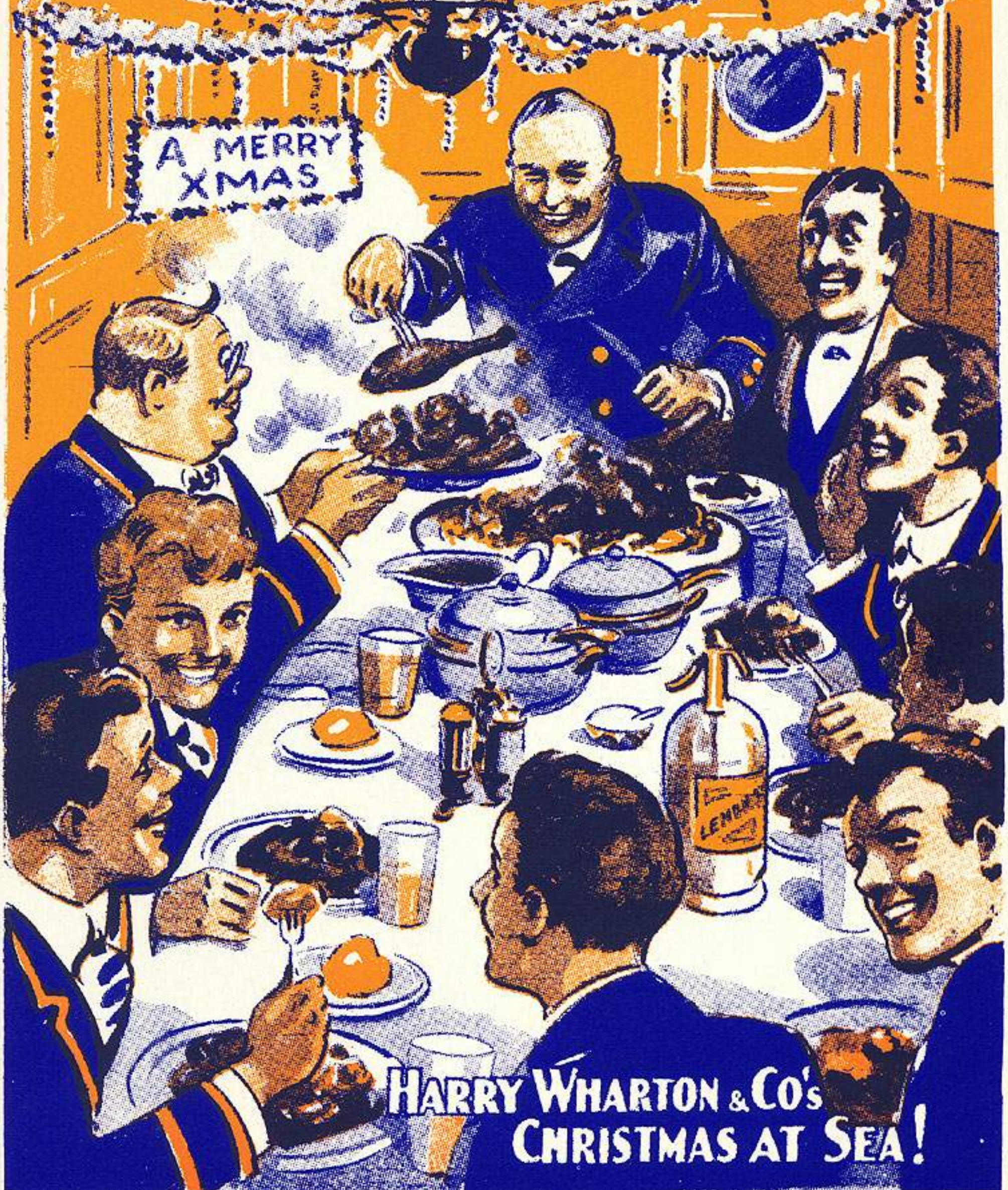


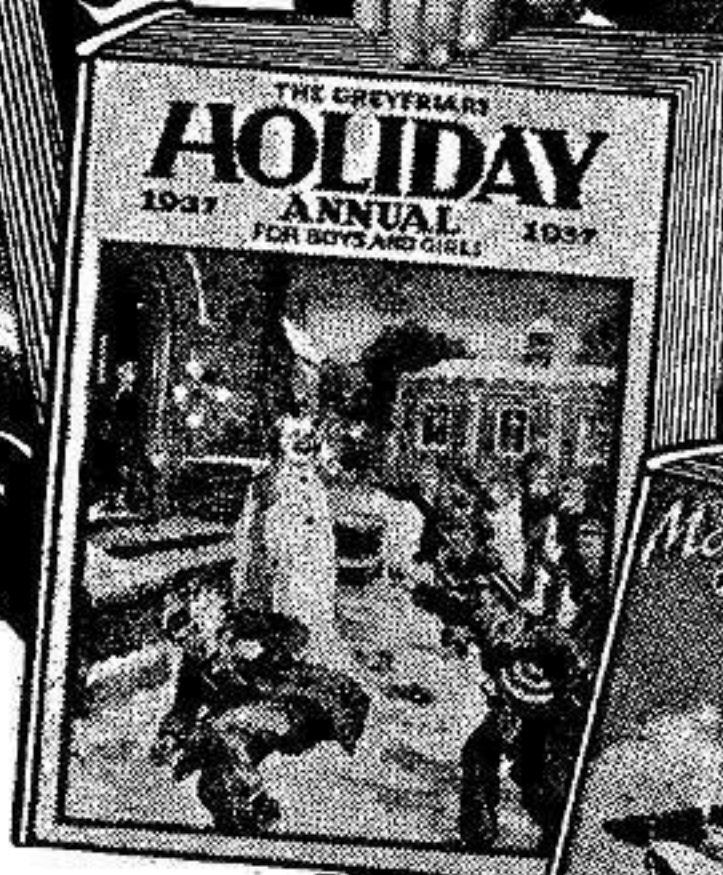
"THE CRUISE OF THE FIREFLY!" Christmas Adventure Story featuring Harry Wharton & Co.

# The Magnet 2<sup>nd</sup>



HARRY WHARTON & CO'S  
CHRISTMAS AT SEA!

# Boys! Choose Your Gift- Books Now!



Christmas present-time is nearly here, and if you want to make sure of a gift that will never lose its interest you must choose one of these magnificent volumes. All are strongly bound in coloured covers and packed with splendid features. Make your choice here and now, and you're sure to be satisfied.

## The MODERN BOY'S Annual 6/-

BETTER THAN EVER. Stories and articles about wonderful inventions and adventures—subjects that boys most delight in—by the world's best writers, illustrated with photographs, drawings and two magnificent Colour Plates.

## The HOLIDAY Annual 5/-

The famous schoolboy Annual which has been a prime favourite for so many years. No boy or girl can resist the fascination of its cheery stories of Harry Wharton & Co. and many another famous schoolboy character; its poems and its many humorous features. Four fine coloured plates.

## The Modern Boy's New Book of AIRCRAFT 6/-

Flying in all its forms, the full story of the conquest of the air, presented in story and picture. Scores of photographs of landplanes, seaplanes, flying-boats, airships, aircraft-carriers—and a fine colour plate by a famous airman-artist.

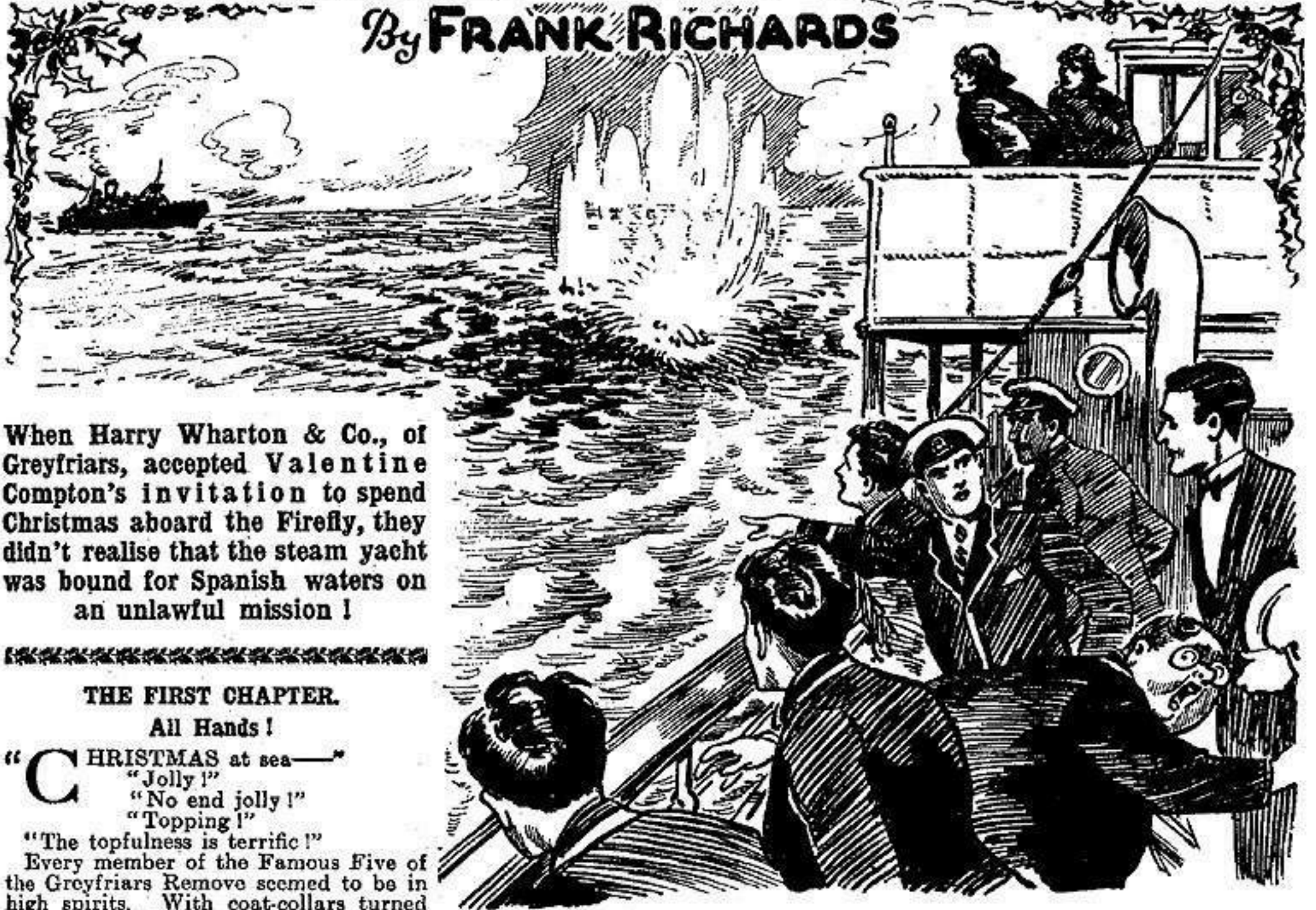
## The POPULAR BOOK of BOYS' STORIES 2/6

Packed with stories of thrilling adventure, this Annual is splendid value. Its hundred and ninety pages of specially selected fiction provide many hours of wholesome entertainment for the healthy boy of to-day

On sale at all Newsagents  
and Booksellers

# The CRUISE of the FIREFLY!

By FRANK RICHARDS



When Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, accepted Valentine Compton's invitation to spend Christmas aboard the Firefly, they didn't realise that the steam yacht was bound for Spanish waters on an unlawful mission!

## THE FIRST CHAPTER.

All Hands!

"CHRISTMAS at sea—  
"Jolly!"  
"No end jolly!"  
"Topping!"

"The topfulness is terrific!"

Every member of the Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove seemed to be in high spirits. With coat-collars turned up, caps pulled down, and the keen sea wind lashing their faces, breathing deep the salty air, they were feeling as fit as fiddles. A wild, wintry wind howled down the Channel; dark clouds were blotting out the sinking December sun, a grey sea surged and tumbled and boomed. The steam yacht Firefly, good ship as she was, rocked to the rocking sea. Spindrift spun over the rail, and lashed five cheery faces, unheeded.

Harry Wharton & Co. had been to sea before; they were good sailors; they were in good condition, and windy weather in the Channel had no terrors for them.

Of the half-dozen Greyfriars juniors on board the Firefly only one did not seem to be enjoying life.

That one sat, or, rather, sprawled on a deckchair. A sudden pitch of the vessel had caused that deckchair to rock and collapse. But Billy Bunter did not get out of it. He did not attempt to set it up again. He did not move. He sprawled on the deckchair in its collapsed state. Something seemed to be the matter with Bunter.

His fat face, which was generally ruddier than the cherry, had a pallid look. From the colour of chalk it was gradually assuming a greenish tinge.

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Bunter.

But the wind carried away that feeble squeak.

"By gum!" said Bob Cherry, breathing deep. "This makes a fellow feel good—what?"

"It does!" agreed Johnny Bull. "It do!"

"I say—" moaned Bunter.

But in the howl of the wind the chims

of the Remove did not hear that anguished moan. And they were not looking at Bunter. They were looking at sea and sky—more attractive, as a view, than William George Bunter. Indeed, it was barely possible that they had forgotten the fat existence of the Owl of the Remove. Important fellow as Bunter was, it was a fact that other fellows did forget him sometimes.

"We're going to enjoy this Christmas cruise!" remarked Harry Wharton.

"What-ho!" said Frank Nugent.

"The enjoyfulness will be terrific!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "though far from the old blokes at home, as the esteemed song remarks."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ooogh!" murmured Bunter. "I say—Ooogh! I say, you fellows—Wooogh!"

And still he was unheard and unheeded.

Captain Compton, on the bridge, glanced down at him, perhaps wondering why he was sprawling on a collapsed deckchair. But the skipper of the Firefly gave him only one glance; he did not seem interested in Bunter. Valentine Compton of the Fifth Form at Greyfriars School was on the bridge with his uncle, and he gave Bunter a second glance, and smiled. Then he called out:

"Wharton!"

"Hallo!" Harry Wharton looked round.

"Is Bunter in trouble?" called out Compton.

"Oh, my hat!"

Five fellows looked round at Billy Bunter. He gazed up at them through

his big spectacles with the gaze of an expiring codfish.

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

"Ooogh!" moaned Bunter.

"Poor old Bunter!" said Nugent.

"He's got it!"

Grunt from Johnny Bull.

"What the dickens did he expect, stacking away the grub in tons? I don't believe he's left off eating till now since he's been on the Firefly."

"Oooh! Beast!" murmured Bunter.

"I've eaten hardly anything!"

"You don't call a whole goose anything?" asked Johnny.

"Urrgh! I didn't have half the goose, as you jolly well know—not more than half, anyhow! And nothing else at all, except some beef and ham and a pie and some pudding. Ooogh! And a few mince pies—not more than six; seven or eight at the most! Oh dear. I say, you fellows—Ooogh!"

"Shall I get you a glass of water, old fat bean?" asked Harry.

"I d-d-don't want a gig-gig-glass of water!" moaned Bunter. "I—I don't want anything except—except to get off this filthy ship! Ooogh!"

"Well, there's nothing to prevent you from getting off, if you come to that!" said Bob Cherry. "But it's a bit wet outside!"

"The wetfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bunter."

"Ooogh! Beasts! Ooogh!"

Harry Wharton & Co. gazed down at Bunter. They were sympathetic. Sympathy was due to any fellow in the deadly grip of mal-de-mer. Still, there

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,506.

was no doubt that Bunter had asked for it—begged for it, in fact.

Before coming on board the Firefly for that Christmas cruise Bunter had been a little anxious about the grub. It was an important matter, and he gave it the deep thought that befitted its importance. Was the grub going to be good? Was there going to be plenty of it?

Both these questions were answered in the affirmative. The grub was uncommonly good. And it was more than ample. Compton of the Fifth, it was clear, was going to "do" that Christmas party well in the grub line. His uncle, skipper and owner of the Firefly, had clearly made hospitable preparations when he was apprised that Compton of the Fifth was bringing a party of Greyfriars fellows. Bunter's doubts were relieved! Everything was of the very best—and there was lots and lots!

In such circumstances it was natural and inevitable for Billy Bunter to disregard the Plimsoll line in taking cargo aboard!

His capacity was extensive. But there was no doubt that he had loaded beyond capacity.

Now he was suffering for his sins.

The goose seemed to be on hostile terms with the beef. The beef did not seem to be pulling well with the ham. The ham seemed to be on fighting terms with the pudding. All of them were in disagreement with the mince pies. Safe on shore they might have settled down, if not in peace, at least in a truce. But the surges of the Channel shook them up.

Bunter moaned.

"Anything we can do, old bean?" asked Frank.

Moan!

"What about a bit of fat bacon?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Urrrggh!"

"Shut up, Johnny, old man!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "You'll feel better presently, Bunter—"

"Beast! I'm not sea-sick!" moaned Bunter. "I never was sea-sick! I'm a better sailor than you are any day and chance it! Urrrggh!"

"You look it!" agreed the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

"Beast! I say, you fellows, I—I've changed my mind about this trip!" moaned Bunter. "I'm not going, after all."

"Bit of a swim back!" said Bob, shaking his head.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Go and speak to that beast—"

"Eh? What beast?"

"Captain Compton! Tell the brute to put me ashore at once! Tell him to turn this filthy ship round and go straight back."

"Oh crikey!"

"I can sort of see him doing it!" remarked Bob.

"Tell that rotter Compton of the Fifth that I'm sorry I accepted his rotten invitation, and I only want to see the last of him and his beastly uncle and his beastly yacht!" moaned Bunter. "That's all I want! Go and tell both the beasts at once and make them go straight back."

The Famous Five chuckled. Compton of the Fifth was a kind and hospitable host, and his uncle, though a man of few words, and those rather curt, backed him up in the hospitable line. But as the Firefly was outward bound it was extremely unlikely that either of them would think of turning the prow back to the white cliffs of old England. It was still less likely that any member of the Famous Five would request them so to do.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,506.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" moaned Bunter. "Of course, you like to see a fellow suffer! That's you all over, after all I've done for you. Will you go and tell those beasts I want to go straight back?"

"Hardly!"

"I tell you I want to get off this ship!" howled Bunter.

"Well, if you're really keen on it—"

said Bob.

"Ooogh! Yes! Ow!"

"We'll give you a heave over the rail—"

"Beast!"

"But you'll find it jolly damp—"

"Yah! Rotter! Ooogh! I say, you fellows, help me down to my bunk! I say, pip-pip-pip—"

"Eh?"

"Pip-pip-perhaps I can sleep it off! Kick-kick-kick—"

"What?"

"Kick-kick-kick-carry me down!"

"Carry you! Have they got a steam derrick on this packet?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Bib-bib-beast! Kick-kick-carry me down to my bunk! Will you kick-kick—"

"I'll kick you with pleasure, if you think that will do any good!"

"Urrrggh! Beast! Kick-kick-carry me dud-dud-down— Urrrggh!"

"All hands on deck!" said Bob Cherry, and the Famous Five stooped over the sad sufferer, grasped him, and heaved him up.

The chums of the Remove were strong and sturdy fellows, but their strength and their sturdiness were put to the test now.

Billy Bunter was not a light-weight. He was of the heavy-weights heavy! And as he made no effort to help himself, the whole of his tremendous weight hung on the gasping juniors. They braced themselves to the task.

A fat arm passed round Wharton's neck, another round Bob's. Bunter hung on them, and they almost collapsed like the deckchair. But the other fellows came to the rescue, lending supporting hands. Slowly but surely the fat Owl was navigated towards the companion door.

"Hold on!" gasped Bob, as the Firefly gave a pitch and a heave when they arrived at the top of the steps.

"Look out!"

"Oh crikey!"

The whole bunch rocked and staggered. Bunter yelped wildly. His fat arms clutched convulsively.

"Ow!" howled Bob. "You're breaking my neck!"

"Beast!"

"Look out!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"Yaroooh!"

There was a slipping and a stumbling and a wild rolling. Billy Bunter rolled down the steps. His convulsive grasp on the necks of Wharton and Bob Cherry dragged them headlong after him.

Bump, bump, bump!

"Whoop!"

"Leggo!"

"Yarooooh!"

Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were strewn on the stairs; but Bunter rolled to the bottom, with his two hapless victims in his octopus-like clutch. They rolled, bumping and crashing, into the saloon, where an astonished steward stared at them blankly.

"Urrrggh!" gurgled Bunter. "I'm hurt! I'm killed! Ooogh! I've broken my neck! Urrrggh! I've broken my back—ow!—in three places! Wow!

Beasts! Rotters! You did that on purpose! Yaroooh!"

"Leggo my neck!" came a muffled howl from Bob Cherry. "I'll biff you in the bread basket if you don't leggo my neck!"

"Ow! Beast! Ow!"

The steward came to the rescue. Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry were disentangled from the fat octopus. They staggered away, gasping for breath. Bob Cherry rubbed his neck, which felt as if it was dislocated. Harry Wharton felt his head, to make sure that he still had it on.

"Urrrggh! Beasts! Are you going to leave me here on the floor?" howled Bunter. "Carry me to my bunk, you beasts!"

But the Famous Five had had enough of carrying Bunter. They scrambled back to the deck. Billy Bunter found that he could crawl to his bunk, with a helping hand from the steward. He collapsed therein, and for a long, long time the moans of Billy Bunter mingled with the murmur of the sad sea waves.

## THE SECOND CHAPTER.

### In the Night!

**S**NORE!

"Oh, listen to the band!"

Snore!

"Gratters, old bean!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

Harry Wharton made a grimace. It had fallen to his happy lot to share a state-room with Billy Bunter on board the Firefly. When he looked in, at bed-time, the deep and sonorous snore of William George was going strong.

In the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars School the juniors were accustomed to that sound of revelry by night.

They had never regarded it as equal to the music of the spheres. But in the confined space of a state-room on a yacht quarters were closer than in the Greyfriars dormitory, and that whirring boom, close at hand, was neither grateful nor comforting.

Billy Bunter had forgotten his woes in sleep. With his eyes shut, and his mouth open, he slept and he snored. The boom of the surges on the windy Channel had nothing on Billy Bunter's snore.

"The snorefulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But so long as the snorefulness lasts there will be no talkfulness or grousefulness, which is a boonful blessing."

"Something in that, Inky!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. And he went into the state-room, and the other fellows went along to their quarters.

In spite of the musical effects that floated up from the lower bunk, the captain of the Greyfriars Remove was soon asleep. The wash of the waves, the throbbing of the engines, footsteps on the deck, and creaking of tackle and timber, did not disturb the healthy slumber of youth, nor sounds that came occasionally from the adjoining saloon. Wharton would probably have slept without once opening his eyes, till Rawlings, the steward, tapped on the door in the morning, had Billy Bunter remained safe in the embrace of Morpheus.

Which, as a rule, Billy Bunter could be relied upon to do once his eyelids had closed in slumber. At Greyfriars, even the rising-bell did not always awaken the Owl of the Remove.

But circumstances alter cases. It was about midnight that Harry Wharton came suddenly out of slumber, feeling extremely cold.

He opened his eyes, and blinked in

deep darkness, wondering what made him so extremely chilly.

The next moment, however, he realised that his bedclothes were gone. Pyjamas were hardly sufficient to keep him warm on a winter's night at sea.

"Are you awake, you beast?" came a voice from the gloom.

"Oh, what the dickens——" gasped Wharton. "Have you pulled my blankets off, you fat frump?"

"I called you five or six times, you beast!" came the voice from below, thrilling with indignation. "I think you might have woke up, and looked after a fellow a bit when a fellow's fearfully ill."

"You podgy porker!" hissed Wharton.

"I'm too ill to get up!" hooted Bunter. "I might never have woke you

was true that he had packed foodstuffs into every available inch of cargo space. But sea-sickness had supervened since then, and that cargo had shifted.

Billy Bunter had woke up as empty as a drum!

"I say, old chap, go and scrounge me something to eat, will you?" came Bunter's squeak from the darkness. "I'm ravenous! I feel as if I hadn't eaten a mouthful since we broke up at Greyfriars. I say——"

"Go and scrounge it yourself, you fat scoundrel!"

"I'm too ill to move! I had hardly the strength to lug your bedclothes off!" said Bunter reproachfully. "I say, go and wake up the steward, and tell him to bring me a snack. Nothing much—a cold chicken would do."

"Oh, shut up, you fat frog! I wonder what's up?"

"Eh? Is anything up?" squeaked Bunter.

"We've stopped!" said Harry. "The yacht's not moving."

"Oh lor'! I—I—I say, is the beastly ship sinking?" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, get me a lifebelt! I say, d-d-don't you leave me to drown——"

"You howling ass, the ship's all right! We've stopped for something, that's all!" answered Harry. "Maybe some other craft in trouble! I'm going to see."

"Sure the ship's safe?" asked Bunter anxiously.

"Yes, ass!"

"Then don't make a fuss about nothing! Go and get me something to eat. I say, they've got no end of stuff in the



As Rawlings reached Bunter with the tray, his foot slipped, and he pitched forward. The contents of the tray shot over Bunter. Biscuits showered on him, and a cup of steaming hot coffee swamped over him. "Yarooooooh!" The fat junior yelled, roared and bounded. "Oh, sir!" gasped Rawlings. "Sorry, sir!"

at all if I hadn't thought of reaching up and pulling your bedclothes off. Lucky I thought of that, wasn't it?"

"Was it?" gasped Wharton. "Shove those blankets back, you fat villain!"

"They're on the floor if you want them. I suppose you don't expect me to get out and pick up your bedclothes? Besides, you're going to get up, anyhow. I say, I'm hungry!"

"What?"

"Hungry."

"You've woke me up in the middle of the night to tell me you're hungry?" howled Wharton.

"Well, you couldn't get me some grub unless I woke you up, could you? Don't be an ass, Wharton! I say, old chap, I'm fearfully hungry! Famished!"

"Do you want to be sea-sick again, you cormorant?"

"I'm all right now. The beastly ship isn't plunging about as it was, and those rotten engines aren't rattling like kettledrums now. I say, a cold chicken and a few sandwiches, and——"

"By gum!" ejaculated Wharton. Now that his attention was drawn to the fact, he noticed that the throb of the engines was silent, and the motion of the yacht seemed rather that of rocking to the surge of the sea than plunging onward through the rolling waves.

It seemed that the Firefly had hove-to. Wharton wondered whether that meant that some accident had occurred. Possibly it meant that fog had descended on the Channel, and that Captain Compton considered it judicious not to keep his vessel under way.

"I say, Wharton——"

refrigerator—prime! I had a squint at it, you know! Ask Rawlings——"

"Fathead!"

Harry Wharton put a leg over the side of his bunk, to step down. There was a sudden howl, as his foot knocked on something.

"Ow! Wow! Beast! Wharrer you kicking me on the nose for? Ow!"

Wharton chuckled. Bunter's head popped back, like that of a tortoise into a shell. The captain of the Remove stepped down, groped for the electric light switch, and pressed it. There was a click, but no light.

"Ow! My nose!" came a wail from the lower bunk. "Beast! Kicking a chap on the nose in the dark! Turn the light on, you rotter! Ow!"

"I can't!" said Harry. "Something

seems to be wrong with it. I'm going to see if there's anything up."

"Bring me a cold chicken—"

"Br-r-r-r!"

"And a cake—"

Headless of the fat voice from the darkness, Harry Wharton groped for slippers and a coat, and got into them. Then he groped for the door. All was darkness without, as he slid the door open.

"I say, are you going?" came Bunter's squeak. "I say, I know they've got cold chicken, and you jolly well make that steward get me one, and—"

Wharton stopped out and shut the door on the squeak. All was dense darkness, and he could only conclude that something was amiss with the engines, and that the electric light had gone off. That it had been shut off intentionally, naturally did not occur to him; he could have imagined no reason for it.

He groped his way to the deck.

A gust of wind struck him as he put his head out. He caught his breath, and, holding on with one hand, turned up his coat collar with the other. Dark as pitch lowered the wintry sky, and almost as dark was the deck of the Firefly. Not a single light was burning on the yacht. Such a breach of sea-laws and regulations could mean only one thing, to Wharton's mind—an accident of some kind. He thought of calling his chums—but if, after all, there was no cause for alarm, he did not want to disturb them. He groped out on deck, feeling his way, and his outstretched hand touched a shadowy figure that passed in the gloom. A sharp voice snapped:

"You're not wanted, Rawlings, you fool! Keep below! Keep an eye peeled

for the schoolboys—some of them might wake."

The shadow was gone the next instant. Wharton had not seen who it was—but he knew the voice: that of Captain Compton. The Greyfriars junior stood holding on to the companion doorway, staring.

### THE THIRD CHAPTER.

#### A Mystery!

**H**ARRY WHARTON stood silent, wondering, peering into the darkness.

His brain was in a whirl. The fact that the lights were off, that the yacht Firefly was a spot of blackness on a black sea, indicated some accident—but there was no sound of alarm, no confusion, no rapping of orders. It was not an accident—Wharton realised that—but what did it mean?

Something was going on on board the yacht in the darkness—but what? Captain Compton, in the gloom, had supposed that he was the steward coming on deck. He had disappeared before the schoolboy could speak. Why was Rawlings to "keep an eye peeled" for the schoolboys, in case any of them awakened? It was scarcely possible that anything could be happening on the yacht that Valentine Compton's school-boy guests were not to be permitted to see. What did it mean?

The wind came with howling gusts. But other sounds came to the Greyfriars junior—trampling of feet, creaking of tackle. A bunch of dark figures loomed shadowy in the gloom. He realised that a boat was being lowered.

So far as he knew, the Firefly was far out at sea, on her way down the

Channel, far from the coast of either England or France.

Had the yacht closed in nearer the shore since dark? Wharton was utterly puzzled and a little alarmed.

A glimmer of light came out of the gloom. It came from a hurricane lamp at a distance from him.

It was held in the hand of Mr. Swain, the mate of the Firefly—a red-faced, taciturn man with whom the Greyfriars fellows had had hardly a word since they had been on board. Indeed, the way Mr. Swain had stared at them when they first arrived had rather given them the impression that the mate of the Firefly was not greatly pleased to see them there at all.

Swain's red face showed in the glow of the hurricane lamp. It shone on Captain Compton's hard, bronzed face, standing near him. It shone on the men who were swinging out the boat from the davits. And, to Wharton's surprise, it shone on the handsome face of Valentine Compton, under a sou'-wester. None of them saw the Greyfriars junior, or even looked round in his direction. His eyes fixed on the strange glimmering scene in amazement. What it could possibly mean was past his fathoming.

"It'll be rough, Valentine!" He heard the curt tones of Captain Compton.

"That's all right!"

"Look here, I'll leave Swain in charge, and go—"

"Leave it to me! Do you think I'm afraid of a windy sea?"

"It's a good hour's pull!" said Swain. "You'll have to burn a flare to help us back, sir!"

"Ay, ay!"

The mate and Valentine Compton slipped down into the boat. Two men were already in it, fending it off from the yacht's side. The light disappeared—but Wharton's eyes picked it up again at a distance on the sea. The hurricane-lamp was in the bows of the boat that pulled away into the blackness through the lashing spindrift.

Harry Wharton gazed, dumbfounded. Compton of the Fifth had gone in the boat with the mate and two seamen at midnight. Obviously, they were pulling ashore—which meant that the coast, either of England or France, was hidden in the darkness, but not far away. In the name of all that was mysterious, why was Captain James Compton sending his nephew ashore at midnight—with all lights off the yacht, at the risk of a collision at sea? It was not by accident that the lights were off—Harry Wharton could see that now. In two hours, the boat would return and flares would be lighted as a guide—in the meanwhile, the Firefly rocked on the dark sea in darkness.

Harry Wharton felt his heart beat unpleasantly.

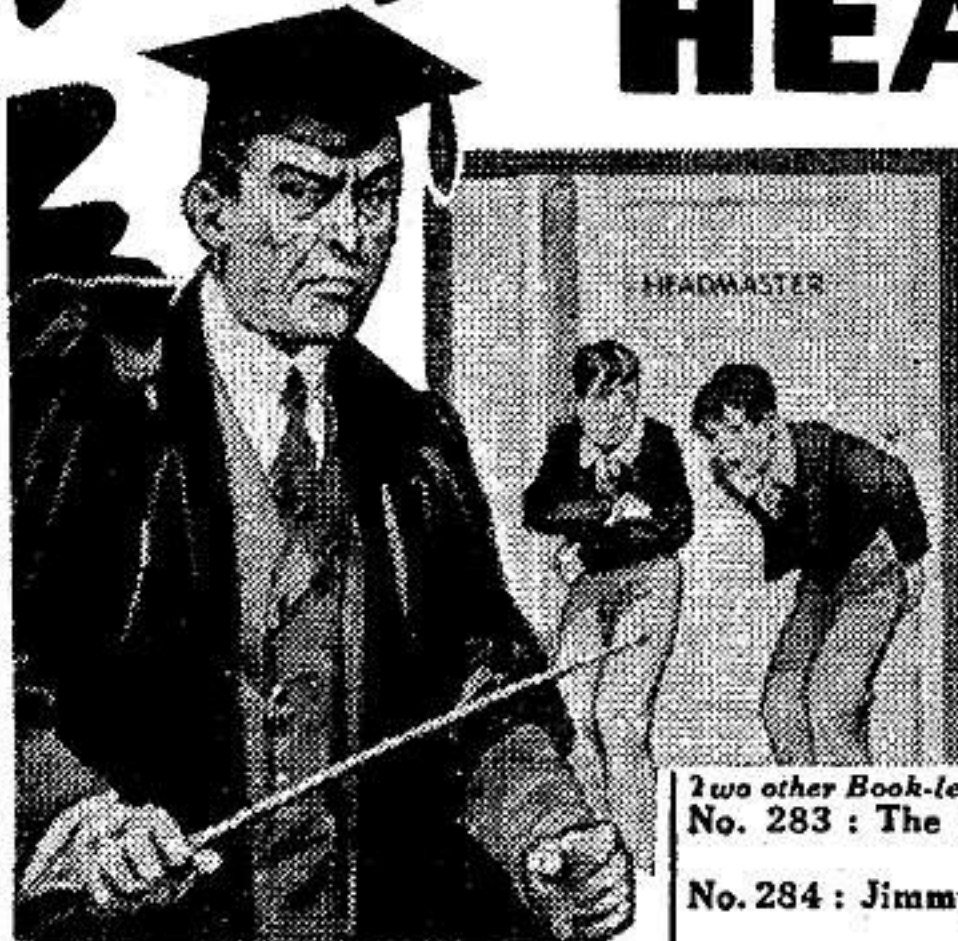
There was something strange, mysterious, and—he could not help realising it—surreptitious in these proceedings in the dark.

Unknown to the schoolboy passengers, the yacht had approached a shore—what shore, he did not know. From what Captain Compton had said—to the steward, as he supposed—the schoolboys were not wanted on the scene—not wanted to see anything of it.

That was an uncomfortable reflection for Harry Wharton. It was certainly not from any desire to pry into Captain Compton's secrets, whatever they might be, that he had come up to the deck.

He hardly knew what to do. As it was clear now that there was no accident, or trouble of any kind, he decided to return to his state-room. He had

# The TYRANT HEAD!



No study feeds—longer lessons—more floggings! Such are a few of the drastic changes the new Head of St. Frank's thinks fit to impose on the school. It's asking for trouble—and Martin, the martinet, gets it from Nipper & Co. of the Remove! Ask now for this all-thrilling, book-length story—

No. 285 of the  
**SCHOOLBOYS'  
OWN LIBRARY**

Two other Book-length yarns you will like:

No. 283: The Worst Form at Greyfriars!

No. 284: Jimmy Silver's Christmas Party!

## SCHOOLBOYS' OWN LIBRARY

Now on sale at all Newsagents and Bookstalls 4d

not been seen, and evidently he was not wanted there.

He turned to grope down the stairs in the darkness. Below all was as black as the inside of a hat. But he heard a movement.

The next moment he bumped into an unseen form at the foot of the stair. There was an exclamation, in the voice of the steward, Rawlings.

"Who's that? That you, sir?"

"It is I," answered Harry quietly. In the strange circumstances he would have preferred to get back to his state-room unseen. But he certainly did not think of dodging observation.

"Who—what—"

A flash lamp turned suddenly on. The beam of light flashed into Harry Wharton's face, almost blinding him.

Behind the beam he saw the plump face of the steward—with an expression he had not hitherto seen on that plump face. It was hard set, and the eyes glinted under knitted brows. Holding the flash-lamp in one hand, dazzling the junior with the light, Rawlings grasped him by the shoulder with the other. His grip was hard and fast—his look threatening, menace mingled with alarm.

"You—you're young Wharton! What have you been spying into?" came Rawlings' voice, between his teeth.

Wharton's eyes flashed.

"Take your hand from my shoulder!" he said quietly. "I've been spying into nothing, Rawlings—if there's anything to spy into!"

The grasp on his shoulder did not relax; it tightened. The man's glinting eyes searched his face in the dazzling beam of the flashlamp.

"You've been on deck?"

"Yes!"

"Why?"

"You seem to forget yourself, my man!" said Wharton contemptuously. "You have no right to ask me questions!"

"You'll answer me, all the same. Why did you go on deck?"

Wharton paused a moment. But he answered:

"Bunter woke me up. I found that the engines had stopped, and that no lights were on. I thought something must have happened."

"Is that all?"

Harry Wharton breathed hard.

"I've answered you, Rawlings, though you've no right to question me. Take your hand from my shoulder, or I'll knock you down!"

For a moment more the angry, suspicious face looked at him; then the hand dropped from the junior's shoulder.

"Sorry, sir!" Rawlings' plump voice was as civil as formerly now. "You rather startled me, sir. Shall I show you a light back to your room? There's something wrong with the current; the engineer says it will be on again shortly. I'll light you—"

"You need not trouble!" answered Wharton icily.

"No trouble at all, sir," said Rawlings civilly.

Wharton went back to his state-room without making any rejoinder, lighted on his way by the steward's flashlamp. Perplexed as he was by the whole business, Wharton was no fool, and he knew perfectly well that Rawlings wanted to see him safe back in his quarters for his own satisfaction.

"I say"—Billy Bunter blinked at the beam of the flashlamp in the steward's hand—"I say, have you got the grub?"

"Go and eat coke!" snapped Wharton.

And he threw his bedclothes back into his bunk and clambered in.

"Beast! Steward! I say, steward,

I'm hungry! Bring me something to eat!"

"Certainly, sir!" said Rawlings.

A few minutes more, and Billy Bunter was happy. The obliging Rawlings left him the flashlamp to gobble by its light, leaving him to it, and shutting the door.

Once more Bunter took in cargo, while Harry Wharton laid his head on the pillow in the upper bunk, though not to sleep.

Strange and troubling thoughts were in the mind of the captain of the Greyfriars Remove, and it was long before his eyes closed again. Before they closed, he heard the throbbing of the engines, and knew that the Firefly was under way—which meant that Valentine Compton had returned from his mysterious boat trip to an unseen shore. Billy Bunter had finished gobbling, and his snore was once more rivalling the boom of the sea before Harry Wharton slept.

## THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

### Very Hot!

"LOVELY morning!" roared Bob Cherry.

He tramped down from the windy deck, his mop of hair rather like a busby, his cheeks red as apples, and a few snowflakes spattered over him.

There was a flurry of snow over the Channel. The cabin skylight had a coating of it, through which the December sunshine glimmered. The Firefly churned on through a grey, tumbling sea.

"The loveliness is not terrific, my esteemed and idiotic Bob!" remarked Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh, with a shiver.

December at sea felt a trifle chilly to the dusky junior from India's coral strand.

"Oh, ripping!" said Bob. "The jolly old wind goes through you like a jolly old knife through cheese! It gives you a jolly old appetite—what? Blessed if I don't feel I could eat nearly half as much as Bunter!"

The saloon of the Firefly was well warmed and cosy. Breakfast was on the table, and Rawlings hovered, plump and polite and attentive.

Harry Wharton, looking at him, found it difficult to believe that he was the same man who had gripped his shoulder in a grip of iron the previous night at the foot of the companion stair, and glared at him in the light of the flashlamp, with a scowling face, half-alarmed and half-threatening.

Rawlings appeared to have forgotten the incident. It was not so easy for Harry Wharton to forget it. His comrades had not awakened in the night, and they were merry and bright in the morning. No one but Harry Wharton knew anything of the strange incident. He did not feel disposed to mention it to them. If there was something of a mysterious and secret nature going on on board the Firefly, it was no concern of the Christmas guests.

Valentine Compton breakfasted with the juniors.

Two or three times Harry Wharton glanced at the handsome Fifth Former of Greyfriars, wondering.

Compton chatted cheerily with the juniors. At Greyfriars there was rather a gulf between a Fifth Form man and juniors in the Lower Fourth. Away from the school, however, that gulf was bridged by Compton's good nature. He seemed to forget that he was a senior among juniors. He talked freely enough, but he made no allusion to that boat

trip of the night. It was not, apparently, a matter he wanted to mention.

Bunter did not turn out to breakfast. Rawlings took his breakfast in to his state-room.

Nobody missed the fat Owl's society very sorely, however. Every now and then the bell rang from Bunter's room, indicating that further supplies of foodstuffs were required. Heedless of the lesson of the previous day, Billy Bunter was disregarding the Plimsoll line again.

Mr. Swain breakfasted with the juniors and Compton, but he left long before the others had finished, and went on deck. No doubt he went to take charge of the bridge, for soon afterwards Captain Compton came down and dropped into a vacant seat at the table, and Rawlings hurried to supply him.

He greeted the juniors with a sort of curt cordiality. His keen, close-set eyes lingered, as Harry Wharton noticed, on the captain of the Remove with a brief but penetrating look.

Wharton affected not to observe it. But he did observe it, and guessed that Rawlings had reported the incident of the night to the captain. He wondered whether the skipper was wondering exactly how much he might have seen when he had gone up to the deck at midnight.

What did it matter what he might have seen? Why had Rawlings used the word "spying"? What was there to spy into? A feeling of doubt and misgiving was rising in Harry Wharton's breast.

In spite of himself, there came back to his mind what Smithy of the Remove had told him at Greyfriars. He had disregarded, and almost forgotten, what Herbert Vernon-Smith had declared—that the Firefly, ostensibly a pleasure yacht, was in reality a smuggling craft; that Captain Compton, ostensibly a wealthy man of leisure and a keen yachtsman, was in reality a smuggler—a dealer in contraband against the law. So Smithy had declared; and that Compton of the Fifth was hand-in-glove with the yachtsman-smuggler.

Wharton had not believed it. He did not believe it now. But the strange episode of the night had undoubtedly given him a jolt.

He could not help being a little silent and thoughtful at breakfast. But he did not want to be a wet blanket, and after breakfast he made an effort to dismiss the matter from his mind.

Bob Cherry tramped to Bunter's door, and roared in rather like a megaphone: "Hallo, hallo, hallo! Roll out, Bunter!"

Bunter was taking an extra nap after brekker. His eyes were shut, and his mouth was open. Bob picked up a coffee-cup from the tray beside the bunk, and playfully trickled a remnant of coffee into the open mouth of the fat Owl!

Bunter woke up. "Urrrrgh!" he gurgled. "Wurrgh! Oooooogh! Ow! Oooogh! Beast! Wharrer you up to? Ooooooogh!"

"Waking you up, old fat man!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "I'm not getting up yet! I'm not getting up this morning at all! I'm ill! Get out!"

"Lovely morning!" urged Bob.

"Beast!"

"There's snow on deck!" said Bob temptingly.

"Idiot!"

"I'll roll you out, if you like, old fat rhinoceros!"

"Keep off, you silly dummy!" howled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, come and take this dangerous maniac away!"





wake me up for dinner, though! That's important!"

"Look here, you frowsy frowster—" "Yah!"

"You'll make yourself ill, frowsting in bed all day, and gorging like a bo-constrictor!" roared Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

"Bunter, you frowsy slacker—"

"Rotter! I tell you I can't get up!" hooted Bunter. "And I'm jolly well not going to, see? Besides, I can't, being so ill! Shut up, and let a fellow go to sleep!"

And Billy Bunter closed his little round eyes behind his big round spectacles, for his umpteenth nap that day.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly. "What's that they're calling out on deck?"

"She's going down fast!" yelled Bob. "Hurry up! Never mind Bunter—don't bother about Bunter—hurry up!"

"I say, you fellows!" shrieked Bunter, as four faces disappeared from his doorway, like ghosts at cock-crow. "I say—help! I say, stop for me, you beasts! I say, where's my trousers? Oh lor'!"

A minute ago Bunter had stated that he couldn't get up. Now he found, suddenly, that he could. Not only could he get up, but he was able to get up quite swiftly. He bounced out of his bunk like a fat indiarubber ball.

He yelled frantically as he bounced:

"I say, you fellows! Help! Save me, you beasts! Get me a lifebelt! Oh lor'! I knew this beastly ship wasn't safe! Harry, old chap—Franky, old

Wharton's dressing-gown, and bolted out of the state-room.

Rawlings stared at him, open-mouthed with surprise, as he whisked by.

It was windy on deck, and the dressing-gown blew out round Bunter, rather like a sail filling with wind. It was rather unfortunate that the fat Owl had borrowed pyjamas belonging to Harry Wharton, and that they were about a foot too long for him. They tangled round his feet as he flew, and he smote the deck and rolled over, roaring:

"Yaroooh! Help! Save me! I say, where's the boats? Put me in a boat! Gimme a lifebelt! Yaroooh!"

Every eye on the deck of the Firefly was fixed on Bunter in blank amazement. Captain Compton and Mr.

## Santa Claus Spills the Beans!



This article is apparently contributed by Santa Claus, who seems to have written it in the handwriting of Harold Skinner, of the Remove.

I SUPPOSE you will think it odd that I should write an article in this paper, but I happened to take a walk down the chimney of Study No. 1 in the Remove the other evening, and I heard Wharton say he'd like to know what Santa Claus would bring the Greyfriars fellows this year. He said it with a laugh, as though he didn't believe in Santa Claus, so I am sending this article to prove that I am very much alive.

I am also sending him a bill for a new pair of trousers. He lit the fire before I could get out of the chimney.

It is my intention this year to give the

Greyfriars fellows exactly what each one of them needs most. Coker of the Fifth, for instance, has asked for a racing-car, but he can hit people quite hard enough with his motor-bike. He will therefore get a plush-lined, solid silver muzzle, which would be an ornament to any fellow's jaw. I'm sure he'll look charming in it.

Bunter of the Remove has asked me for a large cake. I shall give him one—a large cake of soap! He needs it badly. I shall also give him a high-powered telescope through which he will be able to see how far his postal order has progressed.

I am presenting Bolsover major with a handsome leather gas-mask. This is not to protect him from gas, but to protect the Remove from his features, which worry them considerably.

What Loder needs more than anything else is boiling in oil. My patent portable oil-boiler will solve this problem for him. It consists of a folding cauldron, comfortably fitted with a cushioned seat, a barrel of oil, and a crucible furnace. I am sure Loder will enjoy it.

Temple of the Fourth made a modest request for a television set. His face would certainly break it. I am, therefore, giving him a new-style hat, with a large hole for talking through. This is a suitable lid for a big pot.

Vernon-Smith will receive a block of wood and a hatchet, in the hope that he will go and chop chips.

Fisher T. Fish will be given a mangle with which to wring his heart. It's the only thing that ever will!

Quelch will be given six. Let's see how he likes it!

Prout will be given a wide berth, as usual.

Bob Cherry's gift is too big to get into the school, but he will find it on Court-field Common. It consists of a pair of boots big enough for his feet.

Hurree Singh will receive a parrot which will repeat the English language until Inky learns it. This is one way of giving him the birdfulness.

Harry Wharton himself will be given a beautiful tin pedestal, specially designed for little tin gods.

(And a funny ass named Skinner will be given a thick ear, long before Christmas.—HARRY WHARTON.)

"Eh? I never heard—" began Harry; but he stopped as Bob closed one eye at him.

"Better go and see," said Bob. "If there's danger—"

"It's a bit foggy—" said Nugent, taking his cue from Bob.

"Lots of collisions in the fog, on the Channel!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Cut off, my esteemed Bob, and see!" Bob Cherry rushed away.

Billy Bunter's eyes opened behind his spectacles. He gave four fellows at the doorway an alarmed blink.

"I say, you fellows," he gasped. "I say—"

"Hark!"

"What's that?"

Bob Cherry's voice came in a roar:

"Look out, you fellows! She's going down!"

"Oh crumbs!"

fellow—I say, Inky, stop for me! Oh crikey!"

Harry Wharton came speeding back. "Quick!" he shouted.

"I—I—I say, is—is she really going down?" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, are you sure she's going down?"

"Yes, yes, yes! She's going down fast! She was going down before we came to your cabin, but nobody told us! Quick!"

"Oh crikey! Help! Find my trousers!" yelled Bunter. "Where's my bags! I say, old fellow—dear old fellows—wait for me—lend me a hand—I can't find my trousers! Oh crikey!"

"Never mind your trousers, you fat chump! Quick!" yelled Wharton, and he rushed away. "She's going down! Buck up!"

"Oh lor'! Oh dear! Help!"

The fat Owl plunged into Harry

Swain were both on the bridge, the former looking at the horizon, the latter at the binnacle. But horizon and binnacle were both forgotten as they saw Bunter. They gazed at him. Valentine Compton stared at him. The watch on deck stared at him. Bunter had the spot-light.

"What the thump!" ejaculated Compton.

"Is that boy mad?" exclaimed his uncle.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five.

"Yaroooh! I say, you fellows, help!" Bunter rolled and roared. With a pitching deck under him, tangled in pyjamas and dressing-gown, Bunter was on his beam ends, and seemed unable to get off them. "I say, old fellows—beasts! I say, dear old chaps—oh, you rotters! I say, dear old rotters—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Help! Wow!"

With the dressing-gown billowing in the wind, Bunter sprawled, and kicked up two little fat legs. There was a howl of laughter all over the *Firefly*. Even Captain Compton's hard-bronzed face melted into a grin.

Valentine Compton rushed along to the fat Owl, grasped him by a podgy shoulder, and jerked him to his feet.

"Save me!" gasped Bunter. "I say, I'll get in the boat first—that's important! Where's the boat? I say—"

"You young ass!" roared Compton. "What's this game? Are you potty?"

"Beast! Help!"

"What's the matter with you?" roared the Fifth Former. "Why have you come on deck in your pyjamas, you blithering little idiot!"

"He hasn't!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "They're Wharton's!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I fancy Bunter thinks there's danger of some sort!" said Harry, laughing.

"Is that it, Bunter?"

"I—I—I—I say!" Bunter clung to Compton. "I—I say, isn't the ship going down?" It dawned upon even Billy Bunter's powerful intellect, that if the ship was going down, it was rather unusual, to say the least, for the ship's company to be standing about roaring with laughter.

"Going down?" gasped Compton. "You utter young ass, what on earth put that into your silly head?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I—I thought—I—I—those beasts said the ship was going down! You did, Cherry, you beast, you jolly well know you did!"

"That's right!" said Bob. "And so it is! Going down the Channel!"

"What?" yelled Bunter.

"Down the Channel!" explained Wharton. "Got it now?"

"Why, you—you—you—" gurgled Bunter. "Did—did you mean that the beastly ship was going down the beastly Channel? I knew that the ship was going down the Channel, you silly idiots! I thought you meant—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You young ass!" said Compton, laughing. "You'd better go down and dress yourself."

"Beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Relieved of his dire alarm by the news that the *Firefly*, though undoubtedly going down, was only going down the Channel, Bunter gathered his dressing-gown around his fat limbs, and plunged into the companion. A bump and a yell that followed seemed to indicate that the pyjamas had tangled again. Then Bunter's dulcet tones floated up:

"Steward! Can't you help a fellow up, you silly idiot? Ow! Don't drag me about by my ear, you beast—you're pulling my ear off, you fool! Leggo! Don't grab hold of my hair, you dummy! Ow!"

"I'm helping you, sir!"

"Ow! Beast! Leggo! I'll jolly well punch you if you don't leggo!"

Bunter got back to his state-room without further help from Rawlings.

## THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

### A Little Ventriloquism!

**B**ILLY BUNTER coughed—a little, fat cough.

Dinner was over. Being up, Bunter had stayed up, and graced the festive board with his fasci-

nating presence. But he was not in the best of tempers.

His fat leg had been pulled. He had collected several bumps. Rawlings had been cheeky. Not only had he failed to disregard all other duties, and give Bunter his special attention all through the day—as, of course, he ought to have done. But he had spilt hot coffee on Bunter; he had turned a deaf ear to Bunter's bell; he had helped him up when he rolled down the companion, first by his ear, and then by his hair. Bunter would have been glad to boot Rawlings. Booting Rawlings was not practical politics; but there were other ways of making a cheeky and impertinent person sit up.

Hence that fat little cough from the fat Owl—which the Removites knew as a sign that the Greyfriars ventriloquist was clearing for action, so to speak. It was what Bob Cherry had called Bunter's atmospherics. As Billy Bunter gave that little fat cough, five fellows looked round at him.

Rawlings was serving coffee in the saloon. Except for the steward, the Greyfriars fellows had it to themselves. Captain Compton was in his cabin; Mr. Swain in charge of the bridge, and Valentine Compton on the bridge with the mate. Harry Wharton sat at the piano. The juniors were going to have a sing-song. Billy Bunter had other ideas in his fat head.

At Greyfriars School, Billy Bunter's weird ventriloquial gifts were fairly well known. Mysterious voices in the Remove passage, sudden barking or growling in junior studies, did not mystify Remove fellows, but often led to booting for Bunter. But on board the *Firefly*, of course, nobody knew that the fat Owl was a ventriloquist, except the Famous Five. Compton of the Fifth had never heard of it; and to the rest of the ship's company Bunter was a stranger. And certainly nobody, looking at Bunter, would have suspected him of being in possession of unusual or remarkable gifts.

Rawlings had a tray of coffee-cups. The *Firefly* was pitching a little, but the motion of the vessel was nothing to a man accustomed to the sea. His foot was not likely to slip—except, perhaps, in dealing with Bunter. Rawlings, totally unaware of Billy Bunter's wonderful ventriloquial gifts, did not heed the fat ventriloquist's fat cough.

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged a grin as they heard it. If Billy Bunter wanted to weigh in with his ventriloquism, they were not averse to a little entertainment in that line. Wharton, who was running his fingers over the keys, stopped.

"Coffee, sir?" said Rawlings.

He moved across towards Wharton, seated on the piano stool; the next moment he gave a jump.

"Gr-r-r-r-r-r!" came a deep, hideous, savage growl just behind his legs.

Rawlings did not know that there was a dog on board the *Firefly*. As a matter of fact, there wasn't.

But that savage, ferocious growl just behind him naturally made him suppose that there was—and a particularly savage one.

"Ooooh!" gasped the startled steward.

He gave a bound.

Crash! Smash! Clatter! Crash!

Rawlings kept hold of the tray even as he bounded, but the coffee-cups shot right and left.

They showered on the floor, crashing and smashing.

"He, he, he!" gurgled Bunter.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

Rawlings spun round, surrounded by smashed crockery.

Had that horrible growl proceeded from a genuine dog, there was little doubt that a bite would have been the next item on the programme. Rawlings gripped the tray by one end, apparently to use as a weapon of defence.

But as he stared round for the dog and failed to spot the ferocious animal the expression on his face was extraordinary.

"I say— He, he, he! Anything the matter, Rawlings?" squeaked Billy Bunter.

The steward gazed round him in bewilderment.

"Did—did you young gentlemen see—see that dog?" he stammered. "I—I suppose you heard him?"

"Sort of," grinned Bob. "I never saw him, though."

"The seefulness was not terrific," murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Where's that dog?" snapped Rawlings. "Look here, if you've brought a dog on this packet you've done it without permission. You're not going to have a savage dog running loose here, I can tell you!"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him. The plump politeness of the *Firefly* steward had completely vanished.

The previous night Harry Wharton had realized vaguely that the steward on the *Firefly* was not on the ordinary footing of a steward on board a private yacht. The muttered words of Captain Compton, and the steward's own action in gripping him by the shoulder and accusing him of spying were a sufficient proof of that.

Now all the Greyfriars fellows realised the same thing. In his angry alarm Rawlings' civil steward manner left him like a cloak that he had dropped off. It was as if he had been playing a part, and his real self had suddenly peeped out. The expression on his angry face was aggressive, almost bullying.

The juniors exchanged glances.

They were not fellows—like Bunter—to put on any sort of "side" in dealing with a servant. Billy Bunter's system was to throw his fat weight about in dealing with anyone who was not in a position to answer back. But there was a limit.

The opinion of the Famous Five up to that moment had been that it was rather a rotten trick to make the man jump and smash his crockery. But as Rawlings yapped at them they gave up the idea at once of putting a stopper on Bunter's ventriloquial performances.

"Do you hear me?" hooted Rawlings, as the juniors did not trouble to answer him.

"We're not deaf, Rawlings!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"The deaf-fulness is not terrific, my esteemed Rawlings."

"Where's that dog?"

"Puzzle—find the dog!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Gr-r-r-r-r-r!" came suddenly from behind Rawlings, as he glared at the spot where the dog ought to have been, but wasn't.

Rawlings bounded again.

So savage a growl just behind was enough to make any man jump. This time he bounded round the table and stopped on the other side.

"Drive that dog out!" he roared.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do you think you're going to have a savage dog loose here?" shouted Rawlings. "You cheeky young rascals!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Draw it mild, old bean!"

"You'd better chuck that, Rawlings!" said Harry Wharton quietly. "That's not the way to speak to your master's

guests, and you know it. Leave the saloon."

A door in the aft bulkhead opened, and Captain Compton stepped into the saloon. Evidently he had heard the steward's excited voice. His hard, tanned face was frowning, and his eyes glinted at the steward.

"What's this?" he snapped curtly.

"Those young swabs—"

"What?"

"They've got a dog here! I was nearly bitten!" howled Rawlings. "Tell them to turn the brute out!"

"He, he, he!"

"If my nephew's guests have brought a dog on board, Rawlings, it is no concern of yours!" said the captain. "You forget yourself, I think."

"I'm not going to be bitten—"

"Silence!"

"Look here, Jim Compton—"

The captain made a stride at Rawlings, grasped him by a shoulder, and sent him spinning out of the room. He followed him out, shutting the door after him.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another in uncomfortable silence. The silence was broken by a cackle from Billy Bunter.

"He, he, he!"

"Shut up, you fat ass!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull! I'd jolly well sack that man if I were old Compton!" said Bunter. "We don't allow servants to answer back like that at Bunter Court, I can tell you!"

"Shut up, fathead!"

The juniors exchanged a long look; then Harry Wharton turned to the piano again and ran his fingers over the keys.

It was very clear that a steward who hooted "Look here, Jim Compton!" at his captain was not on the ordinary footing of a steward on a yacht.

According to appearances, James Compton was a wealthy man, running an expensive yacht for pleasure. Appearances are proverbially deceptive—and the Christmas guests on the Firefly could hardly doubt that there was something behind the appearances here.

Ten minutes later the sing-song was going strong, and Rawlings came in quietly to clear up the broken crocks and spilt coffee; his manner was deferential enough now.

"Please excuse me, young gentlemen," he said. "I was alarmed, and rather forgot my place. I hope you will overlook it."

"That's all right, Rawlings," said Bob cheerily.

"You were cheeky!" said Bunter, blinking at him. "Don't be cheeky again, my man."

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

Rawlings gave Bunter a look, but made no rejoinder and left the saloon as quietly as he had entered. Perhaps it was a consolation to him to hear Billy Bunter yell as he went. The Famous Five all kicked Bunter together; they felt that it was their duty, and they did. Bunter had not been kicked for two or three days, and it was high time.

## THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

### The Wrong Billet!

"SNOW!"

"The snowfulness is terrific."

"Jolly, isn't it?" said Bob Cherry.

It required exuberant spirits like Bob's to describe that morning as "jolly." Somewhere the sun was shin-

ing, perhaps—but, if so, no gleam of its rays reached the grey, tumbling waters under the blanket of mist.

The chums of the Remove had heard Mr. Swain remark that the visibility was not good. It certainly was not. Half a cable's length from the yacht the mist shut down on the grey sea. From the mist above flurrying snow whirled on the wind. At intervals the long, mournful hoots of the siren sounded, warning other unseen craft, and every now and then an answering wail came back from the mist.

The watch on deck were in oilskins. Captain Compton, on the bridge, peered into the mist, his hand near the engine-room telegraph. The Firefly was at half speed. The snow came on the wind from a hidden shore.

But if it had rained cats and snowed dogs Bob Cherry would probably have declared that it was jolly.

"One for you, Johnny!" said Bob.

"Eh? What is it— Yurrooogh!" gurgled Johnny, discovering what it was, as a snowball squashed on his nose.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was not a lot of space for a snowball game; but there was plenty of snow; it was coming thick and fast. The Famous Five were soon going strong. Valentine Compton, coming on deck, joined in the game with a cheery grin. Billy Bunter was still below, packing in his third breakfast.

Pitching snowballs, slipping and

Will  
**READERS PLEASE NOTE**  
that the next issue of the  
**MAGNET** will be on sale  
**THURSDAY, December 24th.**

stumbling and laughing, the Greyfriars fellows were merry and bright.

Bob went to the companion, and bawled down. It seemed rather a shame to Bob that Bunter was missing this!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Bunter! Bunt! Bunt!" roared Bob. "Tumble up! Show a leg!"

No reply from Bunter. He was deep in foodstuffs, and wind and mist and a flurry of snow had no attractions for him.

Bob gathered a snowball and tramped down.

"Come on, Bunter!" he roared.

"Tumble up, old fat man!"

"Rats!" from Bunter.

"It's simply ripping!"

"Fathead!"

"Give you an appetite for lunch—"

"I haven't finished brekker yet!"

"Oh, my hat! Don't be a frowsy slacker, old fat man! Tumble up!"

"Beast!"

Whiz!

The snowball flew from Bob's hand across the saloon. It landed nicely on Bunter's fat little nose.

There was a horrible gurgle from Bunter. He was dealing with his eleventh rasher, and the sudden shock seemed to cause something to go down the wrong way.

"Urrrrggh!" gurgled Bunter. He spluttered and spluttered wildly. "Urrggh! Oooogh! I'm chook-chook-choking! Groooooogh!"

"Poor old chap! I'll pat you on the back!"

"Urrrrggh!"

Patting on the back was useful assistance. But Bob, in the cheery exuberance of his spirits, put a lot of

energy into it—perhaps more than was required.

Whop, whop, whop!

"Urrggh! Oooogh! Ow!" roared Bunter. "Keep off, you beast! Wharrer you hitting me for, you rotter? Yarooooh!"

"Only patting your back, old man!"

"Ow! Beast! Wow! Stoppit!" shrieked Bunter.

"Better now, old bean?"

"Ow! No! Worse!"

"I'll give you some more, then—"

"Beast! Stoppit! I'm better! I'm all right! Leave off!" yelled Bunter.

"I'm quite all right—right as rain! Stoppit!"

Bob Cherry chuckled and went back to the deck.

Billy Bunter glared after him with an infuriated glare, what time he gurgled and gasped. Then Billy Bunter clambered on deck, with a vengeful glare behind his big spectacles.

Bunter had not intended to go on deck. But snowballing on the nose and patting on the back had roused Bunter's wrath. He was going to give Bob a snowball back again.

He emerged into the wind and the whirling flakes, and blinked round him at scurrying figures. He grabbed up snow, and kneaded a big round snowball, and watched for his chance.

It came!

Bob Cherry, dodging whizzing snowballs from Johnny Bull, passed just in front of him, at a distance of six feet or so. Up went Billy Bunter's fat arm, and his missile flew, with all Bunter's weight behind the whiz.

At a range of six feet even Billy Bunter might have been expected to hit the target. But his snowball missed Bob's cheery head by about a foot! It whizzed on, wasted so far as Bob was concerned.

But every bullet has a billet! Mr. Swain was emerging from the companion at that moment. Bunter did not see that he was in the line of fire—did not, in fact, see him at all. Had Bob stopped that snowball, according to plan, it would have been all right. As it was, Mr. Swain stopped it!

He stopped it with his eye.

The mate of the Firefly had probably met with plenty of surprises during a life on the ocean wave. But this sudden surprise took him aback, all standing, as he might have expressed it in his own nautical language.

He staggered backwards under that sudden and unexpected bang in the eye, and disappeared down the companion! He did the steps in one—chiefly on his neck!

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter, blinking blankly at that awful catastrophe.

There was a bump below, and a roar. The next moment there were hurried steps, and a red and enraged face appeared in view.

Mr. Swain seemed annoyed. That was not, perhaps, surprising, in the circumstances. He made a rush at Bunter.

"I—I say—" gasped Bunter.

Mr. Swain probably had the impression that Bunter had knocked him backwards down the steps on purpose. Really it looked like it. Bunter had bunged that snowball fairly in his eye as he put his head out into the cold and frosty morning. Bunter could have explained—if Mr. Swain had given him time. But he could see that the mate of the Firefly was not going to give him time. He squeaked and dodged.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Smack!

A heavy hand landed on Bunter as he

flew. He roared. Smack! Bunter yelled. Smack, smack!

"Hold on, Swain!" shouted Valentine Compton.

"Yaroooh!"

Billy Bunter flew round the Fifth Former and bolted into the companion like a fat rabbit into a burrow. Swain rushed after him; but Compton caught him by the arm and whirled him round, roaring with laughter as he did so.

"Hold on!" he gasped. "Don't play the goat! Hold on!"

"Look at my eye!" roared the mate. "I'll break him up! I'll—I'll——"

Billy Bunter heard that angry roar, and scuttled. The terrified fat Owl hunted cover.

In expectation of the mate's heavy tread behind him, and of heavy smacks descending again on his fat head, Billy Bunter was only thinking of performing the vanishing trick. Swain jerked himself away from Compton, and his heavy tramp rang on the stairs.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He bolted headlong into Captain Compton's cabin. He shut the door, and listened, palpitating. The captain was on the bridge, and it was safe cover, if the mate did not look for him there.

"Where's that fat swab?" came a roar.

Evidently Swain was looking for him!

"Oh lor!" gasped Bunter.

He gave a wild blink round him through his big spectacles. It was a spacious apartment for a yacht. There was a roll-top desk clamped by the forward bulkhead, with a revolving chair clamped in place in front of it. Under the desk, between the two tiers of drawers, was ample knee-space. It was the only available hiding-place.

Bunter squeezed round the swivel-chair, and packed himself into the available space, like a sardine in a tin!

Squatted there, as far back as he could squeeze, with his fat knees drawn up to his fat chin, Billy Bunter palpitated, and suppressed his breathing.

Meanwhile, Valentine Compton, laughing, had followed Mr. Swain, grasped him by the arm, and led him gently, but firmly, away, not letting go till he was on the bridge.

Unaware that the coast was now clear, Billy Bunter, packed like a fat sardine, squatted and palpitated!

## THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

### What Bunter Heard!

**B**ILLY BUNTER listened very anxiously.

Faintly, from afar, the mournful note of the siren came to his fat ears. He could hear the wash of the sea. And he thought he could hear footsteps—whose, naturally, he did not know.

But he had little doubt that they were Swain's—searching for him with glinting eye and heavy hand.

He squatted closer in his narrow hiding-place—narrow for Bunter!—and tried to suppress his breathing.

He did not want to be found until Mr. Swain had had time to calm down. He looked, to Bunter, rather an ill-tempered beast at the best of times; and there was no doubt whatever that a snowball in his eye, and a tumble backwards down the cabin stairs had done nothing whatever to improve his temper.

There was a sound of a door. Bunter had been about a quarter of an hour in cover, and was feeling rather cramped.

But, cramped as he was, he did not

think of stirring as he heard the door. Somebody was coming in.

The swivel chair, in front of Bunter's refuge, blocked up most of his view. But he saw a pair of shoes, and the lower part of a pair of trousers, advancing. Whether it was Swain or not he did not know; but the awful apprehension smote him that the beast was going to sit down at the desk, in which case, of course, he would shove his legs into the knee-space below, and inevitably establish contact with the fat Owl of Greyfriars.

Nearer and nearer came the feet, and Bunter, in an agony of apprehension, barely breathed.

Then he saw the swivel chair revolve, as it was twirled by a hand above. The newcomer sat down in it, but with his back to the desk, and, in consequence, to Billy Bunter.

That was a relief; but who the man was puzzled Bunter. Swain, if he was still hunting him, was not likely to come into the captain's cabin and sit down there. If it was the captain himself, it was odd that he should turn that chair round from the desk to sit in it, when there was his own armchair available. Then something familiar about the back view of the man in the chair struck Bunter, and he wondered if it was Rawlings.

But it seemed incredible that the steward—cheeky as Bunter had found him—would have the cheek to stroll into the captain's cabin and sit down in this cool way.

A match scratched, and there was the scent of a cigarette. The man in the swivel chair, whoever he was, was smoking.

Rawlings undoubtedly had rather free-and-easy ways, considering his position on board the Firefly. But surely he could not have come there to smoke cigarettes in the captain's absence.

Was it Swain, after all—or who the dickens was it? In that state of doubt Bunter sat tight. If it was Rawlings, taking it easy in his master's quarters, he was jolly likely to be "copped," in Bunter's opinion; for as Mr. Swain had been going up to the bridge, it was doubtless to relieve Captain Compton, who, in that case, would very likely be coming down. Bunter would not have been sorry to see that cheeky steward "copped" by his employer.

But he would not have liked Captain Compton to discover him hidden in the cabin. There was a certain hardness in the captain's face, a certain icy glint in his eyes that made Bunter rather quake at the thought of the captain finding him hidden there.

Uncertain what he had better do, the fat Owl did nothing. And two or three minutes later there was another tread—heavier and harder.

"Oh, you're here!" came a curt voice.

It was the voice of Valentine Compton's uncle, the skipper of the Firefly.

"Sort of," drawled the man in the swivel chair.

And Bunter knew, as he heard the voice, that it was, after all, Rawlings.

Mr. Swain evidently was in charge of the bridge. Captain Compton had come down, and from his remark apparently expected to find the steward there. There was no indication that he was surprised, or annoyed, by finding the man seated in his cabin smoking a cigarette. Billy Bunter was lost in astonishment.

"Shut the door, Valentine!"

Those curt words from the captain, apprised Bunter that Compton of the

Fifth had followed his uncle in. He heard the door shut.

"The boys are all on deck—what?" asked Rawlings.

He spoke in the easy tone of an equal, as the amazed Owl could not fail to observe.

"Yes," answered Compton, "all except Bunter. I think that fat young ass has parked himself in his state-room. Swain smacked his head—and he seems to think that Swain wants to go on smacking it."

"The more the better," grunted Rawlings. "I've come near booting the young swab, and so I tell you."

"Better not," said Compton quietly. There was a hint of menace in his tone, and Bunter heard a grunt from the steward.

"Never mind that!" snapped the curt voice of Captain Compton. "We're here to talk business. You're dusting the cabin, Rawlings, if one of the schoolboys should happen to look in."

"None of the schoolboys will happen to look in, uncle," said Valentine Compton. "They're decent kids enough, and not at all inquisitive." He paused. "Except, perhaps, that fat young ass, Bunter. But he's hiding away somewhere from Swain."

"And what about Wharton?" sneered Rawlings.

"Wharton is as straight as a die."

"That's your opinion."

"Oh, don't be a fool, Rawlings!"

Grunt again, from the steward.

Under the roll-top Billy Bunter listened to all this, with his fat head almost turning round in amazement.

As Mr. Swain was not in the offing, it had occurred to Bunter to emerge from cover; but he dreaded to face the hard stare of the captain.

Now, however, all thought of revealing his presence left him.

He was perfectly safe from discovery—the steward, sitting in the swivel chair, completely screened him from possible view.

Evidently none of the three had the remotest suspicion that he was in the cabin.

Bunter sat tight.

Bunter's besetting sin was inquisitiveness. And there was something so extraordinary in this consultation—evidently a secret consultation—between the captain and his nephew, and the ship's steward, that it might have excited the curiosity of a less inquisitive fellow than Billy Bunter.

But, to do Bunter justice, that was not his only motive for remaining in concealment. He was afraid to show himself.

Even the good-tempered Compton was likely to be angry, if he showed up there. The hard-faced captain was quite certain to be angry, and the steward might very likely yield to his desire to boot him. If they were so particular—as evidently they were—that the Greyfriars juniors should know nothing of this, it was evidently not judicious for Bunter to announce that he was there.

Even the obtuse Owl realised that there was a secret of some sort on board the Firefly, carefully hidden from the schoolboy party. He wondered dizzily what it could possibly be. And he sat tight, hardly breathing.

"I tell you"—Rawlings was speaking—"I caught the boy Wharton spying the other night. I've told you so."

"And I've told you you are a fool," said Compton contemptuously. "The boy explained quite frankly why he came up on deck that night."



Up went Billy Bunter's fat arm, and the missile flew, with all the fat junior's weight behind the whiz. But the snowball missed Bob Cherry's head and caught Mr. Swain in the eye. The mate staggered backwards from the shock!

"You trust him, Valentine?" asked the captain.

"I'd trust Wharton, and any of his friends, with my life without a second thought," answered Compton. "They're perfectly straight. If it had been Bunter—but it was not Bunter."

"Even you don't trust Bunter!" sneered Rawlings.

"He is a prying young sweep!" said Compton. "But luckily he is too stupid to be dangerous in any way."

"According to what the captain's said, there's some boy at Greyfriars who has spotted you there," sneered Rawlings. "Is that one of the crowd you've brought on the Firefly?"

"No."  
"You are sure of that, Valentine?" came the captain's voice.

He was seated in the armchair, and Bunter had a glimpse of his boots.

"I'm sure of it," answered Compton. "I should not have been fool enough to ask them here, if there was any doubt about that."

"Why ask them at all?" snarled Rawlings. "A crowd of inquisitive schoolboys nosing into what does not concern them—"

"They are not inquisitive, and nothing would induce them to nose into what does not concern them. I had reasons for asking them. The boy Bunter, fool as he is, helped me when I was hung on the cliff the day I swam from the sea-cave. I do not believe I should have got through alive, but for his help. It was little enough in return to stand him a Christmas cruise. The others are all decent lads, and I like them here. In their company I can forget some things that I prefer not to remember," added Compton, in a tone of intense bitterness. "But

I put it up to my uncle, and he agreed. Indeed, he seemed to like the idea."

"I don't see why."

"That's because, as Valentine has said, you're a fool, Rawlings," said the captain curtly. "What could look more absolutely above suspicion than a holiday party of schoolboys on the yacht?"

"That's true," admitted Rawlings.

"Nothing could look better in the way of camouflage," said Captain Compton. "The boys are useful in that way, and may be useful in other ways."

There was a sharp exclamation from Valentine Compton.

"Uncle, you do not mean—"

"By gum!" said Rawlings. "I pass it up to you, captain. That's good! A schoolboy going ashore with a packet of sandwiches, or lent a coat with something sewn in the lining."

"Never!" said Valentine Compton. "If you were thinking of anything of that kind, Uncle James, when you jumped at the idea of the boys coming, you can wash it out right on the spot. Never!"

"As the circumstances have not arisen, and may never arise, we need not discuss that now, Valentine," said the captain's cold voice. "Leave it that the boys are your guests, and that, for the rest, their presence on the yacht is useful in the way of keeping up appearances. They are decent lads, and I like them, and am glad to see them about. You, Rawlings, will be careful to remember that, so far as they are concerned, you are simply steward on this yacht, and that appearances have to be considered."

"Ay, ay!" grunted Rawlings.

"Now, to come down to brass-tacks,"

went on the captain curtly. "Sanderson cannot fail to be in the offing to-day. The mist may cause delay—but at the same time, it serves our turn, as it certainly prevents our passengers from being aware that we are still in touch with the English coast. If we do not see Sanderson's motor-boat before the boys turn in to-night, well and good! But if we do—"

"If we do," said Rawlings, "and they see us shifting cargo at sea, we may as well tell them the whole story, from start to finish!"

"They must see nothing. If they are on deck, I will send them below with an excuse of foul weather."

"One prying eye—" grunted Rawlings.

"Nonsense!" interrupted Valentine Compton. "A hint of foul weather will be more than enough to keep Bunter below; and the others will not pry."

"I shall order them, as captain, to stay below!" said the skipper of the Firefly. "That will be sufficient. Valentine answers for them; and we must leave it at that. Go back to the bridge, my boy, and keep your eyes open for Sanderson's craft."

The door closed on Valentine Compton.

A moment or two of silence followed his departure.

It was Captain Compton who broke it, speaking in a low voice:

"We can take no chances, Rawlings!"

"I reckon not."

"I believe that Valentine is right—it was by chance that the boy Wharton went on deck, the night we sent the boat to the French coast for the stuff. But we can take no chances. He can

(Continued on page 16.)

## The CRUISE of the FIREFLY!

By FRANK RICHARDS



(Continued  
from  
page 13.)

only have seen the boat go—he certainly did not see it return—he knows nothing. But—

“But—” grunted Rawlings.

“As I’ve said, we’re taking no chances. If any of them make any attempt to go on deck after I’ve ordered them below, you will have to stop them.”

“Leave that to me!” growled Rawlings.

“Keep an eye on them! Keep your temper, and don’t play the fool! But so long as Sanderson is in the offing, not a head is to be put above decks—even if you have to hit it hard!”

Captain Compton rose from the armchair.

“I’d better get back to the bridge—and you’d better get back to your duties, Rawlings,” he said.

A minute more, and Billy Bunter was alone. He did not stir. He could only squat, wedged in under the roll-top, in dizzy and breathless bewilderment at what he had heard. It was a quarter of an hour, or more, before Billy Bunter ventured to emerge from his hiding-place, and creep cautiously away.

### THE NINTH CHAPTER.

#### Billy Bunter is Mysterious!

“BUNTER, old bean—”

“Eh?”

“Lost your appetite,” asked Bob Cherry sympathetically, “or are you saving it up for Christmas Day?”

“Oh, really, Cherry—”

“I hear,” said Bob impressively, “that there’s going to be a turkey, and a Christmas pudding, just the same as if we were at Bunter Court, old fat man. Rawlings has let out some of the secrets of the refrigerator. But the turkey isn’t in the offing yet, old fat bean. Why this delicate toying with your food? You haven’t eaten more than twice as much as I have!”

“Ill again?” asked Johnny Bull.

“The ill-fulness must be terrific!” remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Really, it was a matter for concern. Harry Wharton & Co. had come down for lunch with excellent appetites, sharpened by the bitter wind. Bunter had been frowsting somewhere below, since his misadventure with Mr. Swain. But they naturally expected him to put up a gastronomic performance, as usual, equal to their combined efforts.

And he didn’t!

Generally, at a mealtime, Billy Bunter’s meal was only limited by the amount of foodstuffs available. On board the Firefly, the food was not only good, but it was unlimited. Bunter, at every meal, tacked in to the limit, regardless of the danger of shifting cargo.

Now he toyed with his food, as Bob described it. Amazing to relate, he ate hardly more than any two of the others.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,506.

It looked as if something was worrying Bunter, and spoiling his appetite. As a matter of fact, something was.

Bunter was puzzled, bewildered, and considerably frightened by what he had overheard in the captain’s cabin.

Something—ho, could not begin to imagine what—was going on on board that handsome and expensive yacht; something that was being kept a dead secret from the Greyfriars guests.

Bunter had not learned what the secret was. But he had learned that there was a secret.

Mr. Swain had come down to lunch—taking no further notice of Bunter. He was relieved of his fears of Mr. Swain. But he was feeling a deep dread of Captain Compton, and a still deeper one of the man Rawlings. Every time the steward’s eyes turned on him, Bunter felt a qualm, in dread of the man guessing somehow that he had overheard that talk in the captain’s cabin.

Rawlings, certainly, was not likely to guess that; unless Bunter gave himself away. But what would he do, if he did?

To Bunter’s eyes, when he first came on board the Firefly, Rawlings had been an ordinary steward—merely that, and nothing more. Since then he had found that he was a cheeky steward; and obviously in no fear of being “sacked” by his employer, whatever he might do or say. And since then, again, Bunter had learned that, in private, he was on terms of equality with the captain, and the captain’s nephew, and shared some mysterious secret with them.

Something was to happen that day in connection with a motor-boat run out from the English coast by a man named Sanderson, which the Greyfriars fellows were not to see. It was connected somehow with a boat having been sent ashore to France one night under cover of darkness.

The juniors were to be kept below under a pretence of foul weather. If they attempted to go on deck against orders, Rawlings was to go to the length, if necessary, of using violence to stop them. He was in the captain’s confidence to that amazing extent!

What could it all mean?

Rawlings had shown the cloven hoof already on the occasion of the alarm of the ventriloquial dog. Under the veneer of a steward’s civil manners he had a fierce and intractable temper, barely kept in check. He was, in point of fact, in the game, whatever it was, with Captain Compton, and rather impatient of the part he had to play to keep up appearances.

Now that Billy Bunter’s eyes were opened, he could read in Rawlings’ plump face, what the other fellows never thought of reading there. There was a hard set to the plump lips—a cold, hard glint in the eyes—which Bunter observed now. Instinctively, he knew that Rawlings was a dangerous man.

He was conscious of a deep fear of Rawlings. He knew that the aggressive bully was ready to leap into view from behind the steward’s mask of civility. He was ready to hit, and hit hard, if required—and Bunter had a strong misgiving that he was capable of darker deeds.

Between his fears and his bewilderment, Bunter was not in a happy frame of mind.

“Try the pudding, old man!” urged Bob Cherry. “You’ll fade away at this rate! Mean to say you’re giving the pudding a miss?”

“Oh, no! Yes!” stammered Bunter.

“Not hungry to-day, kid?” asked Valentine Compton, with a smile. It was the first time that Bunter had not

been fearfully hungry since the Firefly had steamed out of Dover.

“Oh, yes! No!” said Bunter. “I—I think I’ll try the pudding! It looks good!”

He tried the pudding, and further astonished the juniors by having only one helping. He left the table when the other fellows did.

Valentino Compton went on deck immediately after lunch, and joined his uncle and Mr. Swain on the bridge.

Bunter waited anxiously for Rawlings to disappear.

“I say, you fellows!” he whispered.

“He’s got something on his mind, you men!” said Bob. “That’s the only way of accounting for it? What have you done, Bunter?”

“Oh, really, Cherry—”

“Not pinched the turkey, I hope?” asked Nugent.

“Oh, really, Nugent—”

“Let’s get out!” said Harry Wharton. “Coming up, Bunter? You haven’t so much weight as usual to carry up, you know.”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

“Oh, really, Wharton! I say, you needn’t go up, you’ll only have to come down again, you know.”

“Eh? Why?”

“I mean, when the captain tells you you’re to come down because of the foul weather—”

“The weather isn’t foul, fathead! It’s a bit windy and misty, that’s all—not even a capful of wind. It’s all right on deck!”

“That’s all you know!” said Bunter. “You’re jolly well going to be sent down, all the same.”

“What is the fat ass burbling about now?” asked Bob, in wonder.

All the Famous Five looked at Bunter in surprised inquiry. Why he supposed that Captain Compton was going to send them below, on a plea of foul weather, was a mystery to the chums of Greyfriars. The weather was what a seaman would have called “dirty,” but that was all; neither, so far as they could see, could Billy Bunter know anything about the thoughts or intentions of Captain Compton.

“What do you mean, you fat ass?” asked Harry.

“If you mean anything!” granted Johnny Bull.

Bunter gave an uneasy and cautious blink round him through his big spectacles.

“I—I say, you fellows,” he breathed, “do you think that beast Rawlings can hear us?”

“Rawlings isn’t in the room, fathead!”

“He might be listening at a door!” mumbled Bunter. “He could hear us, if he was.”

“I suppose he could, if he wanted to!” said Harry Wharton blankly. “But why should he, you fat duffer?”

“Well, he—ho might—” stammered Bunter. “I—I don’t want him to know—”

“To know what?”

“Oh, nothing!”

“Have you been pinching something from the pantry?”

“You silly idiot!” howled Bunter.

“Well, then, what does it matter whether Rawlings hears you or not?”

“Well, it does. I—I mean it—it doesn’t! I’m not scared, of course.”

said Bunter, blinking at the astonished five. “You know my pluck! Compton only asked us here because I saved his life that day on the cliffs, with my boundless pluck and courage and nerve.

But—but if they knew—”

“They—who?”

“Oh, nobody!”

"And what?"

"Oh, nothing!"

Bob Cherry tapped his forehead significantly.

"Poor old Bunter!" he said. "How long has this been coming on?"

"Beast!"

"Well," said Johnny Bull, with a grunt, "you fellows can stay here and listen to Bunter wandering in his mind, if you like. I'm going up."

And Johnny went, and the other fellows followed. But Harry Wharton lingered, at a squeak from Bunter, and turned back to him. He was quite concerned about the fat junior; and he really almost thought that Bunter must be wandering in his mind a little.

"I—I say, d-don't leave me here alone!" squeaked Bunter. "I say, d-d-don't you leave me here on my own!"

"Come up on deck, then, fathead!"

"Well, it's jolly cold," said Bunter. "Besides, we shall only be sent down again."

"What on earth do you mean, Bunter?" asked the amazed captain of the *Remove*. "What are you blinking over your shoulder like that for, you frabjous owl? Do you think there's a Christmas ghost behind the piano, or what?"

"Well, if Rawlings heard—" muttered Bunter. "I'm not afraid of him, of—of course! Still, if he knew—"

"If he knew what, you blithering idiot?"

"Oh, nothing! I'm not going to tell you anything, when he might hear. If he just heard me mention the motor-boat—"

"The motor-boat?" said Harry, almost dazedly. "What motor-boat?"

"The one that's coming out from the shore—"

"You blithering ass, we're hundreds of miles from the shore, if you mean England—or France, either, for that matter."

"That's all you know!" mumbled Bunter. "It's coming all right. You can't see anything in the mist; but we ain't out of the Channel yet. We haven't covered half the distance you fellows think."

"You know a lot about navigation!" said Harry, laughing. "What on earth's put that idea into your silly head?"

"Oh, nothing! I—I say"—Bunter sunk his voice to a whisper—"I—I say, what did you see when you were prying the other night, old chap? You can tell me."

Wharton jumped.

"You fat rascal!" he hooted. "Who was prying?"

"I say, don't yell!" gasped Bunter. "Rawlings jolly well thinks you were—"

"I wasn't aware you knew anything about it!" said Harry. "I thought you were thinking only of grub at the time."

"So I was, but—"

"But what?"

"Oh, nothing!"

"Fathead!"

Harry Wharton had had enough of this extraordinary kind of conversation. He followed the other fellows on deck.

There was a scamper of feet after him, and then Billy Bunter was at his heels.

In misty, windy, sleety weather, Billy Bunter certainly did not want to go on deck. But he went. Rawlings might appear at any moment; and Bunter did not want to see Rawlings—alone. The captain might come down; and Bunter did not want to see

the captain—alone. Inquisitive as he was, and deeply interested and intrigued by the strange mystery of the Firefly, Billy Bunter almost wished that he had not overheard that mysterious conversation.

What would they do if they found out that he had listened? Bunter did not know—but he was deeply uneasy.

The wind howled through the mist,

and cold sleet dashed into his fat face as he emerged on deck—but he stayed there. He was going to stay there as long as the other fellows did—his only comfort being that, soon, Captain Compton would order the whole party below—which Bunter knew, if the other fellows did not!

(Continued on next page.)

## The STATELY HOMES of GREYFRIARS

### HAWKSLIFF COTTAGE

By

The Greyfriars Rhymester



(1)

A "stately home" is not the name  
To give Tom Redwing's mansion,  
It obviously cannot claim  
Such grandeur or expansion.  
A humble cottage on the shore,  
With boats and nets around it,  
The sea is at its very door,  
The billows almost pound it.

(2)

A cottage always clean and bright,  
Like all good seamen's places,  
John Redwing works from morn to night  
To keep it free from traces.  
He's bluff and hearty, staunch and true,  
A real old English seaman,  
And when there's any work to do  
He's on it like a demon!

(4)

He helps his father mend the nets  
Or gives the boat some patches,  
For any boat out sailing gets  
A fair amount of scratches.  
So with a bit of sheathing lead  
He gally goes repairing  
The planks and seams where they have  
shed  
Their pitch and started wearing.

(6)

But Harry Wharton's rather strict  
Upon his players' talents,  
So Redwing isn't always picked  
He's not quite up to balance.  
But if Dick Penfold needs a rest,  
Or Ogilvy is injured,  
Then Tom comes in and does his best,  
His play is smart and gingered.

(3)

Tom Redwing likes to give a hand  
To help his father working,  
For like his dad he cannot stand  
A fellow fond of shirking.  
To Hawksliff on the bus he comes  
To spend an hour of leisure.  
In ways that few of Redwing's chums  
Would look on as a pleasure.

(5)

There's wood to chop and brass to rub,  
For "ship-shape" is the password;  
A cup of tea, a bite of grub,  
Then Redwing goes back classward.  
One more half-holiday has gone  
With Redwing keen and active;  
Of course, if footer had been on,  
He'd play, it's so attractive!

(7)

At night, Tom's thoughts have often flown  
Far out across the ocean  
To where his dad is rocked alone  
Upon the billows' motion.  
In starlight, storm, or summer calm  
The little craft goes riding,  
Let's wish him freedom from all harm,  
And a lucky star for guiding.

Quite a lot has been said of Billy Bunter's imaginary home at Bunter Court. But where do the other leading lights of Greyfriars live? This new series of snappy poems by our long-haired poet will supply the answer.

Next week: THE GHOST OF MAULEVERER TOWERS.

## THE TENTH CHAPTER.

## Passengers Below!

"WERE not breaking records!" remarked Bob Cherry.

The Firefly moved slowly through the grey water.

Looking in any direction, the view was shut off, at a certain distance, by the clammy mist. Overhead, the sky was banked with the same grey vapour. The yacht, as it floated, seemed to be floating in a little world of its own, shut off from the rest of humanity. Only an occasional echoing, long-drawn wail of a siren, muffled through the mist, came as a hint that there were other inhabitants of the globe. Other craft were at sea that misty December day, sounding their sirens as they crept through the mists. Closer at hand, sounding horribly unmusical and mournful, the Firefly's siren howled at regular intervals.

"Just as well to be careful in this weather," remarked Johnny Bull. "We don't want to run into somebody else!"

"Or on to a jolly old rock!" said Frank Nugent. "Anybody know where we are?"

"Must be out of the Channel by this time," said Bob.

Harry Wharton did not speak. He was wondering

Billy Bunter's words were in his mind. Bunter, of course, knew nothing about navigation and could not know, on his own, whether the yacht had passed Beachy Head, or whether it was getting down to the Bay of Biscay. But if he had no brains to speak of, he had a pair of large ears, which he was accustomed to use, in season and out of season. It was quite possible that he had heard some remark, perhaps not intended for his fat ears, that had put him wise on the subject.

For, now that Harry came to think of it, he was far from certain that the Firefly was so advanced on her voyage as the juniors had taken for granted.

The blinding mist was baffling; if there were coast or cliffs anywhere near at hand, nothing was to be seen of them. By that time the juniors supposed that the Firefly was breasting the wide Atlantic. If she was still in the Channel, the weather might account for it—it was only cautious to go slow in winter mists.

But now that Wharton's attention was drawn to the matter, he realised that the yacht was going very slow indeed—and he had an impression that, instead of keeping on her way, she was steaming—or, rather, crawling—in a wide circle.

Captain Compton, of course, could be relied upon to know how to sail his ship. Whatever line he was following, it was doubtless necessary. Yet, if it had been possible to suppose that the captain had any motive for lingering in a certain area, it looked as if he was doing just that. Wharton had an uncomfortable recollection of the night when the boat had gone off, in the midnight darkness, with Valentine Compton.

He had an idea, though he could not be sure, that the boat, that night, had gone in the direction of the French coast. So far as he had seen, it had taken nothing away from the Firefly. Had it returned with something?

He did not know, and he disliked speculating about it, but he could not get it quite out of his head. Neither could he quite dismiss Smithy's strange suspicions of the Firefly and her

skipper. Now, as the yacht crawled through the grey water, he was in a troubled mood.

Had that prying fat Owl heard something he was not intended to hear? What did he mean by the mention of a motor-boat? He looked round at Bunter. Muffled in coat and cap, spluttering as the wind smote him, grunting and snorting, the fat Owl was evidently not enjoying himself on deck. Why did he not stay below? What the dickens was he afraid of?

"I say, Compton," Bob Cherry called out.

Compton of the Fifth had been below, and as he came up Bob hailed him.

Wharton noticed the dark, thoughtful expression on the handsome face. But Compton smiled cheerily as he glanced at Bob.

"Enjoying the weather?" he asked.

"Oh, no end!" said Bob, laughing. "But a chap can't see a thing. Where do we happen to be, Compton? I suppose the skipper knows."

"The knowfulness of the esteemed skipper is probably terrific," remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

Compton laughed.

"Yes, I think my uncle has a fairly good idea," he said. "But the best skipper has to feel his way, rather, in this weather."

"I suppose we're out in the Atlantic now?" asked Bob. "We might be still in the Straits of Dover, from anything a fellow can see. But I suppose we're out of the narrow waters now."

"We haven't made the speed we should make in fair weather," said Compton. "But it won't be long now before we drop this weather behind."

He went up to the bridge to join his uncle and Mr. Swain there.

Bob Cherry winked at his chums.

"I fancy Compton doesn't know quite where we are, any more than we do," he remarked. "I could have told him as much as he told me."

It did not occur to Bob's unsuspecting mind that Compton's answer was evasive. But Wharton could not help thinking of it with the thoughts that were already in his mind. More and more, he felt assured that the yacht was still between the shores of England and France.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob suddenly. He put his hand to his ear. "Hear that, you men?"

"Only the jolly old siren," said Johnny Bull.

"Something else," said Bob. He listened intently. "If we were anywhere near the coast I should jolly well think that that was a motor-boat chugging away somewhere."

Harry Wharton started violently.

"A motor-boat!" he repeated.

"Well, listen!"

Faintly, muffled by the mist, a sound of throbbing was audible from the unseen sea. It came, and went, and came again. It died away, and there came the screech of a whistle. Silence followed.

The yacht's siren had been wailing at regular minute intervals. Now it omitted three sudden, sharp blasts.

Wharton felt his heart beat. Was it a signal, and an answer to a signal?

Mr. Swain was seen to exchange a word or two with the captain, and then he came down from the bridge.

"Passengers below!" he called out.

"Eh? What?" exclaimed Bob Cherry, in surprise.

"Foul weather coming on!" explained the mate. "You will be safer below."

"My dear chap," said Bob, "we're not afraid of a blow. We'll roll Bunter down and see it through."

"Captain's orders!" said Mr. Swain curtly.

"Oh, that's a horse of another colour!" said Bob. "All serene—come on, you fellows! When the skipper says turn we all turn!"

"I say, you fellows, let's get out of this!" grunted Bunter. "I say, what do we want to stick up here for? I say, come on!"

Bunter, at least, was glad enough to roll down into shelter and warmth.

The other fellows were reluctant to go, but did not, of course, think for a moment of disputing captain's orders. A captain at sea is an undisputed autocrat, and passengers as well as crew had to jump to orders. Neither, of course, did the Greyfriars juniors want to be a trouble to their host. If Captain Compton considered it advisable for them to go below, it was not for them to argue—and they went at once.

But Wharton compressed his lips as he followed his friends.

It could not possibly be a coincidence that Bunter had stated that they would be ordered below on a plea of foul weather. Bunter had known—and evidently he had heard something.

So far as the juniors could see, there was no sign of change in the weather. It was "dirty," but it was not "foul." But they did not dream of setting up their judgment against that of an experienced sea-captain. Wharton would not have thought of it for a moment, but for what he knew. But he knew, and could not doubt, that "foul weather" was only an excuse for getting the Greyfriars party below decks. Something was going to happen which their eyes were not to witness.

The chugging of the motor-boat was plainly audible as they went down.

Mr. Swain followed them to the companion, as if to make sure that they went.

"That's a jolly old motor-boat," said Bob, as he stepped in. "You can hear it, Mr. Swain?"

"Sounds like it," said the mate. "Some tripper lost his way, I reckon, and run out to sea. I dare say the skipper will be keeping an eye open for it, in case help is wanted."

"By gum, they may want help if they've lost their bearings, and run right out into the Atlantic," said Bob.

Mr. Swain gave him a rather curious look.

"Oh, ay, ay!" he said. "If they want help the skipper's the man to give it! Keep snug below till you get word that you can come up again."

"Right-ho!"

Mr. Swain shut the companion after them.

Rawlings was in the saloon, and Billy Bunter eyed him uneasily. Remembering what he had heard, and the captain's instructions, he knew why the steward was there. Bunter noticed that his hard eye lingered on Harry Wharton.

He realised that Rawlings' distrust took that direction, not his own. Rawlings took no notice whatever of Bunter. That was rather a relief to the fat Owl. But Billy Bunter wondered what the other fellows would have thought had they known that Rawlings had orders to hit as hard as necessary if any of them attempted to go on deck. The glint in the man's eyes, and the jutting of his jaw, indicated that he was fully prepared to carry out those orders if required.

"Bit rotten to be stuck here because of a bit of a blow!" yawned Bob Cherry. "But I suppose the skipper knows best."

"It's just possible," said Nugent, with a grin.



"Shall I put on the gramophone, sir?" asked Rawlings, deferentially.

Harry Wharton glanced at him. Shut in the saloon, sounds from without were deadened, but the juniors could hear the chugging of an engine from the sea. Harry could not help wondering whether the gramophone was to be put on to keep the Greyfriars party from hearing as well as seeing. If so, it meant that Rawlings was "in" whatever was going on. But he had no doubt of that already.

"Oh, no, thanks!" said Bob. "I'm listening to that jolly old motor!"

As if deaf to his answer, Rawlings started the gramophone. All other sounds were at once drowned in a burst of music.

"My dear chap, I said no, not yes," said Bob, staring at the steward. "Shut that thing off—I want to listen!"

Rawlings still seemed deaf. Johnny Bull, who was near him, jerked the needle off the record. There was silence again, and through the silence came the unmistakable sound of a motor-boat ranging up to the yacht.

## THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

### Bumps for Billy Bunter!

**V**ALENTINE COMPTON came down from the deck and threw off coat and cap, damp from the sleet.

He turned a smiling face to the juniors, and if there was anything forced in that smile, four of them, at all events, did not observe it.

Bob gave him a cheery grin.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! You ordered below decks, too?" he exclaimed.

"Sort of," said Compton, laughing.

He sat on the piano stool and ran his slim fingers over the keys. There was a crash of chords.

"What about a sing-song to pass the time?" he asked. "Give us the Greyfriars School song, Cherry—I've got the music here. Everybody join in the chorus."

He was rattling out chords as he spoke.

"Good egg!" said Bob cheerfully.

As a matter of fact, Bob, like the others, was interested in the motor-boat, which had turned up far out at sea—as the juniors believed. But he did not feel disposed to say his host nay. Rattling music and cheery singing were soon going strong.

Harry Wharton felt something like a weight on his heart. The gramophone had been silenced and the sing-song was taking its place. What was going on—what could be going on—to which that handsome, cheery, frank-looking fellow was a party?

With piano and voices, there was plenty of noise in the saloon, but other sounds could be distinguished if a fellow gave ear—tramping feet, creaking of tackle. Wharton tried not to listen—he did not want to give attention to what, after all, was no concern of his. But he could not help knowing that cargo of some kind was being moved. He was sure—or almost sure—that something was being transferred from the yacht to the motor-boat alongside. It might have an innocent explanation—he hoped and tried to believe so—but why all this secrecy, this trickery—for there was no other word for it?

Rawlings had left the saloon now—now that Compton of the Fifth was there, keeping the attention of the juniors occupied. But Wharton had an impression that he was not far away.

"Lost your voice, old man?" asked Bob Cherry. "Join up!"

And Harry Wharton, trying to dismiss other thoughts from his mind, joined in the merry chorus. After all, he told himself, it was not his business.

That reflection might have been useful also to Billy Bunter. The fat junior was sprawling on a settee, while the Famous Five were gathered round Compton at the piano.

Billy Bunter was devoured by curiosity.

So long as Rawlings was present, the fat Owl did not even think of indulging that curiosity. But Rawlings was gone now, and Compton and the Famous Five were all occupied, and giving him no attention. There was no eye on Bunter, and he detached himself from the settee and sidled away quietly.

Something was going on—something awfully secret. Bunter, as usual, wanted to know. Indeed, he was so extremely curious that he wanted to know more than usual. If that beast Rawlings had been in the offing he would never have dared to gratify his curiosity, keen as it was. But now that there was no eye on him he was simply longing to take one "squint" on deck, and see what was going on, and what they were all being so jolly secret about.

"Foul weather" certainly would have glued Bunter below. But he knew that was only spoo. There was no change in the weather, and the yacht was not even moving. The expected motor-boat had turned up, with the mysterious Sanderson, whoever Sanderson was, and something awfully secret and mysterious was going on—and Bunter, if he could, was going to know what.

Round the piano a cheery chorus was roaring out. Unnoticed by the Fifth Former or the Remove fellows, Billy Bunter sidled away to the cabin stairs and tiptoed up.

But William George Bunter's fat head was not destined to be put out for a minute, or even a second, or a split second.

Wharton had an impression that Rawlings was not far away; but that had not occurred to the fat Owl. Out of sight was out of mind, to Bunter.

But he learned that Rawlings was not far away, but was, indeed, quite near at hand, when he was half-way up the steps.

A sudden grip fastened on a fat ankle from behind.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Bunter, startled. The next moment he roared. There was a sharp jerk at that fat ankle, and Bunter came down with a heavy bump.

He roared wildly.

But the grip was still on his ankle, dragging. He had a glimpse of Rawlings' face—hard, aggressive, bullying—in fact, terrifying! And the steward was dragging him back by his ankle, bumping hard and heavy, from step to step.

"Ow! Leggo! Stoppit! Yaroooh!" roared Bunter. "Ow! Help! I say, you fellows! Rescue! Yoo-hooop!"

Bump!

Bunter was landed on his back in the saloon, roaring on his top note. He was hurt—a fellow could not be dragged down the steps violently by his ankle without getting hurt. Evidently Rawlings did not care how much he damaged him.

Bunter sprawled and roared.

The chorus at the piano broke off suddenly. The Famous Five spun round, staring, just in time to see Bunter land. Compton of the Fifth whirled round on the piano stool, startled.

"You brute!" shouted Bob Cherry.

He rushed across at Rawlings, grabbed him, and wrenched him by main force away from Bunter.

Rawlings gave him a shove in return that sent him staggering. He bumped on a bulkhead with a gasp.

"Oh! Yow! Wow!" roared Bunter. "I say, you fellows, keep him off! I wasn't going on deck! I didn't know he was watching me! Ow! I say, keep him off! Keep that beast off! Ow!"

Rawlings stood breathing hard. He was trying to control his savage temper and "keep up appearances," as the captain had bidden him. But he clearly did not find it easy.

"What the dickens do you mean, Rawlings?" exclaimed Frank Nugent indignantly. "Have you gone mad, or what?"

"Captain's orders!" snarled Rawlings. "That young swab was going on deck, against orders."

"Ow! I wasn't! Wow!"

"That's no reason for dragging him down like that!" snapped Nugent angrily.

"Ow! Yow! Wow! My neck's broken!" yelled Bunter. "Wow! My skull's fractured! Yoo-hooop!"

"Nothing in it to damage, old man," said Johnny Bull.

"Ow! Beast! Wow-ow-ow!"

Valentine Compton came hastily forward.

"Have a little sense, Rawlings!" he exclaimed. "Captain's orders don't mean that you're to lay hands on my guests, you fool!"

"Yaroooh!"

"Orders are orders!" said Rawlings sullenly.

"You can go!" said Compton. "You can leave it to me to see that the captain's orders are carried out."

Rawlings did not move.

The Greyfriars Fifth Former's eyes sparkled at him.

"Do you hear?" he said, in a low, tense tone. "Are you waiting for me to throw you out of this saloon, Rawlings?"

For a moment longer the man hesitated; then, with a lowering, scowling brow, he went up the stair to the deck.

Harry Wharton, at least, knew that he was going to keep guard above, to see that no one came up.

Nugent and Bob helped Bunter to his feet. They had little sympathy to waste on a fellow who persisted on going on deck, in defiance of the orders from the commander of the vessel. They would have had less had they known Bunter's motive, but dragging the fat Owl down by his ankle, violently, was the act of a brute, and it was unnecessary. Bunter certainly could have been got back by gentler means.

"Ow! Wow!" mumbled Bunter. "I'm bumped all over! My neck's dislocated! Ow-ow-ow!"

"Your chin's all right, anyhow!" said Johnny Bull.

"Ow! Beast! I'm hurt! Wow!"

"You should not have gone up, Bunter," said Compton quietly. "Surely you have sense enough to know that a captain's orders must be obeyed at sea."

"Ow! Yow!"

"What the thump did the fat clump want to go up for?" asked Bob. "We can hardly get him to crawl out on deck, even when the weather's decent, and now we're sent below because it's going to blow! Have you gone off your rocker, Bunter?"

"Ow! Beast! Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter. "Look here, Compton, this isn't the way guests are treated at

Bunter Court, I can jolly well tell you. "Wow!"

Compton smiled.

"Don't be a young ass!" he said. "Passengers, as well as crew, have to obey a skipper's orders at sea. Rawlings is rather rough and ready, but he was only doing his duty. You should not have gone up."

"How was I to know the beast was watching me?" yapped Bunter.

Compton gave him a sharp, searching look.

"You young ass! What's put it into your head that the steward was watching you?" he snapped.

"Well, I jolly well know now that he was," gasped Bunter. "He was after me like a shot, the beast! Dragging a fellow about by his legs! Ow!"

"Nonsense!" snapped Compton. "Come on, you fellows, let's get going again!"

He sat at the piano and swept his slim fingers along the keys. The song restarted—to an accompaniment of moans, and groans, and grunts from Billy Bunter.

Bunter was damaged a little, but he sounded as if he was damaged a lot, and he moaned, and groaned, and grunted, and snorted, and rubbed the various places where the damages were located. But he did not think of making another attempt to learn what was "going on." He had had enough of Rawlings' drastic methods, and he did not want any more!

## THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

### Doubt!

"SMUGGLERS!"

Valentine Compton started violently.

"What—what's that?" he exclaimed.

It was a couple of days later, and the Greyfriars fellows were on deck, on a bright and clear sunny morning.

Since that strange affair of the motor-boat, the Firefly had picked up speed. Whether she had been out of the Channel or not, at that time, she was far from the Channel now. Hour after hour the engines sang their incessant tune, and the swift yacht slid on, ever and ever to the south. Fogs and mists had dropped behind as the Greyfriars Christmas party drew nearer to sunnier climes. With the Bay of Biscay ahead they did not expect to have had the last of rough weather; but this morning, at all events, was fine and bright, and the Famous Five of Greyfriars were as merry and bright as the morning.

Four of them, at least, had already forgotten the episode of the motor-boat. Mr. Swain had mentioned that that craft, which they had heard, but not seen, had lost its bearings in the mists, and that the couple of men aboard had run out of food, which Captain Compton had supplied, as well as directions enabling them to steer a safe course. That accounted for the whole incident to four members of the Co, and Harry Wharton tried to think that it accounted for it satisfactorily. His friends had forgotten it, and he dismissed it to the back of his mind, if he could not forget it.

It was not his nature to be doubtful or distrustful, and he was determined not to believe, if he could help it, that there was anything in Herbert Vernon-Smith's suspicions of Captain Compton and his craft.

Bright sunshine was on the sea, and on the gliding yacht. Somewhere under the horizon lay the western coast of

France, out of sight. Round the Firefly billowed the vast Atlantic, glimmering in the sunlight. It was warm enough that morning to sit out in deck-chairs. Bob Cherry had a newspaper open on his knees—a good many days old—which he had brought on the Firefly with him. He had been reading some news—rather ancient news—out to his chums, when Compton of the Fifth came on deck and caught a word.

He was passing them, with a nod and a smile, when he caught that word, and stopped dead, with a sudden exclamation.

That word was "smugglers."

Bob and Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh, glanced at him. Harry Wharton carefully did not. Somehow he knew that that word was a startling one to Compton of the Fifth.

But if Compton of the Fifth was taken aback, it was only for a second. The smile had hardly left his face before it returned.

"What's that about smugglers?" he asked. "Sounds interesting! What have you got there, Cherry?"

"Only a newspaper a week old," answered Bob. "I kept it because it's got an account of smuggling in it. I don't know whether you ever heard, last term at Greyfriars, about smuggled stuff being found in places near the school, Compton?"

"I hardly seem to remember."

"Compton never thought about anything but Soccer!" said Nugent, laughing. "But there was a lot of talk about it, Compton."

"Yes; I think I remember something," said the Fifth Former. "Didn't Wharton pick up a packet or something on the beach which turned out to be full of smuggled stuff of some kind?"

"That's so," said Bob. "He picked it up on the beach near the Shoulder—the same beach where you lost something or other, you remember. But that wasn't all. Somebody else found another packet, and sent it to the police station by parcels post; and after that, the one and only Bunter found another lot, hidden under a log on Courtfield Common. And then, only two or three days before we broke up for Christmas, the village bobby at Friar-dale found another lot under a laurel-hedge in his garden."

"It's weird!" said Johnny Bull. "Some jolly old smuggler has been at work somewhere near Greyfriars, and he seems to have dropped his stuff all over the shop for people to pick up."

"So, you see, we got rather interested in smugglers and their jolly old ways," explained Bob. "That's why I kept this paper. Looks as if a lot of money's made out of it."

"Is that so?" said Compton.

"Well, from what it says here!" said Bob, tapping the newspaper. "According to this, you can make tons of money out of smuggling whisky, if you're mean enough to sneak round the law."

"Eh—oh, yes!"

"You see," said Bob, "the muck costs no end of a price at home, because there's a terrible tax on it. I forget how much. If Carne of the Sixth were here, I'd ask him. I dare say he knows!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Twelve-and-six a bottle," said Johnny Bull. "About two-thirds of that is taxation."

"Well, it's a jolly good thing to tax!" said Bob. "The less a man drinks, the more good it does him! But, you see, foreigners won't pay our taxes for us, of course, so whisky is exported at the old price—pre-War, or something like it. Now, suppose a case of whisky is sent to France at under four shillings

a bottle! It would pay a man to smuggle it back, and sell it at anything up to twelve-and-six a bottle—see?"

"I see!" said Compton, with a nod. "And is it supposed that smugglers are at work, smuggling exported whisky back into England?"

"That's it; and it's more than supposition," said Bob. "Some people have been had up for it. But, according to this giddy newspaper, there's a gang at work that haven't been snaffled yet. The idea seems to be that they take on a boat's load at the French coast, nip across the Channel in the dark, and unload into a motor-boat, or something of the sort, which runs it into some lonely spot. Easy money—what?—if a man could park his conscience somewhere where it wouldn't bother him!"

"Sounds good!" said Compton, laughing.

"It wasn't whisky they were smuggling round Greyfriars, though," went on Bob. "From what I heard, the packets they found were hardly big enough to hold a couple of bottles. But they smuggle all sorts of things, of course—watches, and cigars, and no end of things. There's a long list in this paper—all sorts of stuff."

"Let's see it," said Compton.

Bob handed over the newspaper. Compton leaned back against the rail carelessly as he looked at the columns on the subject of smuggling.

Harry Wharton watched the flight of a seagull winging the blue. He did not want to have his eyes on Valentine Compton just then.

"Here, look out!" exclaimed Bob, as the yacht gave a roll, and Compton slipped along the rail.

The Fifth Former caught quickly at the rail with both hands. The wind whisked the newspaper away, and it disappeared in a moment, blown out in loose leaves over the sea.

"Oh!" gasped Compton. He straightened up. "Sorry, kid! I'm getting clumsy! The paper—"

"All serene!" said Bob. As a matter of fact, he could not help thinking that Compton had been rather clumsy, and even a little careless. But he was not a fellow to care about a trifling matter. "I'd read it, anyhow. It's all right."

"I'm really sorry!"

"Right as rain!" said Bob. "Don't worry!"

Compton nodded, and went up to the bridge.

"Compton seems to have lost his sea-legs!" said Johnny Bull, staring after the handsome figure. "I've never seen him clumsy like that before. Taking a leaf out of Bunter's book."

"Oh, really, Bull!"

Harry Wharton walked across the deck. He did not want his friends to see his face just then.

Why had Compton let that paper blow away?

He was neither clumsy nor careless, and he had for once acted as clumsily and carelessly as Billy Bunter. Why? Did he desire such a subject as smuggling to pass out of the juniors' thoughts? And was he unwilling to have anything at hand that might keep it in their minds? Smithy's suspicion seemed to be haunting Harry Wharton now.

That newspaper which Compton had let fly away on the wind mentioned cargoes of exported whisky, picked up on the French coast, run across the Channel, and transferred to motor-boats. Wharton knew that a boat had pulled ashore one night; all the party knew that a motor-boat had hooked on to the Firefly, in the misty afternoon, a day or two later.

Was Compton afraid that the juniors



"You trust Wharton?" asked Captain Compton. "I'd trust him, and any of his friends, with my life, without a second thought," answered Compton. "They're perfectly straight. As for Bunter, he's a prying young sweep! But luckily, he is too stupid to be dangerous in any way!" Hidden under the roll-top desk, Bunter listened to every word.

might be struck by some resemblance in the circumstances if the matter remained in their thoughts? He could picture the Bounder's cynical grin, had Smithy been on board to witness that incident.

But he drove the idea from his mind. He had not heeded Vernon-Smith's suspicion at Greyfriars, and he would not heed it now.

Anyhow, the Firefly was out of British waters now, and drawing farther and farther away. If—if there had been anything, it was over—and there had been nothing. Wharton resolutely made up his mind that there had been nothing—so resolutely that it was perhaps an indication that he felt in his bones that there had been something.

### THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

#### Bunter Gets His Own Back!

"RAWLINGS!"

"Sir!"

"Tumble up, you fool!"

Rawlings knitted his brows. Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged surprised glances. Billy Bunter grinned.

Rawlings—once more the polite and attentive steward—was sorting out gramophone records in the saloon when the voice of Mr. Swain came suddenly hooting down the companion.

Mr. Swain had a rather gruff voice. Billy Bunter had compared it to the filing of a saw, and there was, in fact, some resemblance. Anyhow, there was no mistaking it.

The mate of the Firefly was a taciturn man, with little to say to anyone. But he was generally civil. He hardly ever

spoke to Rawlings, so far as the juniors had seen; but if he did, it certainly was not in this manner. And clearly Rawlings did not like it. He stepped to the foot of the companion and glanced up.

"Did you call me, Swain?" he rapped. And the juniors could not help noticing that he addressed the mate neither as "Mr. Swain," nor as "Sir."

"Ay, ay! Tumble up on deck, you swab!"

"Keep a civil tongue, please!"

"Don't give me any back-chat, Rawlings, unless you want a clout over the head! Do as you're told!"

The steward framped up the stair.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at one another.

"The Swain bird seems to have his rag out!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"He does—he do!" grinned Nugent.

"He, he, he!" from Bunter.

"Shove on a record," said Harry, as there was an echo of an angry voice from the deck. "We don't want to hear their little troubles."

"Oh, let's listen!" said Bunter. "I say—he, he, he!"

"Rats!" said Johnny Bull.

He put on a record and started the gramophone. The record ran its length, and was finishing, when Rawlings came back from the deck with an angry, red and puzzled face.

"You heard him!" he exclaimed, addressing the juniors generally. "Did you hear Mr. Swain call me?"

"Yes, I heard him," answered Harry, wondering at the question. All the fellows had heard that harsh voice rapping from above.

"Well, he says he didn't call me!" growled Rawlings.

"Does he?" ejaculated Nugent.

"Rawlings!" The barking voice came again. "What do you mean by going below without orders?"

"What?" yelled the steward.

"Come on deck at once, you lazy swab! By hokey, if I have to come down for you, I'll boot you up the ladder!"

"Will you, by gum, Bill Swain?" roared Rawlings. "If there's any booting on this packet, you'll get the booting, you lubber! I'm coming!"

He dashed out of the saloon.

"Well, my hat!" said Bob blankly.

"Is that man Swain mad, or what?"

"Topsy, I should think!" said Frank Nugent, in wonder. "We jolly well know he called Rawlings, and now—"

"He, he, he!"

"Blessed if I can make the man out!" said Harry Wharton. "What the dickens game is he playing with Rawlings, I wonder?"

"The wonderfulness is terrific."

Angry voices could be heard above. Quite clearly to the ears of the astonished juniors came the barking voice of Mr. Swain—audible not only in the saloon, but all over the yacht.

"Are you drunk, Rawlings? You blockhead, I never called you! What do you fancy I want your ugly mug up here for?"

"You did call me, twice!" came the steward's angry roar. "Didn't Swain call me, young Compton?"

Valentine Compton was on the bridge with the mate, the captain being in his cabin. Addressing the captain's nephew as "young Compton" was another proof,

if the Christmas party had needed one, that the steward of the Firefly was not on the usual footing of a steward.

"No, you ass!" Compton's voice was not loud, but the juniors could hear him. "Have you been drinking?"

"You say that Bill Swain never hailed me from the deck?" roared Rawlings.

"I did not, you swab!" came the mate's loud bark. "You're fancying things. The other day you fancied there was a dog on board, from what I've heard—and I told you I'd eat all the dogs you could find on the Firefly. Did you find any, you fool?"

"Oh!" gasped Bob Cherry as he heard that.

And Bob and the other fellows turned their eyes at once on the fat, grinning face of Billy Bunter. The mention of the ventriloquial dog gave them, though not Rawlings, the clue to the mystery!

"You fat villain!" gasped Bob.

"He, he, he!"

"Bunter!" breathed Wharton. "That fat idiot playing his idiotic ventriloquial tricks!"

"He, he, he!" chortled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, don't you give me away. That beast Rawlings might pitch into me!"

"I think he jolly well might!" growled Johnny Bull. "I know I jolly well would, if you played rotten tricks like that on me!"

"Pack it up, you fat owl!" said Nugent.

"Shan't!" retorted Bunter. "That beast dragged me down the stairs by my leg the other day, and I've still got bumps all over me. I'm jolly well going to make him sit up. I'd jolly well thrash him only—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The idea of Billy Bunter thrashing the muscular Rawlings made the juniors roar.

The fat Owl blinked at them indignantly.

"Only I wouldn't soil my hands on the fellow!" he said disdainfully. "But he's jolly well not going to lug me about like a sack of coke, I can tell him! Compton nightn't like it if I thrashed his steward—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I've decided not to thrash him," said Bunter.

"I—I—I wouldn't!" gasped Bob.

"Not without making your will first, anyhow!" said Nugent.

"But I'm going to get my own back!" said Bunter. "I'm not afraid of the fellow! I'm jolly well going to make him sit up! Don't you fellows give me away—I don't want to have to knock him down!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The knockfulness down might be a hoot on the other leg!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Yah!"

The juniors checked their merriment as Rawlings came tramping down again. Billy Bunter's ventriloquism, like Billy Bunter himself, was rather superfluous in their opinion—still, they could hardly give the fat trickster away.

They had had a sample or two of Rawlings' temper, and they had little doubt that if he learned what Bunter was doing, the fat Owl would be booked for a hectic time. Moreover, there was reason in what Bunter said. Rawlings had handled him roughly and brutally; and—from whatever reason—it was quite certain that Bunter was not going to thrash him! The fat ventriloquist was entitled, more or less, to get his own back in his own way.

Rawlings almost stamped into the saloon.

His expression was a very clear indication of what Bunter would have had to expect had the other fellows given away his ventriloquial trickery.

Rawlings had evidently come down in a very bad temper. That was hardly surprising in the circumstances.

Billy Bunter eyed him slyly through his big spectacles. Rawlings was plainly puzzled and angry, but equally plainly, he had not the remotest suspicion that those hails from the deck had proceeded from a ventriloquist in the saloon. Even the Famous Five, who knew Bunter and his trickery so well, had been deceived at first, so lifelike was his imitation of Mr. Swain's gruff bark.

"Rawlings! Rawlings, you swab!"

It was—or appeared to be—another hail from the deck.

Rawlings turned his head and bawled:

"That you again, Bill Swain? Well, I'm not coming up again! See? Go to Davy Jones, you swab!"

"Do you want me to come down for you, Rawlings? By hokey, I'll break you up, if you give me any back-chat!"

"Come down and do it!" roared Rawlings. "I'll knock your face through the back of your head, as soon as look at you, Bill Swain!"

"Tumble up, you dirty dish-washer!" Rawlings almost foamed.

"If I tumble up, I'll break you up all over the bridge, Bill Swain!" he bellowed. "Another word from you, and up I come!"

Probably there would have been another word—but before the Greyfriars ventriloquist could get going again, Bob Cherry weighed in with a cushion.

That cushion flew across the saloon, and landed on Billy Bunter's fat chin, and Bunter went over backwards as if a cannon-ball had struck him.

Bump!

"Yaroooooooooh!"

"Goal!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"Ow! Beast!" roared Bunter.

"Oooooooooooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Rawlings, with clenched fists, waited for another word from the deck—but, fortunately, it did not come. It could not come, while the fat Owl was gurgling and spluttering for breath.

The steward tramped away to his own quarters, and the Famous Five were left to chuckle, and Billy Bunter to gurgle.

## THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

### In The Bay of Biscay O!

"ENGINE trouble?" asked Bob Cherry.

"So Mr. Ferguson says!" answered Compton.

"Well, what's the odds, so long as you're 'appy?" said Bob cheerily.

The Bay of Biscay—often so treacherous—was calm and sunny and smiling. Far in the distance, the mountains of Spain loomed, a dark blur against a blue sky.

It was a December day—but the change from the Channel in December was wonderful. Not that the Bay could not be as wild and woolly as the Channel, if it liked—and more so! But the famous Bay of Biscay was pleased to turn the smiling side of its countenance to the Greyfriars Christmas party on the Firefly, for which they were duly thankful.

But if the Bay was on its best behaviour, it seemed that the engines of the Firefly were not. For a whole day and a night they had been crawling, and now the yacht was at a standstill, except that it rocked to the wash of the sea.

Mr. Ferguson, the chief engineer, had

been seen in talk with the captain two or three times, and the captain was looking glum and uneasy. Some sort of trouble seemed to have accrued in the engine-room. Billy Bunter remarked that that sort of thing never happened on the Bunter family yacht, and only snorted when Johnny Bull rejoined: "If any!"

"I say, Compton, how long are they going to be tinkering with the engines?" asked Bunter.

"That depends!" answered the Fifth Former, with a smile.

"It's all right, Bunter, we're not likely to run out of grub!" said Bob Cherry reassuringly. "Nothing for you to worry about, old fat man!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"And we're getting a squint at Spain!" said Bob.

"Eh!" Billy Bunter blinked round in alarm. "I say, you fellows, we don't want to get too near Spain. The silly idiots are shooting one another all over the shop there."

"We're not near enough to stop a bullet, Bunter!" said Compton, laughing.

"Well, where's Spain?" demanded Bunter, blinking anxiously over the rail, as if he expected to see the Iberian peninsula sticking out of the sea under the yacht's quarter.

"There, fathead!" Bob Cherry slewed the fat Owl round with one hand, and pointed with the other. "There's Spain—due south!"

"Eh? That's a cloud," said Bunter, blinking at it.

"It's the top of the Spanish mountains, fathead!"

"Oh, is it?" said Bunter. If Spain was only a dim blur, hardly seen against the sky in the far distance, even Billy Bunter realised that there was no immediate cause for alarm. "Oh, all right! Don't you fellows get funky!"

"What?" roared Bob.

"We're not in danger here," said Bunter reassuringly. "Seems rather a pity not to see something of the Spanish civil war now we're on the spot—still, you fellows would hardly care for it, I dare say."

The Famous Five glared at Bunter.

"You piffing, pernicious porpoise—" began Johnny Bull, in a deep voice.

"Oh, really, Bull! Don't be nervy!" said Bunter.

"Who's nervy?" roared Johnny Bull.

"You are, I fancy!" said Bunter. "But it's all right! You're far enough off from the Reds, and the rebels, and the rest of them. They can't hurt you here. Besides, I'm with you!"

"You fat foozler—"

"You needn't call a fellow names, Bull, because he's got pluck, and you're all in a tremble!" said Bunter scornfully. "Take my word for it that there's no danger. If there is, I'll see you through all right."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, giving a sudden dramatic start, and staring at the sunny sea. "Is that a submarine coming up?"

"Ow!" ejaculated Bunter. "I—I say—"

"Suppose they take us for a Red, or a rebel, and torpedo us!" gasped Bob.

"Yarook! I say, you fellows, let's get out of this!" yelled Bunter. "I say, Compton, make that silly fool Ferguson get the engines going! What are we sticking about here for to be torpedoed and blown up? I say—"

"Look at it, Bunter!" gasped Bob. "Just look! It's either a submarine, or—"

"Or what?" gasped Bunter.

"Or a fish!" said Bob cheerfully. "On

second thoughts, I think it's a fish. What do you fellows think?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Compton, laughing, went on the bridge, to join his uncle and the mate there.

Billy Bunter gave the chuckling juniors a devastating blink, and rolled away, snorting.

Harry Wharton & Co. continued to watch the distant mountains of Spain, while the Firefly rocked to the wash of the Bay of Biscay. Judging by the captain's expression, he was irritated by the engine trouble below. It was clear, at all events, that he was irritated about something.

Every now and then he swept the sea with his binoculars, in the direction of the far-off Spanish coast. Once, when a brown sail danced on the sea, coming out from the distant land, he watched it with puckered brows and intent eyes, and Mr. Swain and Valentine Compton glued their eyes on it also. It was a small schooner, and it passed near enough for the juniors to have a glimpse of dusky faces, staring towards the becalmed yacht. But it passed on, and vanished under the sea-rim, and Captain Compton paced the bridge with a knitted brow.

"Hasta manana!" the juniors heard him say to Mr. Swain, in a bitter tone; which they knew to mean "Till tomorrow," and to be descriptive of Spanish dilatory ways.

That remark could hardly refer to the time Mr. Ferguson was taking over the engines. Harry Wharton had a feeling of discomfort at the thought that came involuntarily into his mind.

The yacht was hung up within sight of the northern coast of Spain. Captain and mate were watching, in the direction of that coast, with apparently little interest in what was going on in the engine-room.

They had shown a keen interest, however, in the schooner that had appeared and then disappeared. Now they were watching the distant coast again.

If there was repair work going on in the engine-room, no sound of it reached the deck—the juniors could hear nothing of the tinkering, if tinkering there was. Not only the officers, but the crew—who numbered eight, apart from the engineers and the after-guard—were incessantly staring towards the dim mountains of Spain.

Rawlings came up several times to stare; and even the cook was seen on deck once or twice, looking in the same direction.

Wharton could not help thinking that it looked like the episode of the Channel over again.

Then, the yacht had slowed down and marked time till after the encounter with the motor-boat. Now engine trouble was keeping her idle in the Bay of Biscay—in sight of the Spanish mountains.

Without being unduly suspicious, the captain of the Greyfriars Remove could not help the idea coming into his mind that that engine trouble was a fiction—as there was nothing in the weather to be used as an excuse for hanging about.

Captain Compton was waiting—not for Ferguson to get his machinery going, but for some vessel to creep out from the Spanish coast.

The captain's remark, "Hasta manana," referred to Spanish slowness in keeping an appointment! It was hardly possible for Wharton to help thinking so, and that idea brought a train of uncomfortable thoughts with it. The yacht was still rocking idly to the

## Christmas Chestnuts for the Fireside



### Cracked by Peter Todd.

Why would the turkey be angry if you called it a pheasant?  
Because you would be making "game" of it.

What's the difference between a Christmas bell and a ghost story?  
One is tolled on Christmas morning, the other is told on Christmas night.

What bird do you need with a large turkey?  
A large swallow!

Is it easier to spell GOOSE or GEESE?  
Geese—because it is spelt with more ease (e's).

What's the best tree to visit at Christmas?  
The pan-try.

Why is a sugarplum like a donkey?  
Because the more you lick it, the faster it goes.

What's the difference between a camera and a Christmas gorge?  
One makes fac-similes and he other makes sick families.

What's the difference between a pauper and a pillow?  
One is hard up, the other is soft down.

If a cook was blown on top of a church steeple with a goose, how would he get down?  
By plucking the goose he'd get lots of down.

When is the bravest heart turned to stone?  
When it becomes a little boulder.

Why is the MAGNET like old Gosling's nose?  
Because it is "red" from beginning to end.

waves when the Greyfriars fellows went down to lunch.

Wharton wondered whether the party would be kept below if the expected vessel turned up, and what excuse would be put up. "Foul" weather could hardly be pleaded on a calm and sunny day!

If a vessel was expected, however, it did not turn up. The sunny afternoon passed; "engine trouble" apparently not yet overcome. The juniors were on deck in the evening, and they went to their state-rooms at the usual time. In the cabin shared by Wharton and Bunter, the latter did not immediately proceed to shut his eyes, open his mouth, and snore.

He gave the captain of the Remove a fat wink.

"They can't pull my leg, old chap!" whispered Bunter.

"Wha-a-at?" ejaculated Wharton.

Bunter favoured him with another fat wink.

"Something's on!" he grinned.

"What do you mean, you fat ass?" exclaimed Harry.

"Don't shout, you dummy!" breathed Bunter. "That beast Rawlings may be listening. A fellow can't speak a word on a little packet like this without being heard."

Wharton looked hard at the fat Owl. That Bunter had heard something not intended for his fat ears, that day in the Channel, he had no doubt.

But the fat junior, contrary to his usual custom, had not babbled it all over the place.

Certainly, the Famous Five would not have been willing to listen to anything he had picked up by eavesdropping. They were not interested in what did not concern them, and Wharton, particularly, was unwilling to hear anything that would have confirmed the vague doubts and suspicions in his mind.

Still, as a rule, anything that entered Bunter's fat ears ran off his lengthy tongue. He had some reason for not gabbling as usual. Wharton realised that it was fear of being spotted by Rawlings.

"I say, think that beast could hear us now?" breathed Bunter.

"He could if he liked, I suppose, fat-head!" Harry Wharton laughed. "You howling ass, do you think Rawlings spends his time hanging about to hear what you may happen to burble?"

"Well, he's jolly watchful, and he's got an eye on you, as well as me," said Bunter uneasily. "I ain't going to say anything. But"—he sank his fat voice to the lowest of whispers—"I'm just telling you that they can't pull my leg! Engine trouble be blowed! Shouldn't we hear something going on, if they were tinkering at the machinery?"

Wharton did not answer that.

"They're waiting for somebody, same as they were waiting for that motor-boat in the Channel!" whispered Bunter. "See? They can't spoof me! He, he, he! I say, I'd like to know what the game is, wouldn't you?"

"No!" growled Wharton.

"Oh, you're a fathead!" said Bunter. "It's something awfully mysterious. They're all in it, you know—especially Rawlings." The fat Owl gave a sudden start. "I—I say, did you hear something?"

"Only a footstep—"

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter closed up like an oyster and rolled into his bunk. Evidently he feared that that footstep might be Rawlings'.

Harry Wharton turned in. He

disdained to question Bunter—he did not want to hear eavesdropping at second-hand. Neither did he want his vague suspicions confirmed. It was long before he slept that night. He lay restless for hours—listening to the deep and echoing snore of Billy Bunter, and the wash of the sea—but to no sound from the engines. Through the night the engines were silent, and the Firefly rocked idly on the Bay of Biscay.

## THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

### The Spanish Lugger!

**H**ALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Look out, Bunter!"

shouted Bob Cherry.

"I say—"

"Here come the giddy Spanish revolutionists!"

"Oh crikey!"

It was nearly midday again. The Firefly rocked on sunny waters, like a windjammer becalmed. Several times the juniors had seen Captain Compton taking observations, no doubt to ascertain the precise position of the Firefly. Of that position, the Greyfriars fellows only knew that it was somewhere in the Bay of Biscay, off the northern coast of Spain.

That captain and crew were waiting, and waiting impatiently, was only too clear, from the looks of all concerned. Bob Cherry and Nugent, Johnny Bull and the nabob, naturally supposed that they were waiting to hear from Mr. Ferguson that the trouble in the engine-room was at an end. But even the Co. could not help noticing that the general interest seemed centred in the distant coast of Spain, and in any sail or smoke-blur that rose on the horizon.

Now every eye on board was fixed on a lugsail that had crept out from under the distant cloudy line of mountain-tops. It drew nearer and nearer, and appeared to be making for the almost motionless yacht. Dusky faces, surmounted by red caps, could be seen on board the Spanish lugger. A signal was run up to the masthead, and an answer was flagged from the Firefly. Then the lugger ran down to the yacht.

Hence Bob's playful remark to Billy Bunter.

So far as the juniors could see, the lugger was some Spanish coasting craft, manned by Spanish fishermen. Certainly it did not look a dangerous craft in any way.

But dusky faces and red caps and the word "revolutionaries" sufficed for Billy Bunter. He turned his eyes, and spectacles, on the approaching lugger in great alarm.

"I—I say, you fellows, d-d-d-do you think they're Spanish Reds?" gasped Bunter. "Or—or Spanish rebels? I—I don't know t'other from which, but they're all a lot of murderous beasts! I say—"

"Better hunt cover, old man!" grinned Bob. "Look at that chap at the tiller! You fellows think he looks like General Franco?"

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bunter.

He made a dive for the companion, and vanished.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the juniors. The idea of General Franco, the leader of the Spanish military revolution, standing at the tiller of a dingy coasting craft, made them yell. Even Billy Bunter might have thought it improbable, if he had stopped to think.

But Bunter didn't. He bolted.

"They're going to speak to us!" said Bob Cherry, watching the lugger with

interest, as it ranged alongside. "I wonder what they want? Onions to sell, perhaps."

"They may think we're in some trouble, hanging up here, and they've come to lend a hand, and turn an honest penny!" said Johnny Bull.

"Might be going to offer us a tow!" said Frank Nugent, laughing.

Harry Wharton made no remark. Neither did Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, whose dark eyes were fixed intently on the lugger.

Glancing at his Indian chum's dusky face, Wharton was suddenly struck by the thought that Hurree Singh was not wholly blind to something of an unusual nature going on on board the Firefly. The Nabob of Bhanipur was as keen as a razor. But his dusky face expressed nothing.

The lugsail dropped, and the Spanish craft hooked on to the yacht. Captain Compton was speaking in Spanish to a fat, swarthy man standing on the lugger's deck—a man in a frock-coat, who certainly looked nothing like a fisherman, or a coasting trader, as the crew of the lugger did.

The juniors could hear what was said, but they understood nothing of it. Some of them knew a few words of Spanish; but they could not follow a single sentence of the rapid talk between the fat man on the lugger and the captain of the Firefly.

Captain Compton turned to his nephew, and spoke to him in a low tone, and the juniors saw Valentine Compton shake his head. The captain frowned, and spoke to Mr. Swain, who descended from the bridge, and came to where the Greyfriars fellows stood in a group.

Harry Wharton guessed what was coming. The juniors could not be sent below under a pretext of foul weather, on a calm sea, with a sunny blue sky. But he expected to be sent below. He noted a curious glint in the nabob's dark eyes, as they turned on the mate. And he knew, then, that Hurree Singh's expectation was the same as his own.

"We're going to be rather busy here for an hour or so," jerked Mr. Swain. "Those Spanish swabs want to do a stroke of trade with the skipper—oranges, onions, and so on."

Harry Wharton suppressed a smile. He knew, as well as if he had been told, that Valentine Compton had refused to come and tell that lie, and that Mr. Swain had taken it on, doubtless being less particular in such matters.

"It's close on lunch," remarked the mate. "You young gentlemen might be rather in the way. You wouldn't mind stepping below?"

"If the captain wishes us to go below, we'll go at once!" said Harry Wharton quietly.

"Well, he does!" said Mr. Swain. "Some of that crew will be coming on board, and they're a rough lot!"

"Come on, you fellows!" said Harry. Certainly he had no desire to see what he was not wanted to see. Bunter, fortunately, was already disposed of. A hint of the captain's wishes was enough for the rest of the party.

They went down to the saloon.

Rawlings had come on deck to look at the Spanish lugger. He closed the companion when he followed the Greyfriars fellows down.

"The Seville radio can be picked up from here, if you young gentlemen would care to hear it," said the steward civilly.

"Jolly good idea!" said Bob Cherry. "Might get Madrid, too, and hear about the wonderful victories on both sides. Shove it on, Rawlings!"

And Rawlings put the wireless on.

Lunch was served prompt to time that day, with the wireless still droning on.

Billy Bunter was not seen till lunch, having apparently hunted deep cover. But at the sound of plates and dishes, he emerged into the saloon.

"I say, you fellows, are they gone?" asked Bunter.

"Not yet!" grinned Bob. "They're coming aboard, some of them—so Mr. Swain says."

"Oh lor'!"

"Only to sell oranges and onions," said Frank Nugent, laughing. "They're not going to loot the yacht, or stick us up against a bulkhead for a firing-party."

"Hardly!" chuckled Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you've been pulling my leg, Bob Cherry, you beast—"

"Sort of!" chortled Bob. "Anyhow, I don't quite think that General Franco was on board that lugger! Not quite!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" snorted Bunter.

While the juniors sat at lunch, there were sounds from the deck, to which most of them gave no heed. There was tramping of feet, and calling voices, every now and then, in English or Spanish.

And if Harry Wharton's ears did not deceive him, some of the sounds indicated that heavy cases were being moved—brought up from the interior of the Firefly, and passed over the side to the Spanish lugger. Captain Compton appeared to be handing over something substantial in exchange for the "oranges and onions."

As Wharton was aware that a civil war was raging in Spain, and both sides eager for supplies of munitions to carry on their murderous folly, he could hardly doubt the nature of the contents of the cases that were being passed from the yacht to the lugger.

Whether gun-running was an offence against the law, he did not know; but his common sense told him that it was gun-running that was going on.

He knew—he could not help knowing—that somewhere on board the Firefly, some kind of munitions of war had been secretly packed, for transfer to one or other of the rival fighting mobs in unhappy Spain.

Which side he did not know, and could not guess; but it was certain that if some armed vessel belonging to the other side turned up, there would be serious trouble for the Firefly and all on board.

Probably, however, there was little risk of that. Captain Compton would have chosen the time and place with care—though it appeared that there had been delay in collecting the goods on the Spanish side, which might cause some risk that he had not bargained for.

Whether illegal or not, gun-running was a rotten business, and he hated to think of a fellow like Valentine Compton being mixed up in it.

When the transfer of cargo was over, Valentine Compton came down to a late lunch, and the juniors went on deck.

In the distance, the lugger could be seen, tacking away to the hazy Spanish coast. And a throbbing from below told that the engine trouble was over.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, we're moving!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"He, he, he!" from Bunter.

Wharton compressed his lips. Bob stared at the grinning, fat Owl.

"What are you he-he-heing at, you fat burbler?" he asked. "Nothing funny in Ferguson getting the engines



A sudden grip fastened on Billy Bunter's fat ankle from behind, and he came down the steps with a heavy bump. "Oooooogh!" he gasped, as he caught a glimpse of Rawlings' face—hard, aggressive, bullying. Gathered round the piano, the Famous Five were roaring out a cheery chorus.

going again, is there? He's taken enough time about it, I fancy."

Billy Bunter chuckled, and gave Harry Wharton a fat wink. Wharton frowned, and turned away his head. The resumption of activity in the engine-room coincided with the departure of the Spanish lugger; and even Billy Bunter was not too obtuse, knowing what he knew, to put two and two together!

"What's the joke, you blithering Owl?" asked the mystified Bob.

"He, he, he! You fellows don't see anything!" chuckled Bunter. "I could jolly well tell you something if I liked."

He blinked round cautiously through his big spectacles. Rawlings stepped out of the companion, to stare after the vanishing lugger. The fat Owl gave a jump.

"Well, what could you tell us, if you liked, you burbling blitherer?" demanded Bob Cherry.

"Oh! Nothing!" gasped Bunter. "Nothing at all, old chap! I don't know anything, and if I did I shouldn't jolly well tell you."

And Bunter rolled away, before he could be questioned further.

"Mad as a hatter, I suppose!" said Bob, staring after him. "Well, we're going on again, my beloved 'earers! The Bay of Biscay has been on its best behaviour, but I'm not sorry to get a move on."

The Firefly was getting a move on, now that that mysterious engine trouble was at an end. Leaving a streaming, white wake astern, she scudded through the water: and the scene of that mysterious transfer of cargo was rapidly left behind.

## THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

### Under Fire!

**B**OOM! Booooooooom!

Far out on the Atlantic, the sunset was red. From the unseen shores of France the early December dusk was creeping. Through the Firefly, the beat of the engines ran like a powerful pulse. The yacht was almost racing.

If Mr. Ferguson's machinery had failed him, it seemed to be making up now for that failure. At the present moment, at all events, there was nothing amiss with the Firefly's engines: and they were throbbing at a rate that sent a tremor through the yacht's fabric.

It did not surprise the Greyfriars fellows that, so much time having been lost, orders had been given to the engineers to make up for it by putting on speed. There was, perhaps, no special hurry on a pleasure cruise at Christmas: still, they were keen enough to see the blue Mediterranean instead of the grey Atlantic. And there was pleasure in speed, too, they liked to feel the handsome craft racing through the water, and to watch the white wake spreading fan-like astern. But now, as the yacht tore on, Bob Cherry remarked that it was going all out, as if in a race, and Harry Wharton silently wondered whether it actually was one.

A grey, steely shape had come out of the dusky distance, in the direction in which the lugger had vanished.

It was a warship, and the juniors, looking back at it, watched it with interest, wondering whether it was

Spanish or French, and, if the former, mixed up in the civil war!

They were startled when the boom of heavy guns came suddenly across the sea. At what the craft was firing, they could not see, but they all thought of the lugger. One of them, at least, had a fairly accurate idea of why the lugger might be fired upon.

"By gum!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "That's guns!"

"The gunfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurreo Janset Ram Singh.

"Yaroooooh!" from Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows—"

"They're not firing on us, fathead!" said Bob. "Think anybody would fire on a British yacht?"

"Oh!" Billy Bunter hung on to the rail and blinked across the dusky sea through his big spectacles. "I say, what are they shooting at, then? Perhaps it's only firing practice."

"Perhapsfully!" murmured Hurreo Janset Ram Singh.

Wharton's eyes met the nabob's for a fleeting second. A faint, dusky grin glided over Hurreo Singh's bronze face.

Both of them knew that it was the lugger—out of sight on the other side of the warship—that was being fired on.

The lugger had dipped below the sea-riem, under the loom of the distant Spanish mountains. They could see nothing more of it; but from the Spanish cruiser it would be still visible, and the heavy guns were thundering. In those very moments, Wharton wondered, with a shudder, whether the swarthy crew were going down in deep waters in a shattered wreck.

He glanced up at Captain Compton. THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,506.

The face of the yachtsman smuggler was savagely, fiercely set. His hand was on the engine-room telegraph. Fast as the Firefly was going, he wanted more speed out of her. Throb, throb, throb, answered the engines.

"Hasta manana!" said the captain, speaking to Mr. Swain, with a bitter curl of the lip. "Dilatory fools! They'll pay for it now!"

"They've got it coming!" answered the mate. "They sure did give the swabs in that packet plenty of time to walk round."

Harry Wharton caught the words on the wind, and hastily moved farther away. If he had needed anything to confirm what he already as good as knew, he had it now.

Boom, boom, boom! came the echo of the guns from the distance. Only Billy Bunter fancied that it might be firing practice.

"They're loosing off at somebody!" said Johnny Bull. "Think it might be that lugger?"

"But why?" asked Nugent.

"Goodness knows! Every silly owl in Spain is looking for some other silly owl with a gun these days," said Johnny. "They like scrapping!"

"They've chucked it!" said Bob.

The boom of the guns ceased. What might have been the effect of the firing nobody on board the Firefly could tell. But if those heavy guns had been turned on the lugger, it did not seem likely that the latter had escaped.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! They're heading this way!" said Bob.

The grey shape in the distance swung, the tall prow towards the yacht. Behind it black smoke poured in volumes on the wind.

"Bet you that's a ship of the jolly old civil war!" said Bob. "They're coming to ask us what we're doing in these waters."

"Oh crikey! Are they after us?" gasped Bunter. "I—I—I say, you fellows, is that a Spanish onion—I mean, a Spanish cruiser?"

"Sort of!" said Bob cheerily. "But they won't eat us, old fat man! Which-ever side they belong to, they won't chew you up, old fat bean!"

"Well, I don't trust these beastly foreigners," said Bunter uneasily. "I'd rather keep clear of them."

"Can't, fathead! We shall have to heave to if they signal us."

"Looks as if the skipper agrees with Bunter, though," said Nugent, laughing. "We're going all out."

"Rather a jest to give them a run for their money," remarked Bob. "But if they want us, they'll send a shot across us as a hint to hold on. Stand in front of me, Bunter!"

"Oh lor'!"

"Chance for you to see something of the Spanish civil war while you're on the spot, old bean! You wanted that, didn't you?"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter did not look as if he wanted it.

Boom!

"That's a tip!" said Bob, as a gun roared from the distant cruiser. "They want us to stop and say good-evening."

"Ow! I—I say, you fellows, they—they're firing at us!" yelled Bunter.

"Only a tip, fathead! The skipper will shut off the engine now, and all will be calm and bright!" said Bob, reassuringly.

Bob Cherry took that for granted.

The Spanish warship had fired a warning shot as the plainest of hints for the yacht to heave to and give an account of itself. If the Firefly did not stop, it was fairly certain that the next shot would come closer. So far as Bob could see, Captain Compton had no reason for passing the warning unregarded.

But the yacht fled on with unabated speed.

The speed increased, if anything. The engines roared and throbbed and pulsed, and the Firefly tore through the water, heading direct into the red sunset. Sweeping in pursuit came the long grey cruiser.

Boom!

It was a shell, and it splashed into the Atlantic hardly half a cable's length from the yacht.

Bob Cherry whistled.

"They mean business!" he remarked. "I say, why doesn't the captain shut off?"

"They dare not fire on the British ensign!" said Johnny Bull, with a grunt.

"Well, I don't know," said Bob thoughtfully. "There's a lot of gun-running going on on both sides in that Spanish scrap. And any old gun-runner could fly British colours, if he liked. They've a right to stop us and ask us questions, I believe, in Spanish waters."

"Like their cheek!" grunted Johnny. "They can see that this is an English yacht, if they've got any eyes in their silly heads. Do they think anybody on this yacht would be mixed up in gun-running?"

Boom!

Splash!

Billy Bunter scuttled below. But every other soul on board the Firefly was on deck now, excepting the engineers. Every man in the crew was staring back at the Spanish cruiser with bated breath. Rawlings had come up, and so had the ship's cook.

Valentine Compton, on the bridge at his uncle's side, glanced down at the Greyfriars juniors, and Wharton saw his face set. Only too well he knew what was in the Fifth Former's mind. He was thinking of the peril to the schoolboys—certainly not of his own. He had brought them into this, never dreaming of such a ghastly chance.

Wharton knew, if his comrades did not, that the yacht had had an appointment with the Spanish lugger in the Bay of Biscay, and that the lugger's delay, in true Spanish style, had caused this unexpected outcome.

He could not be sure, but he fancied that the cruiser was a Government craft, and that the cases of munitions had been handed to rebels on the lugger. It mattered little which, so far as the yacht was concerned. It was clear to him that the cruiser's commander knew what had happened; and whether the lugger had been sunk, or had escaped, he was after the craft that had brought the cargo of war material. Had the lugger kept good time, or been only twenty-four hours late, all would have been clear. But "hasta manana" was still the Spanish motto, even in the throes of a civil war. All the fat was in the fire now.

Boom!

Bob Cherry tapped the steward on the elbow, as he stood rigid with fixed stare.

Rawlings shook him off impatiently; then, remembering himself, he glanced at Bob.

"What's the game, Rawlings?" asked Bob. "Those beggars yonder want us to stop, I suppose?"

"Looks like it, sir," said Rawlings, with a faint grin.

"Well, why don't we?" asked Bob.

"They have no right of search at sea, sir," said Rawlings. "Captain Compton isn't the man to let them walk over the British flag."

"Well, that's O.K., of course!" agreed Bob. "They could blow us out of the water if they jolly well liked. But I suppose they wouldn't dare."

"Probably not, sir," said Rawlings. "Hadn't you young gentlemen better go below?"

"No jolly fear! We're seeing this through," answered Bob emphatically. "That fat ass Bunter is parked under the blankets in his bunk by this time. But what's the use? If a shell hit us, we may as well be on deck as below. There's no defence."

"Quite so, sir," said Rawlings. "But I think we shall pull out all right. The light's going fast."

Boom, boom!

Shells dropped on either side of the fleeing yacht, splashing heavily in the water. But the Firefly did not slacken. There was only a glimmer of the sunset left now in the west, and the December dusk was deepening fast to darkness. And all the ship's company—passengers as well as crew—knew that the hard-faced man standing on the bridge was banking on the night to save him—and that it was the only thing that could save him.

## THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

### The Light on the Sea!

**D**ARKER and darker dropped the December night.

Darker and darker loomed the shadowed sea.

Not a light, save the binnacle lamp, burned on the Firefly. Breaking all sea laws, at the risk of collision if a vessel crossed her course, she rushed on into the darkening west, churning the water into streams of foam.

Boom, boom, boom!

The long grey ship was a shadow now. But that she was rushing on, in rapid pursuit, everyone knew. Boom on boom came from the great guns. And the juniors realised, with a thrill, that the Spanish gunners were not firing warning shots now. Only the fall of night saved the yacht from the shells that screamed over the sea.

Harry Wharton & Co., bunched at the taffrail, stared back.

They were not scared, but they were deeply thrilled and excited. Billy Bunter, buried deep in his bunk, palpitated with funk; but the Famous Five of the Remove were made of sterner stuff. Moreover, as Bob had remarked, there was no cover if they had hunted it. If shells crashed into the yacht, it would not matter much whether a fellow was above or below decks. It was impossible to dodge the danger, if they had wanted to, and they were not going to miss the excitement.

"I'm sorry for this, you fellows." It was Compton's voice, at their elbows, in the darkness. "I never foresaw anything of this kind. You can guess that."

"My dear chap, that's all right," said Bob.

"I never dreamed of danger for you



fellows," muttered Compton, with a shake in his voice—"never for a moment."

"Our danger's no more than yours, is it?" asked Harry.

"Eh? No; but—"

"Right as rain," said Bob. "Wouldn't have missed this for worlds, and the whole giddy universe! Poor old Bunter's missing it, though he was so jolly keen on seeing something of the Spanish civil war while we're on the spot."

"It's my fault," muttered Compton.

"Rot!" said Johnny Bull. "Like their dashed cheek to worry an English ship! I'm jolly glad the skipper's taking no notice of them. I wouldn't, in his place!"

Boom!

Something whistled over the yacht, and plunged into the sea ahead. Compton set his lips hard.

"Cheeky rotters!" growled Johnny Bull. "I suppose there's no doubt that that was meant for us, Compton."

"Hardly. I'm glad to see that you've got plenty of nerve," said the Greyfriars Fifth Former, with a faint smile.

"Not likely to be frightened by a gang of Spaniards!" granted Johnny.

"But look here, Compton!" said Bob. "I suppose they've no right to fire on us; but it must look awfully suspicious to them, our clearing off like this. They can't mean us any harm, if we let them come up. We've nothing to hide. That Spanish skipper must be fancying that we're mixed up in the other side, whichever it is—and they're a lot of fat-headed desperadoes, on both sides. Blessed if I see why your uncle doesn't stop and have a friendly word with them!"

Compton made no reply.

"Rot!" said Johnny Bull again. "I wouldn't! Cheeky, let 'em rip!"

"Well, my uncle is letting them rip," said Valentine Compton. "I'd stop, and chance what happened, on account of you fellows; but my uncle is in command here, and—"

"And he's right," said Johnny Bull. "If it were my yacht, I'd rather see it blown out of the water than knuckle down!"

"Good old Yorkshire!" grinned Bob. "Anyhow, we're for it! But it's jolly lucky for us that they never showed up till it was getting dark."

"The luckfulness was terrific."

Valentine Compton went back to the bridge. The juniors continued to stare back. They felt, rather than saw, that the course of the yacht was changing, now that the darkness hid her movements from the pursuer. The last glimpse the Spanish commander had had of her revealed her fleeing due west. Now the course was swerving off to the south. When the boom of a gun came again, it sounded fainter, and the scream of the shell was not heard.

"We're dodging the brutes!" said Bob.

"That's the game!" said Nugent. "I believe we've got the heels of her, too. By gum, the old Firefly is putting it on!"

"Going all out!" chuckled Bob. "Let's hope we don't run full tilt into a jolly old Atlantic liner."

"Shut up, ass!"

The yacht seemed to tremble under their feet, with the heavy pulsation of the engines. Again they realised that the course had been changed, heading into the west again. Then again the Firefly swung to the south, which was the true course of the Christmas party.

Had the Spaniard missed them in the dark?

They listened in vain for a sound of booming guns. Long minute followed minute, and there was no sound from the sea.

"We've beaten them!" said Bob, at last.

"Beaten them hollowfully!" agreed the nabob.

Harry Wharton drew a deep breath. It looked as if the persistent pursuer had been shaken off by the winding and dodging of the fleeing yacht.

The gruff bark of Mr. Swain was heard from the bridge.

"We've done the swabs, sir!"

Wharton wondered. He could scarcely doubt that the desperate flight of the Firefly had convinced the Spanish commander either that she was a gun-runner or that she was a Spanish vessel under false colours. In either case he was not likely to let her escape if he could help it.

But the sea was black as a hat round the speeding yacht. If the Spanish cruiser was anywhere in the offing, she was burning no lights—following the example of the fugitive. Wharton pictured the long, dark vessel, with watchful eyes on board, groping at random over the shadowed sea.

Suddenly from the blackness came a beam of white light.

Wharton caught his breath.

"The searchlight!" breathed Bob. The vessel from which that long, searching beam came was absolutely invisible, but they knew that it was the Spanish cruiser. Like a long, white arm, the searchlight stabbed the blackness of the December night. Slowly it circled, ghostly on the sea.

"By gum!" breathed Bob. "She's nearer than we thought, you chaps! If that light picks us up—"

He did not finish the sentence; he watched with suppressed breath. All eyes were watching.

The next few moments were charged with their fate. If that beam of light picked them up the guns would follow the light; they all knew that. It was clear that the Spaniards were off the track, for the searchlight was turned away from the yacht; but it circled slowly but surely, sweeping the sea round the invisible cruiser.

Slowly nearer and nearer it came, sweeping its circle. The yacht, already going all out, seemed to leap like a hunted animal.

Would it reach them? If they were beyond its radius, all was well; if not—

Breathlessly they watched it describe its slow circle till it was pointing directly towards the yacht. Slowly, with torturing slowness, it passed. A cable's length, perhaps had saved them. They were, at all events, beyond the reach of the circling beam; and, with beating hearts, they watched it circle away on the blackness of the sea.

"All serene, you fellows!" came the voice of Compton of the Fifth from the darkness, and they heard him laugh.

The yacht fled on eating up the sea-miles. But all on board knew that they had escaped, and ere long the circling light faded from their eyes in the dark Atlantic.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Christmas Presence!

"MERRY CHRISTMAS, Bunter!" roared Bob Cherry.

Snore!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" bawled Bob. "Wake up, Bunter! Merry Christmas, old fat bloater!"

Snore!

Christmas or not, Billy Bunter had no idea of turning out. It was a wild and windy morning on the sea; it was cold. There was nothing, so far as Billy Bunter knew, to turn out for, except breakfast, and until he felt the urge of the inner Bunter he preferred to remain in his blankets. If it caused trouble for a fellow to breakfast after everybody else had finished and gone, that did not worry Bunter; it did not trouble Bunter, who was the only person that mattered.

So Bunter snored on.

"What about rolling him out head-first?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Beast!" came from Bunter's bunk.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! He's awake!" chortled Bob. "Turn out, you fat slacker! It's ripping on deck; windy as anything—"

Snore!

"Bunter doesn't seem to understand that it's Christmas morning, the time for Christmas presents" remarked Bob, with a wink at his friends.

Bunter's eyes opened.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Come on, you men!" said Bob. "Bunter's not interested in our presence on Christmas morning—"

"I say, don't go!" squeaked Bunter. He sat up and groped for his spectacles.

"I say, I'm not asleep. But, I say, bring the presents in here, old chap! I say, it's jolly thoughtful of you! Did you bring them on board with you at Dover in your baggage? I never knew."

"You never know?" exclaimed Bob. "Well, I jolly well thought you noticed our presence when we came on board, Bunter!"

"Never had the least idea!" declared Bunter. "I say, bring 'em in! I was going to get a lot of presents for you chaps, but I was so pushed for time, writing letters to my titled relations, and all that, that I never got the chance. I'm leaving it till we get to the South of France, you know; you can get splendid things there; and some postal orders I'm expecting will be forwarded. Better late than never—what?"

"The lateness will probably be great, and the neverfulness terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh really, Inky—"

"What the dickens do you mean, Bob?" asked Johnny Bull, puzzled. "Who's got presents for Bunter?"

"You and I and all of us—the great, the short, the tall of us!" sang Bob cheerily. Bob was in great spirits on Christmas morning—as on every other morning in the year.

Harry Wharton laughed.

Certainly there was no difference to be detected by the ear, but he guessed that Bob had said "presence," not "presents." This was one of Bob's little jokes.

"I don't think Bunter's fearfully keen on our presence," he remarked; and the other fellows, catching on, chuckled.

"Oh!" said Johnny Bull. "I see! No, Bunter won't care an awful lot for our presence on Christmas morning, I'm afraid."

"That's where you make a mistake, old chap!" said Bunter, blinking at him from his bunk. "The fact is, I've been thinking that, as it was really I who got you this splendid and expensive Christmas cruise with Compton, it was up to you fellows to do something of the sort. Being at sea, I shan't get the stack of magnificent presents I usually receive from my titled relations—"

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,506.

"Only because you're at sea?" grinned Nugent.

"Yes, exactly, old chap! They'll be kept for me at Bunter Court, of course. I'm glad you fellows thought of this!" said Bunter. "It shows you're not such an ungrateful lot as I've often thought you."

"Oh crikey!"

"Bring 'em in!" said Bunter. "I don't want to get up yet, but I'd like to see the presents. Bring 'em into my state-room."

Bob Cherry shook his head.

"Can't be done!" he answered. "Not space enough—not without a lot of cramming, anyhow."

Billy Bunter started.

"Not room enough for your presents in this state-room?" he ejaculated.

"Well, I think not," said Bob. "What do you fellows think? The cabins here are fairly large for a yacht; but do you think there's room for our presence?"

"Hardly!" said Wharton.

"Not quite!" chuckled Nugent.

Undoubtedly the presence of five fellows, added to Bunter, would have been rather a crowd.

Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his big spectacles. Still under the impression that Bob was talking about "presents," Bunter was beginning to get excited. It was true that state-rooms on a yacht were not roomy; but if the Christmas presents were on such a scale that they could not be got in, it was evident that shopping had been done on an extensive scale.

"I—I say, you fellows—honest-Injun!" exclaimed Bunter. "I say, I—I think I'll get up! After all, I can do with some brekker, and I can have a nap afterwards. I say, what are the presents like?"

"Well, that depends," said Bob, with owl-like gravity. "There are lots of people who would be fearfully bucked by our presence."

"Lots!" agreed Nugent.

"The loftiness is preposterous!"

"Anyhow, I think I can say that our presence ought to make any fellow feel that Christmas is a really jolly day!" said Bob. "What do you fellows think?"

"Hear, hear!" said the Co. with one voice.

"I can say that I've never seen any presence that I like better!" went on Bob. "I hope you will feel the same, Bunter! Getting up!"

Bunter rolled out of his bunk.

"I say, you fellows, where's my trousers? Hand me my socks! Seen my boots? I say, where are the presents? I take back a lot of things I've thought about you fellows! You're not a nice lot, but you've got your points, and I'm jolly glad you're not so ungrateful as I've thought! Where's my trousers?"

"We'll wait for you in the saloon, old fat man!" said Bob.

"With the presents?" gasped Bunter.

"Well, we should hardly be likely to wait there without our presence!" said Bob.

And the juniors choraled. Really, it was not likely.

Compton of the Fifth was finishing his breakfast coffee when the juniors came back from rousing Bunter. He glanced at their grinning faces, with a cheery smile.

"Merry Christmas!" he said.

"The samfulness to your esteemed and idiotic self! And may the manyfulness be terrific!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Some joke on?" asked the Fifth Former.

"Sort of!" grinned Bob. "Bunter's just coming along to see our Christmas presence. He's looking forward with terrific anticipation to our presence; nothing else would have rooted him out

"Wharrer you mean?" he hooted. "If you've been pulling my leg, you beasts—I mean, dear old chaps, where are those presents?"

"Don't you catch on?" roared Bob. "You're standing in our presence!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Eh—wharrer you mean? You never gave me these trousers—"

"Oh, my hat!"

"If you mean the pyjamas, Wharton hasn't given them to me—I borrowed them!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Wharrer you mean?" roared Bunter. "You said there wasn't room for all your presents in my state-room—"

"Of course there wasn't, when you were present!" said Bob. "Your presence nearly fills any state-room, without any other fellows' presence!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you—you—you silly idiot!" shrieked Billy Bunter, as the truth slowly dawned on his fat brain. "Did you mean presence, not presents?"

"He's getting it!" said Bob. "What a brain!"

"The brainfulness is terrific!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you—you—" gurgled Bunter. "You've rooted me out of bed at hardly half-past nine to make idiotic jokes—rotten puns! You blithering idiot! You howling ass! You gabbling cuckoo! You—you—you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Words failed Bunter. He grabbed the coffee-pot from the table, and turned on the Famous Five, spluttering with wrath.

They rushed for the deck, yelling with laughter, leaving Bunter yelling behind them, as some of the coffee swamped over his feet, and he found it hot.

But later that day the smiles returned to the fat visage of Billy Bunter—smiles so expansive that they extended from one fat ear to the other.

It was Billy Bunter's fixed belief that, if the grub was all right, everything was all right. And the Christmas dinner was, as Bunter frankly owned, scrumptious!

Rawlings revealed at last the long-hidden secrets of the refrigerator. Bunter declared that the turkey was as good as any turkey he had ever had at Bunter Court. The Christmas pudding was a dream—and probably caused Bunter other dreams later from the amount he had parked of it.

Everybody was merry and bright. Captain Compton was seen to smile; even Mr. Swain's face melted into a crusty grin. Compton of the Fifth was as merry and bright as the heroes of the Remove; and, whatever might be coming later, there was no doubt that the Greyfriars party had a merry Christmas on their Christmas cruise!

THE END.

### WHY WAS GREYFRIARS DESERTED? Read

#### "ROUGHING IT AT GREYFRIARS!"

a sparkling story telling  
what happened when Harry  
Wharton & Co. returned  
to the school to find no  
one there! It's in

### The GEM

On sale now 2d.

of bed before eleven o'clock. It hasn't dawned on his tremendous intellect yet that p-r-e-s-e-n-c-e is a different word from p-r-e-s-e-n-t-s, though it sounds much the same.

"What?" ejaculated Compton.

"Bunter's never seemed really bucked by our presence up to now," said Bob. "Now he seems to be looking forward to it with fearful keenness."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter rolled into the saloon with his pyjamas tucked into his trousers, a sock on one foot, and a shoe on the other. Evidently he had been in too eager haste to finish dressing. "I say, where are they?"

"Behold!" said Bob.

"Eh?" Bunter blinked round him through his big spectacles. "I can't see them! Where are they? Blessed if I see anything to cackle at, Compton! I say, you fellows, just point out those presents!"

The Famous Five, with great gravity, lifted their right hands, extended the forefingers, and pointed at one another.

Billy Bunter blinked blankly at that performance.

There are heaps more exciting adventures in:

## "THE MAN from the SEA!"

By Frank Richards.

next THURSDAY'S super story of HARRY WHARTON & Co.

STAMPS

300 DIFFERENT, incl. Airmail, Beautiful Uncommon Sets, Pictorials, Colonials, Price 6d. (Abroad 17/-).—W. A. WHITE, ENGINE LANE, LYE, WORCS.

TALL

Your Height increased in 12 days or no cost. New discovery adds 2.5 ins. I gained 4 ins. Guaranteed safe. Full Course 5/- Details: J. B. Morley, 8, Bream's Bldgs., London, E.C.4.

BLUSHING,

STAMPS

Shyness, Nerves, Self-Consciousness, Worry Habit, Unreasonable Fears, etc., cured or money back! Complete Course 5/-. Details: L. A. STEBBING (A), 23, Dean Road, London, N.W.2.

2d. Approvals. Mounted selections. Bargains. Pick where you like.—E. MEFHAM, 31, VICARAGE RD., HASTINGS, SUSSEX.

All applications for Advertisement Space in this publication should be addressed to the Advertisement Manager, The MAGNET,

The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street,  
London, E.C.4.

# CHRISTMAS AT ST. SAM'S!

Another Rib-tickling Instalment of Dicky Nugent's Great Holiday Serial: "THE HAWNTED HEADMASTER!"



# The GREYFRIARS HERALD

No. 220.

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON.

December 26th, 1936.



## SIR JIMMY VIVIAN Tells You— HOW MAULY DID HIS XMAS SHOPPING!

Lord Mauloverer is a bit absent-minded over some things. But I never realised how bad he could be till the week before breaking-up. I had a date with him to go to Chunkley's, at Courtfield, to help him with his Christmas shopping. And of all the absent-minded beggars—

To begin with, he'd forgotten all about it! He was fast asleep on the sofa in the study, when I called him. He looked completely blank when I reminded him we were going to Chunkley's.

"Chunkley's?" he queried. "Oh, gad!"

"No good saying you're not going after all, old sport," I said. "I gave up another appointment for this, and you're jolly well going—even if it means giving up your afternoon's snooze!"

"Oh, gad!"

"Kim on!" I grinned, yanking him up and jamming on his cap. And Mauly came!

When we got to Chunkley's we went from one department to another. Mauly made a purchase here and there—a tie and some socks and a book, for instance—but he showed no sign of making a start on the Christmas presents for which he was supposed to have come. I began to wonder when he'd begin. There was a sort of puzzled, preoccupied look on his

face. After a time, he told me why.

"Dashed if I know what it was, dear man, but there was somethin' very special I wanted to buy here to-day."

Not guessing the staggering truth, I suggested all sorts of odd things—tooth-brush, footer kit, skates and what not—but Mauly just shook his head and continued to look puzzled and preoccupied.

"Whatever it is, dear man, you haven't hit it yet. I'll leave it till next time."

And he left it till next time. And it wasn't till breaking-up day that he realised that what he'd forgotten was the only thing he really wanted—HIS CHRISTMAS SHOPPING!

**THE LAW'S A HASS!**

Blundell of the Fifth has just been fined for "scorching" on his bike. Yet the bobby who gave evidence against him admitted that, when stopped, Blundell was as cool as a cucumber!

**THE EXPLANATION!**

Yes, "Inquirer," it's true that Mr. Wiggins has never given Dicky Nugent the licking he promised him for being so forgetful. The trouble is, he can never remember to do it!

So saying, the St. Sam's page boy came to the four, carrying an unstamped letter on a silver salver.

The Head looked at Binding. Then he looked at the letter. Then he gave a yell of eggitement.

"Molly's handwriting! It's a letter from my dawter! Hooray!"

**THE HEAD STANDS SAM!**

Amid a breathless silence Doctor Birchermall inserted a somewhat grimy thumb in the flap and ripped open the envelope. Then he proceeded to read out Miss Molly's letter aloud.



"Dear Pop,—Just a few lines, hoping you are well, as this leaves me at present. I couldn't let Xmas go by without wishing you the condiments of the season. But I still think you were horrid to me over that pooding, and I don't intend to return to the fambly harth till you have solved the mystery of why the pooding was hard. I can assure you it wasn't my fault, and I'm not coming back till you've discovered the culprit. In the meantime, pop, in spite of you being so nasty over the pooding, I wish you a merry Xmas and remain, Your affeckshunate dawter, MOLLY."

"Few!"

It was a long drawn-out wistle from the crowd, as the Head finished.

"It sounds as if there's no need for you to worry your fat now, sir," said Jack Jolly. "Miss Molly evidently duzzent intend to be found. Wherever she is, she's sitting tight and standing on her dignity."

"She's not going to

take the Christmas pooding bizziness lying down, anyway," mewed the Head, as he put away his dawter's letter in his trowsis pocket; then his shifty eyes began to twinkle as they hadn't done since Miss Molly had vanished, and he added: "Anyway, it's good news, boys, and no mistake about it. I feel that it ought to be selybrated."

"Jolly good idea, sir!" grinned Jack Jolly. "What about a Christmas party?"

Doctor Birchermall pondered for some seconds. Then he nodded.

with several crisp, ruffling notes and a handful of silver and copper without turning a hair!

Willing hands carried the tuck up to the Skool House, where the skool cook took charge of it. Then the boys fell to preparing Big Hall for the grate feed. Holly and mistletoe were stuck on to the walls and paper chains were hung across the tables. Balloons and paper hats and masks and false noses and streamers and squeakers appeared as if by magic.

It was a merry Christmas feed that followed. Everybody agreed that the grub was first-rate. The turkeys were prime and the sossidges simply marvellous.

The feed was over at last, a topping sing-song followed. The Head, who was by now in his happiest mood, brought down the house by donning a false nose and giving an egghibition of tap-dancing on one of the tables.

"Ong-core! Ong-core!" shouted the fellows, as they loudly applauded the Head's grate solo effort.

But Doctor Birchermall shook his head.

"I'm sorry, my boys, but I shall have to be going now," he said, as he climbed down from the table and removed his false nose.

"Having selybrated the news that my dawter is safe and sound, I feel it is up to me now to start solving the mystery of that Christmas pooding. Only in that way can I ensure her early return to the fambly cercle. Pity carry on the party during my absence, however—or, on the other hand, if any of you would prefer to help me in my investigation, you are welcome to do so."

"I'll help you, sir," volunteered Burreigh of the Sixth.

"Same here, sir!" called out Jack Jolly.

"Me, too!" cried several others.

And while the rest returned to their merry-making, the little band of volunteers followed Doctor Birchermall out of Big Hall—determined to solve the mystery of Miss Molly's Christmas pooding or perish in the attempt!

**SPECTER—AND POODING SNATCHER!**

"You've still got the pooding, of course, sir?" queried Burreigh, as they stamped away from Big Hall.

"Yes, rather!" answered the Head. "I have kept it as a sooveneer o' Miss Molly—though, s'angely enuff, a Fourth Form boy tried to deprive it of this morning."

"Go on, sir!"

"You don't say so!"

"Fakt!" said the Head, and he told them about Snarler's visit earlier in the day.

"Funny bizziness, that, sir!" remarked Jack Jolly, as the Head concluded. "I should never have thought Snarler was the spt of chap who would go in for practical joaks with Christmas poodings. I wonder—"

"You wonder what, jolly?"

"I was just wondering if Snarler had another reason for wanting the pooding—if perhaps he knows more about that pooding than—"

"Look!" cried Frank Fearless, at that moment. All eyes were turned towards Doctor Birchermall's passidge. A gasp of sheer amazement followed. Coming fourth from the shadows of the Head's passidge was a white, shrouded shape which seemed to give out a weird, fosferesant light.

"Yaroooo! It's the host again!" bawled the Head. "Save me!"

"My hat! Do you see what the ghost has got under his arm!" cried Jack Jolly eggstedly. "It's Miss Molly's Christmas pooding!"

"Then for goodness' sake don't let him get away with it, boys!" yelled the Head. "Take it away from him!"

"Leave it to us, sir!" grinned Burreigh. "This way, lads! Charge!"

The juniors charged. At the same instant, the supposed ghost turned round, still holding on firmly to Miss Molly's Christmas pooding, and galloped off into the darkness!

(Don't miss the last laughable instalment of this eggiting serial in next week's great number!)

## LET OTHERS MAKE YOUR NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS! Advises TOM BROWN

The chap who makes his own New Year resolutions is a fathead. How the dickens does he know what he ought to resolve?

The only way you can tell what sort of resolutions you ought to make is to go to somebody who knows you and doesn't mind telling you your weaknesses.

So if you want to make a job of it, let others make your New Year resolutions for you!

I can offer some jolly good suggestions myself to chaps who might come to me for advice. Here are one or two:

**BOLSOVER MAJOR. RESOLVED:** Not to challenge anybody under eleven years old to a slogging contest.

**GERALD LODER. RESOLVED:** Not to play crooked card games with children unless I'm very hard up.

**HURREE SINGH. RESOLVED:** Not to speak discussfully unless my grammarfulness is simply terrific.

**HORACE COKER. RESOLVED:** That my motor-bike shall not slaughter more than three chickens a day.

**SIDNEY JAMES SNOOP. RESOLVED:** Never to smoke a pipe or cigars—so long as there are cigarettes about!

Of course, these are only a few suggestions, made at random. There are plenty more where they come from.

**WOULD ANYONE ELSE LIKE ME TO HELP 'EM WITH THEIR NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS?**

(Apply early, and avoid the rush! WE DON'T THINK!—Ed.)

## FISHY MAKES "DOUGH" OUT OF SNOW!

Says DICK PENFOLD

You can rely on Fisher T. Fish trying to turn anything into money, so I wasn't exactly surprised to find him at the top of the toboggan run on Black Pike, standing beside some hoisting tackle and telling the world that anyone could have his toboggan hauled back up the run for threepence!

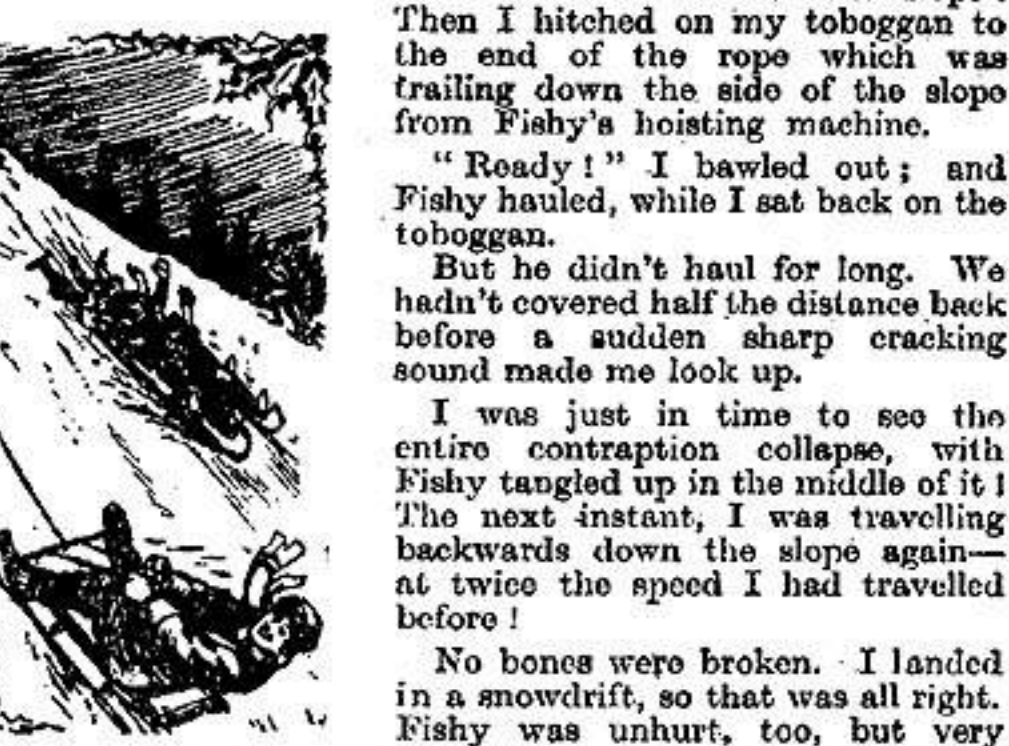
"How's trade, Fishy?" I asked, giving him a thump on the back.

Fishy's hatchet face flattened out into a grin.

"How'd ya, Penfold? Jever see anything like this? Say, I got everyone beat to a frazzle with this little outfit! Taking threepences hyer to-day will be jest like shelling peas—yes, s'ince!"

"Where did you pick it up?" I asked him, blinking at the hoisting tackle.

"Hired it from a junk yard—an' borrowed the rope!" grinned Fishy. "Listen, Penfold! I guess I'll let you in on the ground floor of this little proposition. I need an assistant to turn the handle. How about it, huh?"



"Well, what's the offer?"

"I guess I'm easy," said Fishy. "You can have a penny out of every shilling of the rake-off. Boy, what an offer!"

"Thanks, but I think I'd rather do the tobogganning!" I grinned.

"Going to give me a cut price and haul up my sledge for tuppence when I reach the bottom?"

"O.K., then. Cash now!"

snorted Fishy, who prefers to get someone else to do the work when he can.

I parted with two coppers and parted from Fishy—and had a great run to the bottom of the slope! Then I hitched on my toboggan to the end of the rope which was trailing down the side of the slope from Fishy's hoisting machine.

"Ready!" I bawled out; and Fishy hauled, while I sat back on the toboggan.

But he didn't haul for long. We hadn't covered half the distance back before a sudden sharp cracking sound made me look up.

I was just in time to see the entire contraption collapse, with Fishy tangled up in the middle of it! The next instant, I was travelling backwards down the slope again—at twice the speed I had travelled before!

No bones were broken. I landed in a snowdrift, so that was all right. Fishy was unhurt, too, but very unhappy, though I'm dashed if I know why!

True, he couldn't use his hoisting machine after all. But he was getting fresh air he wouldn't have got otherwise, and, anyway, he had made a certain amount of dough out of the snow—my tuppence, to be exact!

Some chaps are jolly difficult to satisfy!

**CHRISTMAS MORNING!**

It was Christmas Day in the Skool House—but it mite have been Income-tacks Day, judging by the eggpression on Doctor Birchermall's face!

The headmaster of St. Sam's sat in a brown study, looking deadly white—and feeling mitey blue!

"Where is my dawter?" he kept on muttering to himself, as he stroked his venerable beard. "Why duzzent she come home to her doting pop? She mite know that by this time I've forgiven her for dishing me up a Christmas pooding that was as tuff as a concrete paving-block and—"

"Eggscuse me, sir—"

The Head started, as that wining voice fell on his ears. Looking up from his desk, he saw that Sidney Snarler, the cadd of the Fourth, was standing in the doorway.

"Well, Snarler?" he wrapped out.

"Eggscuse me, sir; but could you let me have that Christmas pooding Miss Molly made for you the other day?" wined Snarler. "I want it to play a Christmas joak on somebody!"

Doctor Birchermall jumped. His beard seemed to bristle with rage, as he looked at the cadd of the Fourth.

"You want to play a joak on somebody with a Christmas pooding made by my dawter, Snarler? How dare you!"

"Well, sir, everybody knows it was as hard as a boolit, and—"

The Head glared.

"Not another word, Snarler! Understand this: the pooding may have been hard, but my hart is soft! That pooding is all I have to remember Miss Molly by this Christmas; and I trezzure it even if I can't get my teeth in it! You here?"

"I, here, sir," wined Snarler.

"Then buzz!"

Snarler turned on his heel and buzzed as quickly as possible. But he didn't get very far.

While Doctor Birchermall had been talking, the sound of approaching footprints had become audible in the Head's study; and when Snarler turned to go, he was just in time to come face-to-face with a grate crowd of St. Sam's juniors, headed by Jack

Jolly of the Fourth and his pals.

"What the merry dickens!" gasped Snarler. Before he could say more, he found himself swept aside and lost in the swarming crowd of yewmanity that streamed after the heroes of the Fourth! A moment later and Jack Jolly was stalking fearlessly into the Head's study.

"The condiments of the season, sir!" cried the kaptin of the Fourth.

Doctor Birchermall stared in amazement at the teeming crowd in the passidge.

"Jolly! What means this introsion?"

"It means that we look like getting left—so we've come to demand our Christmas right!" answered Jack Jolly, in a wringing voice. "You're determined to stop our Christmas hollerdays till we find Miss Molly. Well, then, we're determined to stop searching for Miss Molly till you've given us a really ripping Christmas party!"

"Bless my sole!"

"We want plenty of turkey and sossidges and Christmas pooding, sir. We want nuts and chock-lits and Christmas crackers and mewsick. And, above all, we want you to pay for them!"

Doctor Birchermall regarded the kaptin of the Fourth in horror.

"Me pay for them?" he gasped. "What do you take me for, Jolly? A bloated millionaire?"

A scornful smile flickered across Jack Jolly's face.

"It's no good you trying to plead poverty, sir," he said. "We all know for a fakt you can afford it. What have you done with all the munny you made out of the sercuss we ran for you on the footer field?"

The Head cullered furiously.

"Ahem! I—or—invested it all in the Hanky-Panky Tin Mines and they've gone bankrupt. Anyway, Jolly, that's neither here nor there, and if you're going to start being unplezzant, I shall refuse to take any note—"

"You're refusin' to take any note, sir?" uneggspetedly came the voice of Binding from the back of the crowd at that moment. "Then, in that case, wot am I goin' to do with this ere note?"