Mr. Joyce,
A woodman bold is he,
And when he heard my pleasant voice,
He set the dog on me!

(3)

Of course, I knew the cause of that.
By way of fun, you know,
I put a hedgehog in his hat
A week or two ago.
I laughed to see him dance and yell
And clutch his punctured head,
But now his dog had started—well,
I had to dance instead.

(4)

I sought old P.-c. Tozer next,
The Pride of the Police,
Although I had no good pretext
To seek his frontispiece.
No matter; for I could not find
That estimable sloop!
I sought him till I changed my mind
And sought a ginger-pop!

(5)

I therefore went to Uncle Clegg's,
And put my foot in it;
By "it" I mean a box of eggs—
Which smashed them up a bit.
"You'll pay for them there heggs!"
he cried.
"That box is worth a quid!"
"I'll never pay it!" I replied.
"No, never!"—And I did!



(6)

Then out to call on Farmer Cootie!
I passed his apple-trees,
And saw them filled with luscious fruit
Obtainable with ease!
I shook my head and said: "Tut-tut!
To leave them is a shame.
My former search was 'fruitless,' but
This one won't be the same!"

(7)

So up the nearest tree I went
And picked a score or so;
I sat and munched in great content,
Until a voice cried: "Ho!"
I peered down from my lofty perch,
And saw with great alarm
The object of my hopeless search
At last—upon the farm!

(8)

Yes, P.-c. Tozer stood below,
His features wore a frown,
And as he stood there, saying: "Ho!"
I sadly clambered down.
"I've gotcher now, my lad!" said he,
With loud official hoot.
"Per'aps you'll kindly come with me
To call on Mr. Cootie!"

(9)

I must admit that I was loath
To seek that interview,
Although I'd hoped to call on both,
Old Cootie and Tozer, too.
Yet now the opportunity was here
I did not feel inclined
To take it—don't you think it's queer,
This sudden change of mind?

(10)

Cootie greeted me with savage barks,
And told me quite a lot.
He illustrated his remarks
With actions—on the spot!
I can't describe what I went through,
While fearful minutes passed.
But, gee! If that's an interview,
Thank 'Eaven it's the last!



"That is my raincoat, sir!" admitted Harry. He understood now why he was sent for and questioned.

Prout had picked up that coat, where the wearer had left it. He had supposed that the wearer thereof was the owner, quite a natural thing for Prout to suppose. Indeed, he could hardly have supposed anything else. And Quelch, clearly, was impressed by that evidence. Wharton's lips set rather hard.

In the Rag the fellows were jeering him for having backed out of that trip. In his Form-master's study he was accused of having carried it through. It was rather rough luck, to be jeered on one side as a funk, and called over the coals on the other as a reckless breaker of bounds!

"I must ask you to explain this, Wharton!" said Mr. Quelch. "I cannot, and will not, believe that you deliberately deceived me when I spoke to you at Pegg this afternoon. Yet to all appearance, it would seem that, as soon as you were out of my sight, you went out of bounds by a different route."

"I hope you will not judge me by appearances, sir!" said Harry.

"Certainly not, Wharton! But you must explain!"

Tap!

The door opened, and Mr. Prout rolled in.

The Remove master knitted his brows. He had told Mr. Prout once that he did not need his aid in dealing with his Form. Apparently Mr. Prout had to be told over again.

"Sir!" boomed Prout. "This boy's impertinence—"

"Really, Mr. Prout, I am engaged at the present moment—"

"This boy of your Form, sir, this junior, Wharton, has for a second time to-day treated me with gross impertinence!" boomed Prout, with a thunderous glare at the captain of the Remove. "I told him to stop, sir, a few minutes ago, and he deliberately—deliberately, sir, walked on, and—"

"My Form-master had sent for me, sir!" said Harry.

"That is no excuse! That—"

"On the other hand, sir, the boy was bound to come here without loss of time, when I had sent for him!" said Mr. Quelch coldly. "And I shall be glad, sir, if you will not interrupt me while I am questioning him."

Prout almost gurgled.

"I am waiting, Wharton, for your explanation," said the Remove master. "It will be better, perhaps, to make it in the presence of Mr. Prout, in the circumstances."

"I am quite willing, sir!" said Harry. "It is quite easily explained. I was not wearing that coat to-day."

Mr. Quelch started, while Mr. Prout stared.

"You were wearing a raincoat, Wharton, when I saw you in Pegg!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Nugent's, sir!"

"Indeed! And why?"

"It's quite simple, sir! When I came down to the lobby for my raincoat, I found that another fellow had borrowed it, so I took Frank's, I mean, Nugent's."

"Oh!" said Mr. Quelch. He smiled faintly.

It was a quite simple explanation, if true. Mr. Quelch had no doubt that it was true.

Mr. Prout gave an emphatic snort.

"Then this coat was left where Mr. Prout found it, Wharton, by another boy?" asked the Remove master.

"It must have been, sir!"

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"I was assured, Wharton, that you would be able to explain the matter," said Mr. Quelch graciously.

"Thank you, sir."

"My dear Quelch!" Prout began to boom. "Is that what you call an explanation? This boy has broken bounds—"

"This boy has done nothing of the kind!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"He has made a statement which any boy, in similar circumstances, might make without a word of truth in it!" boomed Prout.

Wharton's eyes gleamed at the Fifth Form master.

"I am sorry you cannot take my word, Mr. Prout," he said quietly, "but it does not matter to me in the very least, so long as my Form-master believes me."

"What?" gasped Prout. "What? You hear that, Quelch?"

"You must not speak like that to Mr. Prout, Wharton!" said the Remove master, hastily. "Nevertheless, Mr. Prout—"

"This boy," boomed Prout, "states that another junior borrowed his raincoat this afternoon. Let him give that junior's name."

"Mr. Quelch would never ask one fellow in his Form to give information against another, sir!" said Wharton coolly and scornfully.

Prout seemed about to choke.

"Wharton, you may leave my study!" said Mr. Quelch. "I believe every word you have told me, and the matter is at an end. You may take your raincoat!"

"Thank you, sir!" said Harry, and he left the study with the raincoat over his arm, taking no further notice of Mr. Prout.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Begs for It!

"HA, HA, HA!"

Harry Wharton heard the sounds of laughter from the Remove passage as he came up the stairs. His lips set.

"Some joke on in the Remove!" he said.

And the Co. exchanged rather uncomfortable glances.

It was time for prep when Wharton left his Form-master's study. Having put the raincoat away, he went up to the Remove, and found his friends waiting for him on the staircase. That outburst of merriment greeted their ears, as they went up together.

Wharton's eyes were glinting.

"If Smithy—" he muttered. He had no doubt that the merriment in the Remove passage was in connection with himself, and the Bounder's accusation of funk.

"Keep cool, old chap!" said Johnny Bull. "After all, it's partly your own fault, you know."

Harry Wharton paused, and looked at him.

"What do you mean by that, Bull?" he asked. "Do you think, like Smithy, that a fellow ought to tell rotten lies to a beak?"

"You know I don't!" answered Johnny calmly. "But you'd never have been in the fix at all, if you hadn't started out with Smithy to play the giddy ox. And you oughtn't to have done it, especially being head boy."

Wharton breathed hard.

There was certainly truth in what Johnny said. But it was rather unpalatable at the moment.

"My esteemed Johnny," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur, "speechfulness

is silvery, but silence is the cracked pitcher that goes longest to the well."

Wharton tramped on up the stairs, without another word. His chums followed him into the Remove passage.

Some of the fellows were in the studies: but a good many were out in the passage, all laughing.

"Here he is!" called out Skinner. And there was another outburst of chuckles.

Harry Wharton glanced along the passage. The Bounder was not to be seen there, apparently he was in Study No. 4. But it was clear that there was some jest on, and that it had to do with Wharton.

The next moment, he saw what it was, as his eyes fell on his study door. On that door was chalked, in large capital letters, the remarkable word:

PHUNK!

The Co. grinned as they saw it. They could not help it. Evidently, Billy Bunter had left that taunt for the captain of the Form.

The taunt itself was unpleasant enough: but the remarkable spelling made them grin. Wharton, however, did not grin.

He stared at the door, and strode along the passage to Study No. 7, the study that was honoured by the presence of William George Bunter. He kicked the door open, and strode in.

Three juniors were in Study No. 7, Peter Todd, Tom Dutton, and Billy Bunter. Toddy and Dutton were sorting out books for prep: Billy Bunter was grinning. He ceased to grin, however, at the sight of the captain of the Remove.

"You fat worm!" exclaimed Wharton.

"I—I say, you fellows, keep him off!" squeaked Bunter, and he dodged promptly round the study table.

As Wharton made a stride after him, Peter Todd stepped coolly in the way.

"Go easy, old bean!" said Peter amiably, "this happens to be my study, you know. Nobody else allowed to throw his weight about in it."

"Stand aside!"

"Bow-wow!" said Peter cheerfully.

"I—I say, Toddy, keep him off!" gasped Bunter. "I never did it, you know! Besides, he is a funk!"

Harry Wharton controlled his temper with difficulty. He did not want a scrap with Peter; though he was getting into a mood to scrap with almost anybody. But he kept himself in check.

"That fat fool has been chalking on my study door!" he said. "I'm going to rub it out with his face!"

"Beast!" yelled Bunter. "I haven't! I haven't been near your study door! Besides, it's only what all the fellows think."

"Ha, ha, ha!"—from the passage.

"You fat freak!" said Toddy. "What have you been up to, you image?"

"Nothing!" gasped Bunter. "I haven't touched a bit of chalk to-day! I dare say Smithy did it—he's down on Wharton for being a funk, you know."

"I don't think Smithy spells like that!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wharton's on the warpath!" came Skinner's voice from the passage. "He's going to prove that he ain't a funk—by scrapping with Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a yell.

Wharton's angry face crimsoned. "Will you step aside, Toddy?" he cried, forcing himself to speak calmly. "I don't want to scrap with you!"



"I say, you fellows, I jumped at the chance of going with Smithy!" said Billy Bunter, blinking round through his big spectacles, with quite a vaunting air. "No funk about me, I hope. Smithy knew where to come for a plucky chap to see him through. Pluck's my long suit, really! Who cares for beaks?" "Is that Quelch coming?" asked someone in the crowd.

"Bet on that!" came Skinner's voice. "Toddy can punch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

That was enough for the angry captain of the Remove. He gave Peter a shove that sent Todd staggering.

Peter rallied at once, and came back with his hands up. In another moment they were fighting.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "I say, whop him, Peter! Pitch into him! Kick him out of the study, old chap! He's a funk, old fellow! Whop him!"

"Stop that!" roared Bob Cherry.

My esteemed, idiotic friends— gasped Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

The Co. rushed into the study. Nugent and Bob grasped Wharton, Johnny Bull and the nabob grasped Peter, and the combatants were wrenched apart.

"Chuck it!" snapped Johnny Bull.

"Look here!" panted Wharton.

"Chuck it, you silly ass!"

"And you chuck it, Toddy, you duffer!" exclaimed Nugent. "Hold that fathead, you fellows! Bunter's going to have what he's asked for!"

"I say, Toddy, keep him off!" yelled Bunter, as Harry Wharton grasped him by a fat neck. "I say, I never did it! I dare say Skinner did it! Yaroooh!"

The fat junior was propelled out of the study, with a grasp of iron on his fat neck. Peter Todd was barred off by the Co.

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!" yelled Bunter, as he was propelled along the passage to Study No. 1. "Leggo! I never did it! Besides, it was only a jig-jig-joke! I—I thought it would amuse you, old chap! Yaroooh!"

They reached the door of Study No. 1. Peter was barred in Study No. 7 by

the Co. The other fellows followed, laughing.

With an iron grip on Bunter's fat neck, the captain of the Remove squeezed his fat face against the door. Using that fat face as a duster, he rubbed out the chalk.

That remarkable word "PHUNK!" disappeared. Billy Bunter's face, never spotless, was unusually grubby by the time the inscription was rubbed out. And his fat little nose felt as if it had been rubbed nearly off. Horrible gurgles came from the fat Owl.

"Urrrgh! I say— Gurrerrgh! Yurrerrgh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Leggo! Wurrerrgh!"

Wharton released the fat neck. Bunter, gasping, shot up the passageway like a bullet. He disappeared, gurgling, into Study No. 7.

Wingate of the Sixth came up the Remove staircase, his ashplant under his arm. He stared at the hilarious crowd in the passage.

"What's this row? Why aren't you in your studies? Do you want six all round?"

Evidently the Removites did not want "six" all round. They scuttled into their studies like rabbits into burrows.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Surprising!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! What's up with Prout?" murmured Bob Cherry

The Remove were coming down after prep. Mr. Prout was standing near the foot of the staircase,

in conversation with Mr. Capper, the master of the Fourth.

There was visible excitement in Prout's plump, portly face.

As the Famous Five came along, with a crowd of other fellows, Prout's eyes turned on Harry Wharton.

He gave him a very expressive look.

There was no mistaking that look. Prout, after his latest interview with Mr. Quelch, was doubtless fed-up with taking Quelch's boys in hand. He did not speak to Wharton. But his look told volumes.

It expressed all Prout's indignation and scorn for a boy who, as Prout firmly believed, had stood in his Form-master's presence and uttered barefaced and palpable falsehoods.

All the juniors noticed it, and wondered what was up with Prout. Mr. Capper, following Prout's glance, looked at Wharton and was seen to shrug his shoulders.

Wharton's face burned.

He knew what the two beaks had been discussing. Prout had told Capper, who no doubt agreed with Prout.

"What's the matter with the old ass?" asked Squiff. "Have you been getting Prout's rag out, Wharton?"

Wharton did not answer. Prout was, no doubt, an old ass; but contempt was hard to bear, even from an old ass!

Had Prout addressed Wharton at that moment he would have received a reply that he would certainly have called impertinent! But the Fifth Form master did not speak.

Harry Wharton passed on, his face burning. From astern, he heard Prout's boom, addressed to Capper:

"Unexampler, Cauyer! Such THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,500.

unscrupulousness—such entrontery! I should not have believed there was a boy at Greyfriars capable of it—”

Wharton half-turned. His intention was so obvious that his alarmed chums gathered round him, and barged him down the passage into the Rag.

“That old fool—” breathed Wharton.

“For goodness’ sake don’t be a goat!” exclaimed Bob. “Are you going to row with a beak?”

“I’ve a jolly good mind—”

“Do you fancy he was speaking of you, ass?”

“I know he was!” snapped Wharton savagely.

“What rot!” said Johnny Bull. “What have you done to Prout?”

“He, he, he!” came a fat cackle. “I say, you fellows, Wharton knew Prout was talking about him, from the description—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Harry Wharton breathed hard. A crowd of fellows were looking at him very curiously. They all wondered what was “up” with Prout. That look on his portly face told, unmistakably, what the Fifth Form beak thought of the captain of the Remove.

“What on earth’s biting the old ass?” asked Ogilvy.

Harry Wharton laughed, a hard and sarcastic laugh.

“I’ve been up before Quelch, for going to the sea-cave to-day. Every fellow here is calling me a funk for not going—and Prout thinks me a rotten liar for telling Quelch I never went.”

“Oh, my hat!”

“You get it both ways, old bean!” said Russell, laughing. “Rough luck! But what’s put it into Prout’s silly old head—”

“Oh, Prout knows!” said Wharton savagely. “He picked up my raincoat, where it was left by a fellow going out of bounds. Isn’t that proof?”

“By gun, I should say it was!” said Ogilvy.

“Oh crikey!” gasped Bunter. “I—I—I say, you never told Quelch that I had your raincoat to-day, did you, old

chap? I—I—I say, old fellow, don’t you mention that to Quelch! That’s important.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“I told Quelch some fellow had borrowed the mac,” went on Wharton. “Luckily, he believed me—Prout doesn’t! It sounds rather steep, I know—a yarn that any fellow could spin! If Quelch didn’t swallow it, I should be up for a Head’s flogging—unless I gave that fat fool away!”

“I—I—I say, old chap, you—you wouldn’t do that!” gasped Bunter. “You wouldn’t give a pal away, old fellow! After all, I only went with Smithy because you funk’d it—”

“What?” roared Wharton.

“Because you funk’d it, old chap! You can’t give a fellow away after that!” argued Bunter. “I say, you keep it dark that I had your raincoat to-day! Besides, I never had it! I—I believe it was a Fourth Form man borrowed your mac, old fellow! In fact, I saw Fry of the Fourth wearing it—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I say, it’s a flogging if it comes out!” gasped the alarmed Owl. “Quelch wouldn’t take my word like he did Wharton’s. A fellow doesn’t get justice here! I never had the mac, and I only took it because there were holes in mine—but if I told Quelch that, as likely as not he wouldn’t believe me—”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“More likely than not, I think!” chortled Bob Cherry. “Look here, Bunter, you go to Prout and tell him you had the mac. He can’t whop you.”

“I’ll watch it!” gasped Bunter. “I say, Wharton, old chap—”

“Oh, shut up, you fat ass!” snapped the captain of the Remove. “You’re safe enough! Nobody will guess that it was you went to the cave—unless Smithy lets out that he had a bag of tuck there.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Well, if it doesn’t come out, all right!” said Bunter. “You can’t give

a man away! And I only went because you were funky. Keep off, you beast!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

The door of the Rag opened again, and Vernon-Smith came in with Tom Redwing.

Reddy was looking worried—the Bounder smiling a sardonic smile. He fully expected the trouble to break out again, as soon as he saw Wharton in the Rag after prep. He was ready for it—more than ready.

But, to his surprise, and to the surprise of all the Remove, Wharton did not approach him, and did not even seem to notice that he had entered the room. Wharton sat down in an arm-chair and picked up a “Holiday Annual.” His face was quite calm—almost expressionless.

“Stir the fire, somebody!” said Skinner. “Cold weather—makes a fellow’s feet cold!”

There was a chuckle.

The Bounder stood at a little distance from Wharton, with a group of fellows round him, talking and grinning. A murmur of their voices reached the Famous Five. Then, suddenly and clearly, came the Bounder’s voice above the murmur, deliberately raised to reach all ears:

“As I’ve told you, Wharton funk’d it!”

The Co. glanced rather anxiously at their leader. Every fellow in the Rag looked at him!

It was coming now!

But it did not come!

Wharton, turning a page of his book, did not seem to hear. The Bounder’s taunt passed him unheeded, if not unheard.

There was a moment of silence, and the juniors looked at one another. The Bounder’s voice came again:

“Rotten funk!”

Still the captain of the Remove did not heed.

Herbert Vernon-Smith gave a loud, scornful laugh. But there came no sign from Harry Wharton—and he was still sedately reading the “Holiday Annual,” apparently unconscious of nods and winks and sneers, when the time came for dorm.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Up to Smithy!

LODER of the Sixth saw lights out for the Remove. He gave the juniors more than one suspicious look.

It was clear enough that something was “on” in the Remove. Loder could hardly have failed to observe it.

Fellows were grinning or whispering. There was an atmosphere of suppressed excitement.

Harry Wharton, in the Rag, had puzzled the whole Form. Most of the fellows concluded that trouble would break out in the dormitory after lights out. The prospect of a “scrap” in the Remove dorm was rather exciting. The Bounder fully expected it, for he could not believe that the captain of the Remove intended to take his taunts “lying down.” If he did, Smithy was prepared to hand out more of the same, without limit.

Wharton, however, was very quiet and calm, his face impassive. His friends gave him rather uneasy looks. Calm as he looked, they did not like the look in his eye!

Lights were turned out, the door closed, and the Remove were left to themselves. Nobody was thinking of sleep—not even Billy Bunter! For once, Bunter’s snore did not wake the echoes

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a minute after his fat head had touched the pillow.

So assured were the Removites that the trouble was to come after lights out that every fellow expected to hear Wharton getting out of bed as soon as the prefect was gone. But there was no movement from him.

The Bounder sat up in bed, peering through the darkness. He was as puzzled as any other fellow. Unless Wharton really was the funk he was accused of being, it seemed impossible that he was going to let the matter drop where it was. If that was his idea, Smithy had something to say. He was going to "rub it in" till the fellow came up to the scratch. Herbert Vernon-Smith had his good qualities, but he had an unforgiving temper. From his point of view, Wharton had let him down, and thrown in a dose of "pi-jaw" over and above, and the Bounder, for the time at least, was implacable.

"Gone to sleep, Wharton?" he called out, mockingly.

"No!"

"Chilly feet keeping you awake?"

"He, he, he!" from Bunter.

"Oh, shut up, Smithy!" snapped Bob Cherry. "You're asking for more than you want."

"Wharton doesn't seem in a hurry to hand it out!" said the Bounder, with a sneering laugh.

"All the better for you, you silly ass!" growled Johnny Bull. "You've scrapped with Wharton more than once, and got licked every time."

"I'm ready for another licking, if that funk can give me one!" retorted the Bounder. Johnny's remark touched Smithy rather on the raw.

"My esteemed and idiotic Smithy—" began Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows, Wharton's awfully funky!" giggled Billy Bunter. "I say, jever see such a funk? He, he, he!"

"Shut up, you fat Owl!" said Frank Nugent.

"He, he, he!"

"Haven't you anything to say, Wharton?" jeered Skinner. "You seem to be leaving it to your pals to talk for you."

"Nothing to you, Skinner!" answered the captain of the Remove disdainfully.

"Anything to me?" asked Vernon-Smith.

"Yes—just a few words!"

"Cough 'em up!" jeered the Bounder. There was a scratch of a match. Bolsover major lighted a candle-end, and it glimmered in the dormitory.

The flickering light showed nearly all the fellows sitting up in bed with eager faces. Wharton raised himself on his elbow. Vernon-Smith stepped out.

"Hold on, you men!" drawled Lord Mauleverer. "If you kick up a row here, you'll have Loder back! I could see in his eye that he smelt a mouse!"

"Who cares for Loder?" snapped the Bounder.

"You will—if he gives you six, old man!" said his lordship.

"Wharton does, anyhow!" chortled Skinner. "Wharton's not in a hurry to turn out!"

"I say, you fellows, let's roll him out!" said Billy Bunter. "If there's anything I can't stand, it's a funk!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, are you turning out, Wharton?" asked Vernon-Smith.

Wharton, leaning on his elbow, regarded him coolly in the glimmering candlelight. His face was quite cool, but there was a mocking gleam in his eyes.

"Not yet!" he answered. "All in good time, Vernon-Smith! Nothing on till midnight."

"Midnight!" repeated the Bounder. "You silly ass, do you think I'm going to turn out of bed and scrap at midnight?"

"Not with me!" said the captain of the Remove. "I'm not scrapping with you, Smithy! I've never felt more inclined to give a cheeky cad a hiding—but I'm not going to give you one."

"Thank you for nothin'!" sneered the Bounder. "If it is not a scrap, what are we to turn out at midnight for?"

"I'll tell you!" said Wharton composedly. "You've called me a funk for refusing to go to the smugglers' cave with you this afternoon. Thrashing you won't wash that out. That's why I'm not going to give you what you're asking for. I'm going to the sea-cave."

"Date uncertain—some time in the giddy future!" mocked the Bounder, and there was a laugh.

"To-night!" said Wharton coolly.

"Wha-a-t?" ejaculated the Bounder. "What did you say?"

"Deaf?" asked Wharton. "I said to-night!"

There was a buzz in the Remove dormitory. Harry Wharton's words had almost taken away the general breath.

The Bounder stared at him blankly.

"You're mad!" he said. "Breaking bounds at midnight—gammon! It would have been a flogging for going in the day-time! It would be the sack for going at night! Tell us another funny story!"

"Gas!" remarked Skinner.

"I'm going to-night," said Harry Wharton, "and you're coming with me, Vernon-Smith! We can get in by the panel in the library corridor, go down the secret passage, and get to the sea-cave that way—we can't get a boat out from Pegg in the middle of the night. I'm going—and so are you."

"You're not—and I'm not!" said Vernon-Smith. "If you mean business, I'll go with you any half-holiday, in a boat from Pegg."

"You'll come with me to-night, and if we're spotted, we'll both get sacked for breaking out at night!" said the captain of the Remove. "If you refuse, you're a coward!"

Vernon-Smith set his teeth. He stood silent. It was borne in on his mind that Harry Wharton meant every word he said. It was up to Smithy now to take the risk or back out.

"Harry!" exclaimed Nugent. "You must be mad to think of anything of the kind. Breaking bounds at night—"

"I've said what I'm going to do, and what Smithy's going to do!" said Harry Wharton. "Every fellow here is going to see whether I funk going to the sea-cave—and whether Vernon-Smith does. I told Quelch I would not go to the sea-cave this afternoon, and I kept my word. Smithy calls that pi-jaw, and an excuse for funking—"

"It was!" said the Bounder savagely.

"Very well—it's twice as risky going at night. I'm going—and you're coming with me."

"I'm not!"

"Or else," said Wharton coolly, "you're going to own up that you're afraid; and I'll leave it to all the fellows here to say which of us is the funk!"

"A fair catch!" grinned Peter Todd.

"Up to you now, Smithy!" said Skinner.

The Bounder gave him a black look.

"That's all," said Harry. "You can blow out that candle, Bolsover—it won't be wanted. If you're asleep at twelve, Smithy, I'll give you a call."

"You needn't trouble," said the Bounder between his teeth. "Not that I believe you mean it!"

"You'll see—at twelve!" Wharton laid his head on the pillow again.

The Bounder breathed hard. He was a reckless fellow—considered the most reckless in the Form. He had swanked that day, as the fellow who cared not a straw for the Head's order. He had disregarded that order, and boasted of it. But even the reckless Bounder jibbed at this.

"Look here, Wharton—" began Bob Cherry uneasily.

"It's settled!" said Harry.

"You can't do it, you ass! A fellow breaking out at night is up for the sack, if he's spotted!"

"I know that! Smithy's broken out at night more than once—though he doesn't seem so keen on it now."

"That's different. Dropping from the box-room window in the dark—and sneaking back half an hour later. You'll be out hours, if you go as far as the sea-cave—half the night. You may be heard getting that panel open. Why, Quelch sometimes sits up late in the library, going over his blessed manuscripts. And Loder's got an eye on this dorm already. And if you're spotted, what are you going to say—that you got out at night specially to disobey a special order from the Head? It's just asking for it!" said Bob hotly.

"No worse for me than for Smithy!"

"Well, Smithy won't be such a fool, if you are!" said Johnny Bull gruffly.

"Fool or not, Smithy will come, or own up before all the Remove that he funks it!" said Wharton stubbornly.

"Look here, Harry—" said Frank Nugent.

"I'm going to sleep!"

Wharton closed his eyes, and refused to say another word. The candle was blown out; Smithy getting back into bed. There was a buzz of voices up and down the dormitory.

But Herbert Vernon-Smith had no more to say—though it was long before he slept.

Smithy was a reckless fellow, and liked to show off his recklessness. But this was, as Bob Cherry had said, simply asking for it—and it did not seem good enough to the Bounder.

"Going, Smithy?" called out Skinner.

The Bounder made no answer. Probably he did not know himself.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Play Up!

GREYFRIARS SCHOOL was buried in silence and slumber, as the last stroke of midnight died away. But there was a faint sound in the Remove dormitory, as a fellow stepped quietly from his bed.

"Smithy!"

It was Harry Wharton's voice.

He heard a deep breath from the Bounder's bed. Vernon-Smith was awake. But he did not stir.

"Are you coming?"

"No!" breathed the Bounder. "I'll take a risk with anybody—but this isn't a risk—it's a cert! Shut up, and don't be a fool!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Funk!" he said.

He did not subdue his voice in the least. Several fellows awakened, and there was a general stir.

"Is that you, Harry?" asked Nugent's voice.

"Yes."

"You're not—"

"I am—unless Smithy funks it!"

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'Yes' or 'No,' Vernon Smith? Speak loud enough for all the fellows to hear!" said Wharton scornfully. "Are you coming, or are you funking it?"

The Bounder reddened with rage. He did not answer; but he stepped out of bed and groped for his clothes. Nobody was going to call Herbert Vernon-Smith a funk! His eyes glinted at Wharton in the gloom; but he began to dress himself.

"Smithy—" came Redwing's voice. "Oh, shut up!" snarled the Bounder. "I'm goin'—if Wharton goes! I fancy he will stop short!"

"I fancy somebody will stop you both short!" growled Johnny Bull. "You're playing the fool, Wharton!"

"I know that, old bean!"

"Oh, rats!" growled Johnny.

Wharton dressed himself quickly in the dark. He went to the dormitory door—where he waited for the Bounder, who was not so quick. There was a subdued buzz of voices in the dormitory. Billy Bunter's snore was heard—but every other fellow in the Form was awake now.

"Look out for Loder!" chuckled Skinner.

"Look out for Prout!" said Snoop. "Prout's got an eye on you, Wharton!"

Wharton made no reply to that. It was very likely that Loder of the Sixth had kept an eye on that dormitory; but at midnight it was pretty certain that he had gone to bed. Neither was there much doubt that Mr. Prout, also, was sleeping the sleep of the just. But if they had both been up, and awake, and Wharton had known it, it would have made no difference to him, in his present mood.

A shadowy figure joined him at the door.

"Get on with it!" muttered Vernon-Smith.

"By gum! They're really going!" said Skinner. "Good-bye, you two! I don't suppose we shall see you again!"

There was a sleepy chuckle from some of the fellows.

The door opened and closed quietly. The Removites were left in a buzz, and it was long before they settled down to sleep again. The Co., at least, did not feel like sleep, while their leader was absent on that hare-brained expedition.

Harry Wharton went down the dark corridor to the stairs. Below was a well of darkness.

"Quiet!" hissed the Bounder, as he heard the sound of Wharton's boots on the stairs.

"Are you getting nervous?" drawled the captain of the Remove.

"Don't shout, you fool!"

"Why not?"

Smithy did not answer that. He repressed a desire to punch out at the shadowy figure near to him in the dark, and trod savagely and sullenly on after Wharton. On the lower landing, Harry turned in the direction of the Remove passage.

"Where are you going?" hissed the Bounder. "That's not the way!"

"I've got to get a torch from my study."

"You couldn't bring one up to the dorm with you!" snarled Smithy.

"I didn't take the trouble."

"Will you speak low, you fool?" hissed Vernon-Smith, as Wharton's voice echoed on the dark landing.

"No!" answered Harry coolly.

He left the Bounder waiting, and Smithy could hear his footsteps as he went.

On the occasions when Vernon-Smith

"broke out" at night, he was as stealthy as a cat. It was risky enough, with all his caution. But there was no stealth, and very little caution, about the captain of the Remove. It seemed to amuse him to keep the Bounder's nerves on the jump. In his present mood he was more reckless than the Bounder had ever dared to be; and Smithy, in silent rage, knew that it made the danger doubly dangerous, and that Wharton did not care—while Smithy cared very much indeed!

In a few minutes Wharton rejoined him, and they went down the lower stairs together. There was a glimmer of light in Masters' Passage, which the juniors had to traverse to reach the library. It came from under one of the study doors.

"Prout's still up!" said Harry, with a laugh. "That's his door."

"That old ass often sits up late!" muttered Smithy. He grabbed Wharton's arm in the dark. "Look here! Let's get round another way!"

"I'm going this way! Go round, if you're funky."

Wharton shook off the Bounder's detaining hand, and walked down the passage. Breathing fury, Vernon-Smith followed him on tiptoe. It was more likely than not that the Fifth Form master had fallen asleep in his armchair. But it was risky to pass a master's door, and the Bounder, with all the nerve of which he boasted, felt his heart beat as he passed. He made no more sound than a cat—but Wharton was not so silent.

"Tiptoe you fool!" breathed Smithy.

"What rot!"

"Do you want Prout to hear us?"

"Is that Smithy, the devil of a fellow, who doesn't care a straw for beaks, speaking?" asked Wharton mockingly.

Vernon-Smith almost choked with rage. He cut on to the end of the passage, and turned the corner silently. Wharton followed him more slowly, and less quietly.

The Bounder waited for his companion to rejoin him, gritting his teeth as he waited. The most reckless fellow in the Remove was getting more reckless now than he liked.

This was the fellow he had denounced as a funk—the fellow who was walking past a beak's door, after midnight, as coolly and calmly as if it were midday!

Smithy realised that he had asked for this, and that Wharton, with cool mockery, was giving him what he had asked for. But that made it no more agreeable, and he waited tensely till the captain of the Remove rejoined him.

"Hark!" he breathed. "He's heard!"

"Looks like it!" said Wharton carelessly. He did not even lower his voice.

Prout, clearly, had heard some sound, for his study door was heard to open. They caught a glimmer of the light from his doorway, and the sound of a grunt in the dead silence of the night. If he came out to investigate—

The Bounder felt his heart beat very unpleasantly. He knew that Wharton, at his side, was cool as ice; and, though he could not see him, he knew that there was a scornful smile on his face.

"That cat!" Prout's muttering voice came in the silence. "I must speak to Mrs. Keble about that cat! Upon my word!"

They heard the door close again.

Vernon-Smith wiped a spot of perspiration from his forehead with the back of his hand.

"Come on, you mad fool!" he snarled.

A few minutes later they stood on the library corridor, and Harry Wharton flashed the light of his electric torch on the secret panel in the old oak wall.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Smithy on Toast!

CLICK!

It was not a loud sound. But it seemed almost like a pistol-shot to the Bounder's startled ears in the midnight silence.

Since the discovery of that secret panel in the solid-looking oak wall of the library corridor, it had been a matter of great interest to the Greyfriars fellows. There was hardly a fellow in the school, from the head of the Sixth to the smallest fag in the Second Form, who had not come along, some time or other, to look at it, and there were plenty of fellows keen enough to get it open and explore the hidden secrets beyond.

That, however, was strictly forbidden; and three or four adventurous fellows who had made the attempt had been spotted, and duly "whopped."

Only Sixth Form fellows were allowed to enter the library without special leave, and any other fellow spotted in the corridor was up for "six." Two fellows—Hobson and Stewart of the Shell—had come down one night after lights-out, to try their luck, and their Form-master, Hacker, had caught them, and dealt with them faithfully. Since then, most fellows had sagely given the spot a wide berth.

The hidden spring was not easy to find. It was concealed among carved scroll-work on the old oaken panel. A fellow might have spent half an hour hunting for it, though he knew that it was there somewhere.

Harry Wharton, however, knew exactly where it was, and he had the panel open quickly enough. But the spring clicked sharply as the hidden oaken door slid out from the wall.

He laughed as the Bounder gave a start, and glanced up and down the dusky corridor hastily.

"Will you keep quiet, you fool?" snarled Smithy. "Prout may have come out again—"

"My dear man, aren't we here to take risks?" drawled Wharton. "You've been swanking up and down the Remove that you don't care a boiled bean for the Head or Quelch. So what does Prout matter?"

The Bounder checked a savage reply. He knew that Wharton would answer him without subduing his voice.

He stepped into the orifice in the wall, where a block of stone was left out to make a doorway. Wharton followed him in.

Wharton left the panel standing wide open behind him. The Bounder grabbed at it, and pulled it shut. He heard Wharton chuckle.

"Mind you don't bar us in, Smithy! I don't know whether it opens from this side or not!"

"We can't leave it open, you mad ass! It's sure to open from this side! Lend me your torch!"

Vernon-Smith took the torch, and carefully examined the panel. Certainly he did not want to shut himself off from access to the school.

"It's all right!" he muttered. "There's a knob on this side—the same as on the other. I'll shut it."

Click!

The panel closed and fastened.

The Bounder, keeping the torch, moved on, by the narrow passage through the thick stone wall. The way farther was barred by an oaken door, bolted.

Harry Wharton drew back the bolts. They were old and rusty, and shrieked as they moved.



Wharton and Vernon-Smith watched as the boat loomed into sight from the shadowed sea. The hurricane lamp gleamed on the back of a boyish figure that was pulling at the oars. In the stern sat a man with a hat slouched over his face. "What the thump are they up to?" whispered Smithy. "Goodness knows!" answered Wharton.

"For the love of Mike, be careful!" muttered Smithy.

"Have we come here to be careful?"

"Oh, shut up!"

Harry Wharton laughed and pulled the oaken door open. They passed through, into a little stone-walled room, hidden in a massive outer buttress of the ancient building. Smithy drew the door shut; but it was impossible to fasten it; there were only the bolts on the inner side.

"Come on!" said Harry. "Here's the jolly old stair—"

Vernon-Smith paused. He was wondering uneasily whether Prout might have been out of his study, and might have heard the clicking of the panel.

The captain of the Remove looked round at him.

"Aren't you coming?" he asked.

"I'm thinking of that old fool Prout!" muttered the Bounder. "If he nosed in, and found those bolts drawn back—what do you think?"

"Even chances, I think!" answered Wharton coolly. "They've been keeping a suspicious eye on this jolly old spot since Hobby and Stewart were caught at it one night after lights-out. Rather a lark if Prout butted in and shot those bolts after us—what?"

"You fool! It's not good enough!" muttered the Bounder. "What's the good of asking for it, like this?"

"Still time to turn back, if you're afraid!" said Wharton contemptuously. "Give me that light, and I'll go on alone."

"You won't, hang you!"

The Bounder tramped across the little room to the head of the stair. Below, spiral steps stretched away, apparently endless, into deep darkness. The silence was heavy and oppressive.

Herbert Smith, reckless rebel and breaker of bounds as he was, would

have been glad to be back in his bed in the Remove dormitory. Every moment he dreaded to hear a sound behind him which would tell of discovery. On the top step he paused again, to listen intently. Wharton yawned.

"Taking a rest?" he asked. "We've a long way to go, you know! Take a rest at the other end, old bean."

The Bounder snarled and tramped down the spiral stairway. Wharton, laughing, followed him.

The steps seemed innumerable. But they reached the passage at the foot of the stair at last. It ran like a black tunnel into the heart of the earth.

Smithy tramped along the tunnel, carrying the light. Wharton lounged after him, with his hands in his pockets.

If there was any sound behind, they would not hear it now. That had to be left to chance. Only too well they knew that the way might be closed against them when they returned. That was a chance the Bounder did not like taking; but his companion took it with cool indifference.

"How long is this dashed tunnel?" asked the Bounder, when a quarter of a mile of clammy stone flags had passed under their tramping feet.

"About a mile," answered Harry.

"I hope you put a new battery in this torch! If the light petered out before we got back—"

"Afraid of the dark?" asked Wharton.

"You cheeky fool!" hissed the Bounder. "Is it a good battery?"

"Blessed if I know! I haven't changed it since I used it the other day. I haven't the least idea how long it will last."

"You mad idiot! Then we may be left in the dark!"

"I shouldn't wonder."

The Bounder suppressed his rage with difficulty, and tramped on faster. The underground passage was damp, clammy, dark, and dismal, and seemed interminable. The possibility of having to tramp back, in dense darkness, was not attractive. But the Bounder went doggedly onward.

They reached, at last, the pit in the cavity at the sea-cave. Vernon-Smith stood in the sand, where he had stood with Valentine Compton, looking up at the iron pegs in the rock that gave access to the cave.

Harry Wharton caught hold of the pegs, and clambered up. He climbed out into the cave, and looked back at the Bounder below.

"Chuck up the torch. I'll show you a light to climb!" he said.

He caught the torch, and held it for the Bounder to clamber up the pegs. Then they stood in the sea-cave, glad to breathe the fresher air that blew from the sea.

Vernon-Smith sat down on a rock in the cave. The Bounder was more used to late hours than his companion, but hardly such late hours as this. He was tired, sleepy, and savagely irritable.

Wharton, the torch in his hand, stood looking at him with a smile. It was in Smithy's mind to dash that smile from his face with a clenched fist.

"Taking a rest?" asked Wharton politely.

"Do you want to go further, you fool? 'We're in the sea-cave now.'"

"Just in!" said Harry, laughing. "Did you come here to put your head in, and pop it back like a tortoise into a shell? I'm going on."

"What for?" hissed the Bounder.

"Just to pull your leg!" answered Wharton coolly. "Just to feed you up

to the back teeth with playing the ox. I'm going as far as the sea, and you're coming with me—or funking it!”

The Bounder gave him an evil look. If ever a fellow was fed-up with “playing the ox,” Herbert Vernon-Smith was at that moment. But there was no mercy for him. He had asked for it, and he was getting it.

“It's past one o'clock!” he said thickly.

“I know that!”

“The light may give out——”

“I know that, too.”

“Oh, you fool!”

Harry Wharton laughed and moved along the cavern. The Bounder rose from the rock, breathing hard, and followed him. They tramped down the cave towards the sea, Wharton smiling, the Bounder in savage silence.

It was rather a long tramp to the mouth of the cave, but the arched opening of rock loomed before them at last, with a glimmer of winter starlight on the rolling waters without.

The Bounder grabbed the torch from his companion and shut it off. He was doubtful whether it would last out the return journey.

“We don't want that now!” he snarled.

“Just as you like!” said Wharton indifferently.

The starlight glimmered in at the mouth of the cave. It was dark, but the juniors were able to pick their way. And the glimmer was lighter and clearer as they drew nearer the high, arched opening.

Not till the water was lapping at his feet did the captain of the Remove come to a halt. He had not come there, as he expressed it, to put his head into the cave and pop it back like a tortoise into a shell. What he had set out to do he had done—thoroughly. He stood on the water's edge, looking down the channel amid the jutting rocks of the Shoulder towards the open sea. The Bounder gave him a savage glare.

“How long are you going to stand there?” he snarled.

“As long as I choose!” answered Wharton coolly. “If you're getting funky you can scuttle off as soon as you like.”

“You rotter! We've only got the one torch.”

“You can take it; I'm not afraid of the dark.”

Vernon-Smith slipped the torch into his pocket and clenched his hands. His temper was at boiling point. Nothing could have induced him to desert his companion, and have it said in the Remove that his nerve had failed him. But he was goaded to the limit now.

“You rotter!” he said, between his teeth. “You've had me on toast! I've had to let you get by with it.”

“Exactly!” assented Wharton. “I've had you on toast. I've got you on toast now, and I'm keeping you on toast just as long as I jolly well choose. You asked for it, you know.”

Vernon-Smith stepped towards him, his hands clenched hard, his eyes blazing. Then suddenly he paused, as a sound came up the rocky channel, clear over the murmur of the sea. It was a sound of oars in rowlocks. From the darkness seaward a light gleamed—a moving light. A boat was pulling into the sea-cave.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Prowlers of the Night!

“A BOAT!” breathed Smithy.
“By gum!” muttered Wharton.

The Bounder unclenched his hands. He stared at the moving light on the sea. It was a hurricane lamp in a boat that was coming up the rocky channel into the sea-cave under the Shoulder.

Forgetful for the moment of mutual anger and animosity, the two Greyfriars juniors stared at it. A boat coming into the lonely sea-cave, at nearly two o'clock on a winter's night, was amazing. But there was no mistaking it. They could hear the grind of the oars in the rowlocks, louder as the boat approached, and the light came steadily on.

“What the thump!” muttered Wharton. “Who the dickens can be coming here at this time of the night?”

“Nobody who's up to any good,” said the Bounder.

“Hardly.”

They stood and watched.

The boat loomed into sight from the shadowed sea. The hurricane lamp gleamed in the bows, on the back of a boyish figure that was pulling at the oars. In the stern sat a man with a hat slouched over his face—a hard face, bronzed by wind and weather, from what the juniors could see of it.

Smithy's hand touched Wharton on the arm.

“Not fishermen from Pegg,” he whispered.

“No.”

“What the thump are they up to here?”

“Goodness knows!”

“They'll spot us in a few minutes by that light. Better get out of sight till we know who they are!” whispered the Bounder.

Harry Wharton nodded.

It was strange and startling enough for a boat to pull into the lonely cave after midnight on a November night. Obviously it was only prudent for the schoolboys to keep out of sight.

There was plenty of cover among the rugged rocks in the sea-cave. They backed quickly away from the water and took cover among the

rocks. The light of the hurricane lamp in the bows of the boat was shining into the cavern now.

They heard a light bump. The boat had reached the shelf of rock, which made a natural landing-place. It looked as if the night prowlers from the sea knew their way about. In fact, it was certain that they did, for it was dangerous work getting a boat round the Shoulder at night in the running tide. Strangers to the spot could scarcely have attempted it.

Strange thoughts passed through the minds of the Greyfriars juniors as they kept close behind a rugged rock a dozen yards up the cave. A hundred years and more had passed since the old gangs of smugglers had rowed their contraband cargoes into the cave from dark luggers lying off the shore. But the thought of them came back to the juniors now. At such a late hour, on such a dark night, boats had pulled into the sea-cave in the old days of the Georges. It seemed to the juniors like a page of history turning back.

They heard the sound of the boat being made fast, and of footsteps on the rocky floor of the cave. The two strangers had landed, and were standing by the boat.

The juniors could not see them, but they heard every sound in the deep silence, that was broken only by the murmur of the sea.

A voice—deep, with a sharp note in it—reached them.

“Get the lamp out; we shall want it!”

The moving glimmer showed that the hurricane lamp was being lifted from the boat. Light and shadow danced on the rocky walls of the cavern.

“How far up the cave is the place?”

“A good distance,” came the answer, in a clear, boyish voice. “I can find it easily enough, uncle. It will take us about ten minutes.”

Both the hidden juniors started at the sound of that voice. It seemed to Harry Wharton that there was a familiar ring in it. He was sure that he had heard it before somewhere. But the Bounder knew! The Bounder knew that he had heard it only the previous afternoon.

It was the voice of the boy who had been searching the beach by the Shoulder, when Smithy arrived there with Bunter. He knew instantly the clear, pleasant tones of Valentine Compton.

“And you're sure about the tunnel?” went on the hard, sharp voice of the elder man.

“I only know what the schoolboy told me; but I am sure of it. According to him, some boys belonging to his school were stranded in the cave one day, and got out by way of the tunnel back to Greyfriars.”

“Well, we shall see! I have little doubt that the tunnel exists. It was known in the old days, according to what they used to say at Greyfriars in my time there, but the secret was lost. I have explored the cave myself, thirty years ago, looking for it.”

“You're going to find it now.”

“I hope so. If it's true, it will make a tremendous difference. But it seems rather too much luck.”

“I am sure the boy was telling the truth.”

“Some twaddling little fool of a schoolboy, talking out of his hat.”

Clearly the elder man had doubts.

“He did not seem that sort, uncle. In fact, I have never seen a boy who

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looked more level-headed. I thought him keen as a razor."

"That's no comfort, considering what you were doing when he came on you!" growled the elder. "If he guessed—"

"How could he guess? He fancied that I was looking for a lost penknife."

The elder man grunted.

"That was lame enough. If he was suspicious, the young rascal might hunt over the beach to find out what you were searching for."

The Bounder gave a start as he heard that. He grinned in the darkness.

"He would not be likely to find it if he did!" came the boyish voice, with a laugh. "I've hunted for it every day since last Wednesday, but I haven't picked it up yet."

"Fool to leave it there!" came a muttering growl.

"I had no choice, had I? It was touch and go, swimming out after the boat, and I could not have swum carrying the packet."

It was Wharton's turn to start at that. Every word reached his ears, and the voice seemed more and more familiar. It began to dawn upon him who was speaking—the boy whom Coker & Co. had seen swim out after the drifting boat to rescue Billy Bunter and Bessie; the boy he had seen on the yacht in Pegg Bay.

"You need not have swum after the boat!" came the grunting rejoinder. "You could have let the fat fool take what was coming to him!"

"There was a girl in the boat with him, uncle." Young Compton's voice was quiet, but very clear. "If I'd left them to it, I should have been a cur! Is that what you want me to be?"

"I want you not to play the fool, at any rate!" said the other harshly. "What would happen if the packet was found? Better to fling it into the sea than to leave it on the beach."

"I did not leave it on the beach; I crammed it into a crevice in the chalk. You told me it was worth five hundred pounds, and—"

"That's enough! What's done cannot be undone!" It was almost a snarl. "It cannot be helped now. We are not here to talk, but to find out whether that secret passage really exists. Give me the lamp!"

Harry Wharton nudged the Bounder's arm. Most of what had been said was a puzzle to him, though less so to Smithy. But one thing was clear—the younger fellow of the two was the fellow who had swum out after the drifting boat and saved Billy Bunter and Bessie. Now that he knew that, it seemed to Harry quite unnecessary to keep in concealment.

"May as well show up, Smithy," he whispered. "I know who that chap is now."

"So do I!" grinned the Bounder. "But—"

There was a sudden, sharp exclamation. They had spoken in whispers, but the ears of the slouch-hatted man seemed remarkably keen. Evidently he had caught some sound.

"What is that? Someone is here!" came his sharp voice, in panting tones.

"Impossible at this hour!"

"Fool!"

The light was instantly extinguished. There was a sound of hurried feet dropping in the boat, a crash of an oar on a rock, and almost before the juniors knew what was happening, the boat was shooting out to sea.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Shut Out!

HARRY WHARTON stared out of the cave-mouth. The boat that had come so strangely from the sea was gone—vanished into the night.

Faintly from the distance came back a sound of oars in rowlocks, dying away on the sea. That sudden flight amazed the captain of the Remove.

"Gone!" muttered the Bounder.

"But why?"

"They heard us."

"I know. I don't see why they should be so alarmed."

"Might have thought it was the smuggler's ghost!" grinned Smithy. "This cave is said to be haunted at night."

"Oh, rot!"

"I showed that chap the place," said the Bounder. "I was the fellow he was speaking of. They came here to explore it. Queer time to choose—what?"

"Yes, rather!"

Wharton, astonished and perplexed, stared at the dim sea. The boat had disappeared; no sound came back from it now.

The Bounder's eyes were gleaming.

He had known at the time that it was not a lost penknife for which Valentine Compton had been searching the beach. Now he knew what it was. Last Wednesday the boy had been put ashore by a boat from the yacht, which had then sailed with a "packet." He had left the packet on the beach when he swam out to the rescue of Billy Bunter and Bessie. What was in that mysterious packet? Smithy wondered. Evidently, Compton had not yet succeeded in finding it.

"Well, they're gone!" said Smithy.

"Blessed if I can understand why they should take the alarm like that!" said Harry, quite puzzled. "Looks as if they want to keep it secret that they came here at all. I don't see why they should."

Vernon-Smith grinned in the darkness. There was a glimmering suspicion at the back of his own mind.

But he had no intention of speaking of it to Wharton.

"It's jolly odd!" said Harry.

"No bizney of ours!"

"Oh, no!"

"Coming back, or staying here all night?" asked the Bounder sarcastically.

Now that that strange episode was over, the Bounder was his sneering self again.

"Let's go!"

They turned their backs on the sea and tramped up the cavern. Beyond the faint glimmer of starlight, Vernon-Smith turned on the torch.

He gritted his teeth as the light wavered.

"You fool!" he muttered. "It won't last out!"

Wharton laughed carelessly.

"Like to run?" he asked.

"Oh, shut up!"

The Bounder did not run, but he walked very fast. They reached the cavity in the cavern wall and swung down by the pegs in the rock. The light of the torch was dim as they entered the underground tunnel.

"We can trot here!" muttered the Bounder.

"Trot, if you like," answered Wharton coolly. "I'm going to walk."

"I'll leave you in the dark, then!" snarled Vernon-Smith.

"Do!" answered Harry indifferently.

The Bounder was tempted to take him at his word. The torch was dimming,

but it might last if they did that underground mile at a rapid trot. The thought of groping along in dense darkness was unnerving, strong as Smithy's nerve was. But he would not run if Wharton did not; and Wharton walked at his ordinary pace, neither faster nor slower. Several times, hurrying on ahead, the Bounder had to slow down for him to come up.

"Will you hurry, you fool?" he asked, between his teeth.

"No!"

"Do you want to finish this in the dark?"

"I don't care a bean!"

The Bounder, breathing hard, tramped on. Dimmer and dimmer grew the failing light. There was barely a glimmering spot in the darkness when they had still a good distance to cover.

It dimmed and dimmed. The battery was on the point of exhaustion. In almost complete darkness, the Bounder tramped on, and the captain of the Remove followed him. When he turned that tiny spot of light for a moment on Wharton's face the Bounder saw a smile of scornful amusement there. He repressed his rage with an effort and tramped on.

The light suddenly went out.

"That tears it!" muttered the Bounder savagely.

The blackness was like pitch.

"Lucky there are no turnings in this jolly old passage!" drawled Wharton. "We've only got to keep on."

"You rotter!"

"What's biting you?" asked Wharton, with a laugh. "Have you forgotten that you're a devil of a fellow, with tons of nerve?"

The Bounder made no answer to that. He had boasted of his nerve, and called the captain of the Remove a funk. He was outdone in nerve, and he knew it, and knew that Wharton knew it. There was something like hatred in his heart as he tramped wearily on, groping in the dense darkness.

That black tunnel seemed endless. But at last—at long last—the Bounder's knees struck against a stone step as he groped, and he stumbled. It was the spiral stair at last.

He clambered up, and Wharton followed. They groped into the stone-walled room at the top of the stair.

Vernon-Smith fumbled over the oaken door. There was a deep dread in his heart that it might be fastened on the other side. If Prout had suspected—

The door did not open.

It seemed to Vernon-Smith that his heart missed a beat. He groped over the door and pushed at it. It did not stir.

Wharton heard his panting breath in the darkness. The Bounder was straining his strength on the oaken door. But he knew now that it would not open. He knew that it was bolted on the inner side, or it would have opened at once. He stepped back from it, panting.

"Done!" he muttered huskily.

"You can't open it?"

"No!"

"Let me try!"

"Try if you like, you fool—it won't open!" panted Vernon-Smith.

Wharton groped past him and pressed on the open door. It was immovable.

"We're done!" muttered the Bounder.

"Looks like it!" Wharton stepped back from the door. His voice was perfectly cool.

"Prout must have suspected something."

"I said it was even chances," assented Wharton.

"You mad fool!"

"Getting the wind up?" asked Harry.

"Oh, you fool—you mad fool!" hissed the Bounder. "That old ass guessed what the game was! He's bolted the door, to make us knock to be let in. He's waiting for us now—near enough to hear a knock! He doesn't know who we are. But he will know when we have to knock. The game's up!"

"Quite!"

"What are we going to do now?" breathed Vernon-Smith.

Harry Wharton laughed.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Friends in Need!

"**T**HEY'RE keeping it up!"

"The silly asses!"

"The blithering idiots!"

"Three o'clock—listen!"

"Something's happened!" said Frank Nugent. "I'm going down!"

It was a low murmur of voices in the Remove dormitory. Five fellows were awake there—Tom Redwing and the Co. The rest of the Remove was fast asleep, long ago. But there was little sleep for the Co., or for the Bounder's anxious chum.

Frank Nugent slipped from his bed and began to dress in the dark. Tom Redwing and the rest of the Co. did the same.

"Anybody got a flash-lamp?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Here!" answered Nugent.

"Come on, then!"

Masters' Passage, when they reached it, was black as a hat. They groped cautiously along. But as they turned the corner at the end a glimmer of light came to their eyes.

"Somebody's up!" whispered Bob.

The electric light was burning in the library corridor. That could mean nothing but that a master was up. And that, in turn, could mean nothing but that the breakers of bounds were watched for!

Bob Cherry whistled softly.

"That tears it!" he murmured.

Frank Nugent peered round the corner into the lighter corridor. He had to take the risk of being seen. Half-way down the corridor was the secret panel—and it stood wide open.

Wharton and Smithy could hardly have left it so. It had been opened since.

Nugent's heart throbbed.

A little farther along the corridor was a deep, leather-covered settee, under a window, almost facing the open panel. On that settee was seated—or, rather, sprawled—a portly figure.

"Prout!" breathed Nugent.

Had Mr. Prout glanced along the corridor, he must have seen Nugent. But he did not stir. Faintly, there came a low, rumbling sound in the silence.

Mr. Prout was asleep.

The juniors did not need telling what had happened. Prout had been up, he had suspected something, and gone to investigate, and found the hidden door unbolted. Then, of course, he had known that Greyfriars fellows had gone out of bounds by the secret passage. He had sat down to wait for their return.

He had had a long wait—and he had fallen asleep; or probably he had allowed himself a nap while he waited. It was fairly certain that he had secured the hidden door, to force the truants to knock when they returned.

"That's why!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"They're shut out!" muttered Redwing. "They'll have to knock—and Prout's sticking there to hear them when they do—"

"That's it!" said Frank. "Most likely they've got back before this—but they've found the door bolted on them."

"Keep back!" muttered Redwing. "One of us will have to cut along and get the door open, and chance Prout—"

"Leave it to me!" whispered Nugent.

"Keep quiet, for goodness' sake!"

Without waiting for a reply, he stopped round the corner into the lighted corridor. On tiptoe, he stepped along towards the open panel.

Nugent reached the light switch, and the corridor was plunged into darkness.

Through the darkness came Prout's rumbling snore. The juniors listened, their hearts beating. There was a faint gleam as Nugent turned on his flash-lamp. It disappeared beyond the panel into the passage through the thick stone wall. Prout had not awakened—yet!

Frank Nugent trod softly through the narrow passage. He flashed his light over the oaken door. As he had expected, it was bolted. He shut off the light and gripped the bolt. Slowly, with infinite care, he worked at it, forcing it back. With all his care, there was a grinding, grating sound, as the rusty iron moved in the rusty sockets.

It was clear at last, and the oaken door was unfastened. Nugent stood and listened, with almost painful intensity. But there was no change in the steady breathing of the slumberer on the settee. Prout had not awakened.

He pulled open the oaken door, and peered into the blackness beyond. Had the breakers of bounds yet returned? He soon knew! From the blackness came a savage muttering voice:

"Oh, you fool! You fool! You've done for both of us!" It was the Bounder's voice.

"Quiet!" hissed Nugent. "Quiet, you fools!"

He flashed on his lamp, and the light gleamed on two startled faces.

"Frank!" breathed Wharton. "Is that you, Frank?"

"Quiet! Prout's only a few yards away—asleep on the settee in the corridor! Quiet!" breathed Nugent.

"Then it was Prout—"

"Yes—quiet, for goodness' sake!"

The Bounder was already groping through the low doorway.

Harry Wharton pressed his chum's arm.

"Frank, old man—"

"Come on—quiet!"

They groped out after the Bounder. They could hear the low rumble of Mr. Prout's snore, a few yards away, in the dark. Softly they crept along the corridor to the corner, where they joined the rest of the party. In a few minutes more they were in the Remove dormitory. The last sound they heard from Mr. Prout was a snore. How long it would be before the Fifth Form beak woke up and discovered that the birds had flown, they did not know—and did not care! Prout was welcome—now—to keep it up as long as he liked!

Billy Bunter was not the only member of the Remove who was unwilling to turn out at the clang of the rising-bell in the morning. There were seven other fellows who were very sleepy.

Fortunately, it was Sunday, and a day of rest. Harry Wharton was rather thoughtful that day. The outcome of his reflections was a remark to his chums:

"I suppose I was rather an ass!"

"No supposing about it!" said Johnny Bull. "You were!"

"If you fellows hadn't come down—"

"Well, we did!" said Bob. "All's well that ends well. Poor old Prout must be feeling disappointed! He knows that somebody went out of bounds—but he's got all Greyfriars to choose from. No catch for Prout!"

There was, at least, one satisfactory outcome of that reckless adventure. Smithy was not likely to call the captain of the Remove a funk again! He did not want to be put to another such test of nerve! Once was enough for the Bounder, or rather, more than enough!

THE END.

(There will be another spanking fine cover-to-cover yarn of Harry Wharton & Co. in next week's MAGNET, chums, entitled: "The Schoolboy Smuggler?" You can only make sure of reading it by ordering your copy WELL IN ADVANCE!)

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