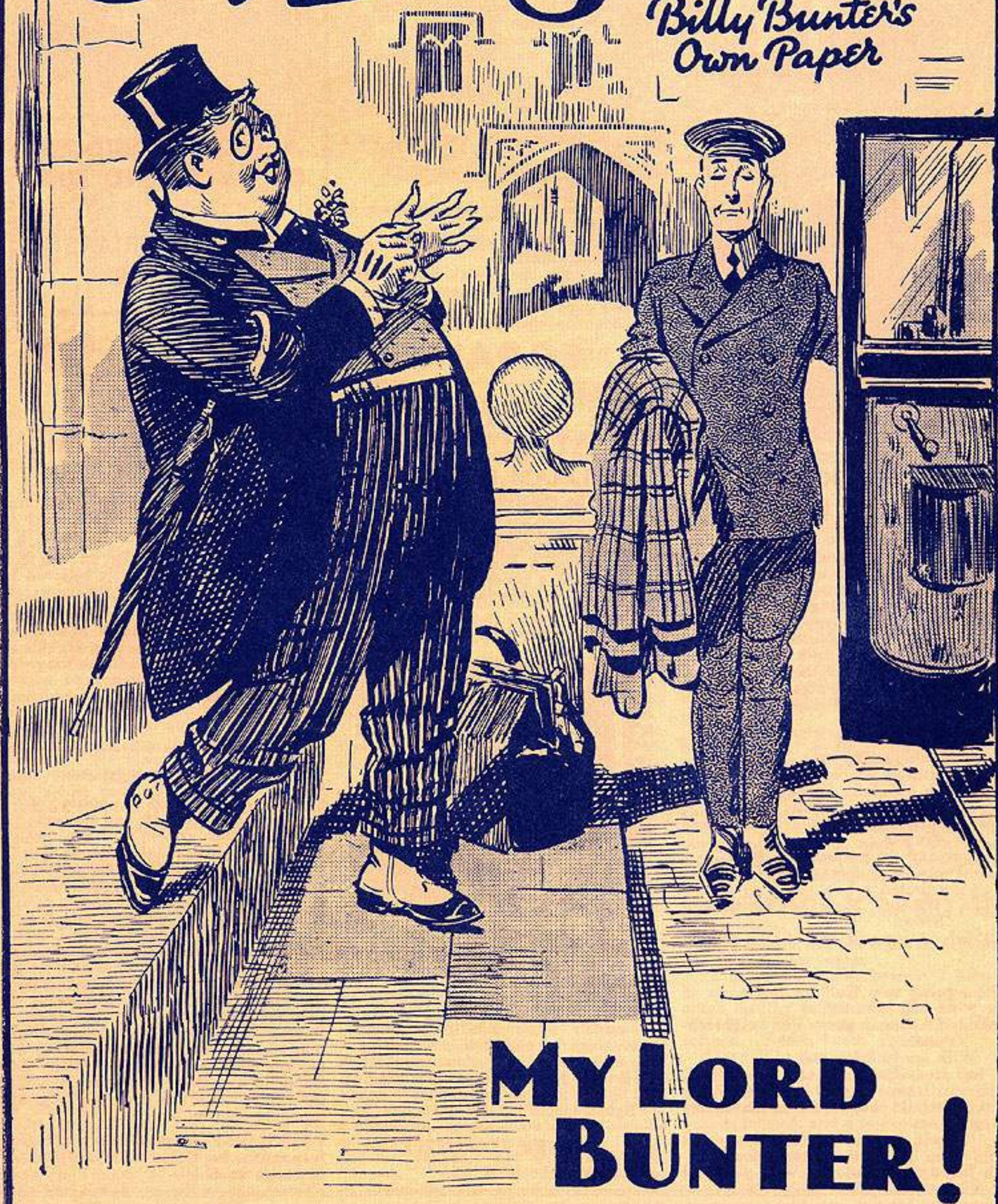


BILLY BUNTER BECOMES A LORD!

Grand Greyfriars
Yarn Inside!

The Magnet 2^D

*Billy Bunter's
Own Paper*



**MY LORD
BUNTER!**

If You Want to be Right in the Know, Consult—

The GREYFRIARS GUIDE

A TOUR OF THE SCHOOL. The Head's Study.

(1)

"Abandon, hope, all ye who enter here!"
Might well be carved upon
This study door.
For some have entered, shivering with fear,
And after they have gone
Returned no more.
"Expelled from Greyfriars!" Melancholy fate!
I hope I shan't earn that, at any rate.



AFTER SCHOOL HOURS Bunter Pays His Debts

(1)

When Bunter borrowed half-a-crown
From Clara Trevlyn in the town,
We promised him our hardest kicks
For trying such a game.
The half-a-crown he owed to her
He borrowed from Mauleverer,
While Cherry lent him two-and-six,
And Wharton did the same,
And Linley, from his meagre store,
Lent Bunter two-and-sixpence more.

(2)

From Newland, Bolsover, and Rake
Three shillings he contrived to take,
He even hopefully appealed
To Fishy—what a job!
Then Bull and Smithy each were
dunned
For two-and-six towards the fund,
And Samson Quincey Ifley Field
Contributed a bob,
While Wibley, Morgan, Stott, and
Brown
All helped towards that half-a-crown!

(3)

Then, going into Hall for tea,
He got a bob from Ogilvy,
And Desmond gave him eighteen-
pence
With ready Irish tact;
A bob from Bulstrode and from Todd,
And two from someone in the quad
Who should have had much better
sense
(Myself, in point of fact!)
And when he put these items down
He found they made just half-a-crown!

(2)

But I myself have once experienced
The fate of those who go
To see the Head.
The interview was brief, and it com-
menced
With measured beat and slow.
And it is said
My contributions to the argument
Were quite distinctly heard all over
Kent!

(3)

Here sits the Head to take his share of
ease
When cares do not engage
His busy mind,
Reclining in a chair with Sophocles,
And as he turns the page
He's sure to find
New beauties spring to light in every
line.
That's HIS idea of fun. It isn't mine!

THE GREYFRIARS ALPHABET WILLIAM GOSLING, The Greyfriars Porter

G is for GOSLING, the porter,
Who's not very fond of cold water
When choosing a drink for his pleasure,
But pours out a generous measure
Of something that's stronger and
thicker,
No doubt a medicinal liquor!



He's crusty, ill-tempered, and surly,
And doesn't like chaps to be early
Returning from daily excursions;
For one of his pleasant diversions
Is shutting the gates and reporting
Late-comers, who're fond of retorting
By ringing the gate bell, and calling
Him names which are often appalling!
So here's to his health, the old blighter,
And long may his "dooties" grow
lighter!

ANSWER TO PUZZLE

He pushed the cork in!



A WEEKLY BUDGET OF FACT AND FUN

By
THE GREYFRIARS
RHYMESTER

GREYFRIARS GRINS

A toad was found in Loder's study yesterday. It knew where to go!

We understand that Carne of the Sixth intends to be a schoolmaster in the future. It will be interesting to know what will happen when he catches himself breaking bounds at night.

Mr. Quelch's rheumatism is troubling him again. As usual, it will hurt us more than it does him.

Bolsover was seen lying on the floor of the gym recently. It is believed he is in training to be a heavy-weight boxer.

Hobson's mater sent him a birthday cake last week. In thanking her for it, Hobson writes that, according to Bunter, it was very tasty and cooked just right, and he wishes he could have tried it himself.

PUZZLE PAR

Bunter snooped a bottle of ginger-wine, but he had no cork-screw and couldn't draw the cork. How did he get at the wine without breaking the bottle, smashing the cork, or pulling it out?

Answer at foot of column 2.

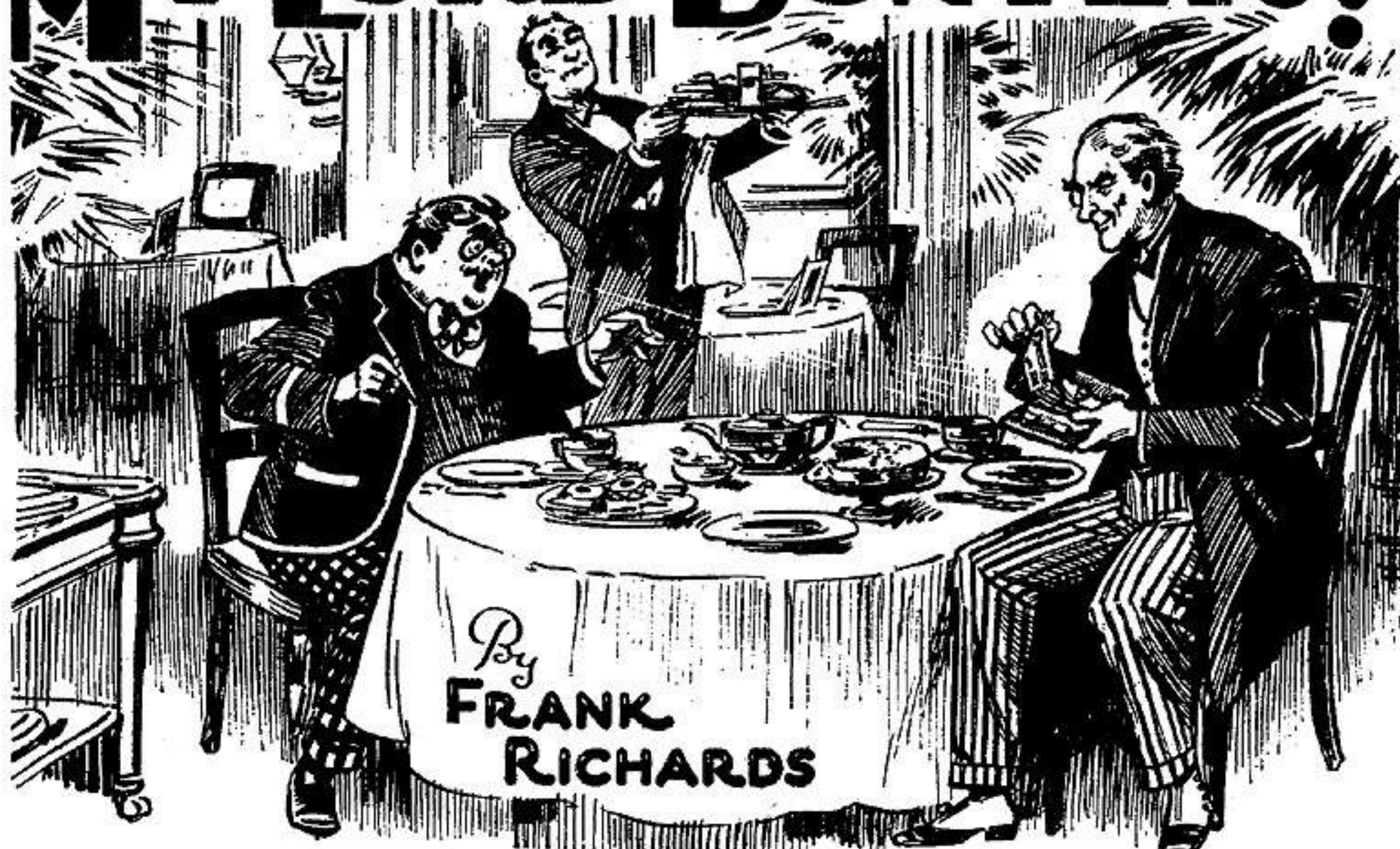
The Form-room clock stopped at half-past three the other afternoon. It wouldn't have mattered so much if Smithy hadn't been in detention till four o'clock. It was a quarter to five before he realised the clock had stopped, and the fact that he spent three-quarters of an hour too long will probably shorten his life.

Fisher T. Fish walked into a booby-trap meant for Coker to-day. Good job it wasn't wasted.

More Interesting Information in Next Saturday's MAGNET!

BELIEVE IT OR NOT! Ever since he's been in the Greyfriars Remove, Billy Bunter has been borrowing "bobs" and cadging "tanners." Now, to the amazement of his schoolfellows, he becomes—

MY LORD BUNTER!



Playing the part of a lord at a magnificent castle, surrounded by wealth, and my-lorded by a host of servants, sounds good to Billy Bunter—and he jumps at the chance with both feet!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter Starts First!

"BLOW!" said Billy Bunter. Bunter looked peeved. Most fellows, at Greyfriars School, were looking merry and bright that afternoon. It was a half-holiday, and a glorious winter's day; bright and sunny, but with a nip of frost in the air. Harry Wharton & Co. came out of the House, after dinner, looking as if they found life really enjoyable. But Bunter looked, and felt, peeved.

Standing in the quad, Bunter was going through his pockets, one after another. He searched them all with great thoroughness—and he searched them all in vain.

Not for the first time in his fat career, Billy Bunter was short of that necessary article, cash.

That morning—as had happened on many other mornings—he had been disappointed about a postal order he was expecting. And that afternoon, the need of cash was pressing and urgent.

The First Eleven were playing at Redclyffe—the last fixture before breaking up for the Christmas holidays. Quite a number of fellows were going over to see them beat Redclyffe—or be beaten by Redclyffe, as the case might be. Smithy of the Remove was taking some friends in a car—the Bounder always had money to burn. The Famous Five were going on their bikes. Billy Bunter was going by train—if cash was available for the ticket!

Not that Bunter was fearfully interested in the doughty deeds of the First Eleven. Had they been playing at home, the fat Owl of the Remove would probably not have taken the trouble

to roll down to Big Side. But Smithy was standing a spread at the Rotunda, at Redclyffe, after the match. Soccer did not draw Bunter, but a spread—especially one of the Bounder's lavish spreads drew him with an irresistible attraction.

Wherefore did Billy Bunter go through pocket after pocket, in the vain hope of discovering some forgotten or overlooked coin therein.

Deep in that urgent research, the fat Owl did not observe five juniors watching him from a little distance, with grinning faces.

Harry Wharton & Co. were quite interested. Pocket after pocket was turned out, without revealing anything in the

**Amazing and Amusing Yarn
of Schoolboy Adventure,
featuring HARRY
WHARTON & CO., of
GREYFRIARS.**

nature of coin of the realm. But quite an interesting variety of things were revealed. There was a handkerchief, sorely in need of a wash. There was a penknife with both blades broken. There was a stump of pencil, with half an ancient bullseye adhering to it. There was a considerable amount of fluff and dust, and some aniseed balls. There was a note-case—empty. But there was no coinage of any description—not a "bob," not a "tanner," not even a humble "brown." And Bunter, in a tone of deep feeling, said again:

"Blow!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked round, through his big spectacles, as that sound of merriment fell on his fat ears. Then he spotted the Famous Five. He frowned at them.

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" he grunted. "I say, you fellows, I'm stony! I shall have to go over on a bike!"

Bob Cherry chortled.

"You'll go over, all right, if you get on that jigger of yours!" he said. "It hardly holds together! You'll go over wallop!"

"If you'd mended it for me, it would be all right!" grunted Bunter. "You can't say I haven't asked you! I've asked you a dozen times, at least! It doesn't want much doing to it, either—only the chain's broken, and the pedals are off, and one of the wheels buckled, and the mudguards twisted, and a few other things. Look here, you've got time to put it to rights before you start."

"I'll lend you a hand, if you like!" said Bob. "We don't start for half-an-hour! Come on!"

Billy Bunter did not come on. He was not looking for work.

"I think I'd better borrow a bike!" he remarked. "I say, you fellows, I've asked Smithy to lend me his—he won't want it, as he's going over in a car. He's refused. Selfish beast, you know!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Perhaps he doesn't want to see it with the chain broken, and the pedals off, and a wheel buckled, and the mudguards twisted, and a few other things!" he suggested.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, look here, suppose one of you

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fellows lend me a bike!" said Bunter.

"You're not so selfish as Smithy—"

"We are!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"Quite!"

"The quitefulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Well, I've got to go over to Redclyffe: I can't miss that spread at the Rotunda—I mean, the last First Eleven match of the term. If you won't lend me a bike, lend me five bob for my fare."

"It's two bob return to Redclyffe, you fat spoofer!" said Johnny Bull.

"Third-class," sneered Bunter.

"Travelling third may do for you fellows. It would hardly do for me."

"You couldn't travel third?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Hardly! You see—"

"No good offering to lend you two bob, then?"

"Eh? Oh! Ah! Yes! Certainly! Hand it over, old chap!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Frank Nugent extracted a shilling from his pocket. Harry Wharton produced another. Both were grabbed by a fat and grubby hand.

"Thanks," said Bunter, "I'll let you have this back out of my postal order, when—when it comes. The fact is, I'm expecting a good many Christmas tips from my titled relations. Now, you other fellows, put a bob each to this, and—"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"I say, you fellows, don't walk off while a chap's talking to you!" roared Bunter.

But the Famous Five did walk off. As they generally travelled third themselves, they seemed to see no special reason why Billy Bunter should be too fearfully aristocratic to do the same.

"Beasts!" hooted Bunter: doubtless by way of thanks for the two shillings.

The fat junior blinked after the chums of the Remove, through his big spectacles. Then he blinked at the window of the school shop.

He hesitated.

It is well said that he who hesitates is lost. The lure of the tuck was irresistible to Billy Bunter. He did not start for the gates, to catch that train for Redclyffe. He started for the school shop: and rolled therein.

In five minutes, Billy Bunter had consumed jam tarts to the exact value of two shillings.

Then he rolled out of the tuck-shop again—jammy, sticky, and stony.

The problem of transport, which Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent fancied they had solved for him, still remained to be solved.

But Bunter knew how to solve it.

Bob Cherry had said they were not starting for half an hour. They were not likely, therefore, to be at the bike-shed yet. If the coast was clear, Bunter could borrow a bike.

He did not think of going over on his own dilapidated jigger. It was only too likely that if he tried it on, he would, as Bob suggested, go over wallop. He decided on Harry Wharton's bike.

Like Moses of old, Bunter looked this way and that way, as he approached the bike-shed. Like Moses again, he saw no man. The coast was clear. He rolled into the bike-shed, and lifted Wharton's handsome jigger from the stand. The saddle was rather high for Bunter: but he did not bother about putting it down, for two good reasons. He had no time to waste: and he was lazy. He wheeled the machine out, and trundled it down to the gate.

Skinner of the Remove, in the gateway, glanced at him and grinned.

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"Whose bike?" he asked. "Fellow lent you his jigger?"

"Eh? Yes! Exactly."

"Does he know he has?" grinned Skinner.

"Yah!"

Bunter trundled the bike out. He mounted in the road, and pedalled away cheerfully for Redclyffe.

What Harry Wharton was going to do for a bike that afternoon, when the time came to start, was a problem that was left for the captain of the Remove to solve. Billy Bunter really had no time to bother about other fellows' troubles!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Bagging Bunter!

"WHAT the dickens—"

"What's up?"

"Where's my bike?"

"Eh? Isn't it here?"

"If it is, it's become invisible!"

grunted Harry Wharton. "My hat!

Has some silly ass had the cheek to borrow my bike?"

"Oh, my hat!"

Four members of the Famous Five had taken their machines; but one member of the famous Co. was staring round the bike-shed with an exasperated stare.

Wharton's handsome jigger was conspicuous only by its absence.

"What cheeky ass—" roared Wharton.

"Dash it all, it's too thick!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Everybody wants to get over to Redclyffe this afternoon, but bagging another man's jigger—"

"Who the dickens—"

Harry Wharton stepped out of the bike-shed, and looked up and down the path outside. There was no sign of his bike to be seen, however. Billy Bunter was half an hour on his way. Bunter was not a quick traveller on a bike, but he was already far from Greyfriars.

Skinner, who was lounging in the gateway, glanced at the exasperated captain of the Remove with a grin. After seeing Bunter start, he had rather expected some fellow to miss a bike. Wharton looked like the fellow who had missed it! Which rather amused the amiable Skinner.

"Seen anything of my bike, Skinner?" called out Wharton.

"Didn't you lend it to Bunter?" asked Skinner.

"What? Bunter? No!"

"Somebody lent him a jigger!" chuckled Skinner. "He wasn't riding his own, as it didn't sound like a jazz band!"

"Bunter!" gasped Wharton. "Bunter's bike's in the shed—not that it's any good! Did you see Bunter on a bike? When?"

"About half an hour ago!" chortled Skinner. "He's half-way to Redclyffe on it by this time!"

Harry Wharton ran out of the gate. But there was no sign of Bunter on the road. Bunter was far away.

His friends joined him, wheeling their machines. But they did not mount. Bunter's problem of transport had to be solved by the captain of the Remove before they could start.

"That fat scoundrel!" gasped Wharton. "That podgy pirate! That bloated brigand! Why, we lent him his railway fare—and now he's bagged my bike! I—I—I'll—"

Words failed the captain of the Remove.

"You lent him his railway fare!"

chortled Skinner. "I noticed he looked jammy! Ha, ha, ha!"

"The fat villain!" exclaimed Bob.

"The blithering octopus!" said Frank Nugent. "We'd better get after him and—"

"He's miles away by this time. I—I'd burst him all over the Redclyffe road if I could snaffle him!" gasped Wharton. "He's blewed his railway fare on tuck, and bagged my bike! I—I—I'll—"

"Can't borrow a jigger!" said Johnny Bull. "Every fellow wants his bike this afternoon. What the thump shall—"

"You fellows get off," said Wharton. "I shall have to go by train. I'll join you in Redclyffe. If you catch Bunter on the road, heave him into the ditch. I shall have to sprint for the train, too—"

"My esteemed chum—" began Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"No time to waste, if I'm to catch a train, Inky!" said the captain of the Remove. "I'll cut off—"

"The English proverb remarks that more haste is less speedy than a bird in the bush, my esteemed Wharton. It would be terrifically better to catch the absurd Bunter than to catch the ridiculous train!" said the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"But how, fathead—"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh pointed a dusky finger at a car that was standing in the road. It was a four-seater, with five fellows in it—Vernon-Smith, Tom Redwing, Ogilvy, Russell and Peter Todd. The Bounder had just stepped in, and it was about to start.

"The esteemed Smithy is going to Redclyffe," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The absurd car will pass the fatheaded Bunter on the road. If the idiotic Smithy would give you a lift to catch Bunter—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry.

He rushed across to the car.

"Hold on a minute, Smithy!" he exclaimed.

"Two, if you like," answered the Bounder. "What's up?"

"That fat villain, Bunter, has borrowed my bike!" gasped Harry. "He can't have done more than a couple of miles: if you could cram me in till you pass him—"

The Bounder chuckled.

"Not much room," he said, "but we'll manage it. Shove up, you fellows!"

"Thanks!" gasped Wharton.

The fellows in the car squeezed up, and the captain of the Remove crammed in. He waved his hand to his friends.

"Follow on, you men!" he called out. "I'll wait for you when I've bagged my bike!"

"Right-ho!"

The car started, and whizzed away on the road to Redclyffe.

Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh mounted their jiggers and followed. They were all good cyclists, but they had no chance of keeping Smithy's car in sight. They pedalled after it at a good speed, but the car soon dropped them.

But if they had no chance of keeping up with it, still less chance had Billy Bunter of escaping capture. In half an hour it was probable that Bunter had done about two miles—perhaps a little more. And it was five miles, by road, to Redclyffe.

Harry Wharton had no doubt of sighting him before he had covered half the distance.

It was undoubtedly a squeeze in the car, with six fellows in the space

planned for four. But it was not going to last very long. Vernon-Smith had told the chauffeur to cover the ground, and the car was going all out. The miles flew under the whizzing wheels.

*Its occupants watched the road, with grinning faces, for a fat figure on a bike ahead. A couple of miles from Greyfriars the Redclyffe road ran between bordering woods, winding a good deal. As the car whizzed round a bend, the Bounder pointed.

"Jolly old Bunter!" he said.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Harry.

Ahead of the car, there was Bunter, labouring along on the borrowed bike. He was not making a great speed. At that distance from Greyfriars he was entering on the rise of Redclyffe Hill—and hills always gave Bunter trouble on a bike. Moreover, he was finding difficulties on a bike too high for him. He had to plunge at the pedals to reach them, and every now and then he missed, and the bike wobbled wildly.

Really, it would have been less trouble to get off and lower the saddle. But Billy Bunter, like many lazy people, often took a lot of trouble to save a little.

He plunged and wobbled on, happily unaware of the car rapidly overtaking him. Even at his slow rate of progress he had plenty of time to get to Redclyffe. The possibility of missing the football match did not worry him unduly, so long as he did not miss the spread which was to follow at the Rotunda. Gasping a good deal, gurgling considerably, Billy Bunter plunged and wobbled on, while the car ran him down.

Vernon-Smith called to the chauffeur. The car shot past Bunter, and stopped a dozen yards ahead of him.

Harry Wharton jumped out.

"Thanks, Smithy!" he said, as he shut the door.

"O.K.!" grinned the Bounder, and the car shot onward again, the occupants looking back with grinning faces.

They saw Harry Wharton rush at the grunting, gasping, labouring cyclist. They saw Bunter wobble wildly as he grasped the machine and pitch off. They heard a bump and a roar as he landed. Then the car shot on out of sight and whizzed on to Redclyffe.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Beastly for Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER roared.

He roared, and roared again. For some moments the fat Owl of the Remove did not quite know what was happening to him. He was dimly aware that somebody had jumped out of a car and rushed at him and pitched him off the borrowed bike.

Now he was sitting in the grass by the roadside, in quite a dizzy state, roaring, and blinking wildly over the spectacles, that had slid down his fat little nose.

"Owl! Owl! Owl! Yaroooh!" roared Bunter. "Beast! Rotter! Yaroop! Gimme that bike! You're not going to pinch that bike! I say, it ain't mine—a fellow lent it to me! You gimme that bike, you beast!"

Bunter tottered to his feet. Harry Wharton stood holding the bike, looking in the direction of Greyfriars for his friends. He had fully intended to boot Bunter up and down the Redclyffe road when he captured him; but the recovery of the jigger had a mollifying effect. Bunter had had a bump, and he had miles to walk, whatever the

direction he took, so the captain of the Remove left it at that.

The fat junior set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and blinked at him. Then he recognised the owner of the bike.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Is—is—is that you, old chap?"

"Yes; you fat sweep!"

"I—I—I say, how—how did you get here?" gasped Bunter. "Mean to say you got a car to get after me, simply because I'd borrowed your bike—"

"Smithy gave me a lift, you bloated burglar!"

"The beast!" gasped Bunter. "The awful rotter! Why, I asked him to take me in his car—then I shouldn't have needed a bike. He wouldn't. And he goes and gives you a lift. The rotter! I—I say, old chap, you're not bagging that bike, are you?"

"Sort of," said Harry.

"Oh, really, Wharton! I say, what am I going to do, if you bag that bike?" exclaimed Bunter, in dismay.

"Is that a conundrum?"

"Beast! It's three miles more to Redclyffe—uphill, too!" exclaimed Bunter. "I can't walk it. I—I say, old chap, don't be a beast! Look here, you're ever so much better a walker than I am."

"I hope so," agreed Wharton.

"Well, look here, you walk it, and let me have the bike."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What are you cackling at?" howled Bunter.

"Your little joke."

"I'm not joking, fathead!"

"You are!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Four cyclists came in sight on the road, and Harry Wharton waved his hand to them. They waved back, and came whizzing on.

Billy Bunter blinked at them through his big spectacles.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, Harry, old chap, I—I think you might let me have that bike. After all I've done for you, you know."

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry, as he came whizzing up. "Got it?"

"The gotfulness is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Booted Bunter?" asked Johnny Bull, as he jumped down.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"The bootfulness is the proper caper."

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Come on!" said Harry Wharton, putting a leg over his machine. "Good-bye, Bunter! Think twice before you pinch a bike next time."

"I say, you fellows, I can't stop here!" roared Bunter. "I say, it's three miles on to Redclyffe, and nearly three back to Greyfriars. I can't walk it."

"It's mostly downhill," said Bob.

"I tell you I can't walk it!"

"And I tell you it's mostly downhill! Turn over, and roll home like a barrel."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You—you silly ass!" gasped Bunter. "Look here, if you leave me stranded here like this, what do you think I'm going to do?"

"I think you're going to be a bit more careful about pinching a fellow's bike," answered Harry Wharton.

"Beast!"

"Look here, he ought to be jolly well booted!" said Johnny Bull.

"Yah!"

"Oh, let him rip!" said Bob Cherry.

"I don't suppose we shall ever see Bunter alive again."

"Eh? Why not?"

"He will be dead before he's walked three miles."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five, chuckling, remounted, and rode off for Redclyffe.

Billy Bunter glared after them, with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

"I say, you fellows!" he yelled.

The cyclists whizzed on.

"Beasts!" roared Bunter.

They vanished round the next bend of the road. Billy Bunter was left on his lonely own.

He was left overwhelmed with dismay.

Borrowing a bike, without the owner's leave, evidently had its drawbacks. Billy Bunter's last state was worse than his first. At Greyfriars, if only he hadn't borrowed that bike, he might have found some means of transport. Half-way to Redclyffe, on a lonely country road, there was no hope. Traffic was sparse, and there was not much chance of a lift.

Bunter was left to depend wholly on his fat little legs.

There were fellows in the Greyfriars Remove who would walk three miles, and hardly be aware that they had walked at all. But Billy Bunter was not one of those fellows. Three yards was about as much as he really cared for.

"Oh lor!" groaned Bunter.

He blinked dismally up and down the road. He had to walk. It was an awful prospect; but there was no other. He debated in his fat mind whether to walk on, or walk back. It was nearly as far back to Greyfriars as on to Redclyffe, and at Redclyffe there was Smithy's spread at the Rotunda. That decided Bunter in favour of Redclyffe. He groaned and started.

It was awful. With every step it grew awfuller. Bunter plugged on, gasping and gurgling. Every now and then cyclists passed him. Crowds of Greyfriars fellows were going over to Redclyffe to see Wingate and his team play. But it was useless to think of asking any of those fellows to get down and walk, and let Bunter have his bike. It was a selfish world, as Bunter knew only too well.

The fat Owl was still plugging wearily on, long after the last cyclist from Greyfriars had passed and disappeared. He was still wearily plugging when they had all gathered on the Redclyffe ground, watching the Soccer match.

Harry Wharton & Co., in that cheery crowd, watched the game, and cheered old Wingate when he put the ball in—absolutely forgetful of a perspiring, fat junior plugging slowly and wearily on the Redclyffe road. Sad to relate, they had forgotten his fat existence.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Bunter on the Spot!

CHUG, chug, chug!

Billy Bunter blinked round wearily at the sound of a motor-bike on the road.

Bunter was not walking now.

He was resting.

He needed a rest. He had covered a whole mile on foot. Actually it was one mile, though it seemed more like a hundred to Bunter.

In a mile, there were one thousand
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seven hundred and sixty yards. Bunter could have done the sixty fairly well. But every one of the remaining thousand and seven hundred, was a yard too much.

He was going to be too late for the Soccer match at Redclyffe School. That did not worry him, so long as he was in time for the spread at the Rotunda. It was that enticing thought that kept Bunter going for a whole mile, uphill.

Now it kept him going no longer. Even at the risk of missing the Bouncer's lavish spread, Bunter had to have a rest—and a long rest.

He had blinked round wearily for a favourable spot. In summer he would have disposed his fat limbs in the grass by the roadside. But in December the grass was wet and chilly. He blinked into the wood that bordered the road, and happily discovered a pile of logs left by the wood-cutters.

Sitting on a log, leaning back against the pile, the weary fat Owl rested his weary fat legs, and recovered a little from his uncommon exertions.

He was beginning to think of getting a move on again, when that chugging from a motor-bike fell on his ears. He wondered whether it might be Coker of the Fifth on his stink-bike, and whether there was a bare possibility, if it was, of Coker giving a fellow a lift.

Then his fat ears told him that the motor-bike was coming from the direction of Redclyffe. It was going in the wrong direction for Bunter, and he lost all interest in it at once.

It came down the road at great speed, and suddenly shut off. The chug, chug, chugging ceased. Then, to his surprise, Bunter heard a brushing sound, and realised that the motor-bike was being pushed off the road into the thickets.

He blinked round again.

But the pile of logs was between him and the road—the loose log on which he sat being on the side towards the deep wood. He could see nothing of the motor-bike, or its rider.

The brushing sound ceased. Only that pile of logs was between Bunter and the motor-bike. Why anyone should stop there, at the very loneliest spot on the Redclyffe road, and park his machine in the thickets was a mystery to Bunter. He was about to rise to his feet, and blink round the stack of logs, when a muttering voice fell on his ears.

"Quick! The rope—quick!"

"What's the hurry? That old fool is not doing more than twenty on his Ford, and we did nearer fifty on the jigger."

"Don't waste time, you fool!"

"O.K.! But there's some traffic on this road—"

"Not much."

"Some, anyway. We don't want to catch the wrong bird. Look here, Smiler, don't get that rope across the road till we spot the Ford. We want that old fool, Lanchester, but we don't want anybody else."

"I saw the road clear in the other direction—nobody coming up from Courtfield, Ferret."

"The road's full of turns! I tell you, get this end fixed on a tree, and watch for the Ford. I'll cut across and fasten the other end as soon as you spot it!"

There was a grunt.

"Oh, all right! Fix it on this side, anyhow!"

"O.K.!"

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Billy Bunter sat perfectly still. Every word, spoken not more than ten feet from him, came clearly to his fat ears.

Obviously, the two men had not the faintest idea that anyone was at hand. The spot was lonely; the woodland dank and dreary; and no one would have expected any fellow to be sitting about in a wood in December.

They saw nothing of the fat Owl of Greyfriars—and in his alarm and terror Bunter was careful that they should hear nothing.

Billy Bunter was not quick on the uptake. But even Bunter's fat brain could not doubt the meaning of this. Those two men, within ten feet of him, were motor-bandits, planning to wreck a car coming along from Redclyffe.

Bunter's fat heart quaked.

If they spotted him there—

Two ruthless rascals, who were planning to wreck a car, by stretching a taut rope across the road, were not likely to stand on ceremony, with anyone who spotted them at this dastardly work.

Bunter felt a tremble run along his fat limbs. He hardly breathed.

Sounds came to his ears. He knew that a rope was being run round the trunk of a tree beside the road and knotted there. It was in readiness for one of the rascals to cut across the road and fasten the other end to a tree on the other side, as soon as the Ford was spotted in the distance.

Bunter suppressed a gasp of terror. The muttering voice of the man called Smiler came to his ears again.

"Stand steady with the rope, Ferret. I'll watch out."

"O.K. He won't be here for ten minutes yet. Keep your gun handy."

Billy Bunter barely repressed a squeak.

"I've got it handy, you fool!" came back the Smiler's mutter. "I fancy the sight of it will be enough for old Lanchester. The old fool is not likely to guess that there's nothing in it."

Bunter heard a chuckle from Ferret.

The fat junior breathed again.

Evidently, from the Smiler's words, he was going to hold up the motorist with an unloaded gun. The rascals were not quite so desperate as Bunter had supposed at first.

"The old fool's too valuable to plug, anyway," went on the Smiler. "But I fancy he will jump to orders with a gun looking him in the eye!"

"I should smile!" agreed the Ferret.

There was a rustle in the thickets again. To Bunter's horror, the Smiler came into his line of vision, moving past the end of the stack of logs.

But he was facing towards the road, his back to Bunter, and he did not look round, or think of looking round.

Bunter, his little round eyes popping behind his big round spectacles, blinked at his back in terror.

All he saw of the Smiler was the back of a dark overcoat, and a soft hat pulled low down. But he noticed that the man was slim in build, though with rather broad shoulders, and quick and active.

Bunter saw him only for a moment or two.

Then he stepped out into the road, and the trees and thickets hid him, much to the fat junior's relief.

There was the sound of a car on the road. But it was evidently not the car they wanted, for it roared by undeterred.

Bunter heard the Ferret's voice again:

"I guess I told you, Smiler! You don't want that rope across too soon. I'm telling you!"

Only a grunt answered from the man watching the road.

Billy Bunter rose softly to his feet.

They did not know that he was there—and the sooner he was not there, the safer Bunter was going to feel.

Whether the Ford would rush on the stretched rope, and be piled up in wreckage, or whether the driver would see the danger in time, and jam on his brakes, Bunter did not know. As it was broad daylight, it was probable that the driver would see the rope, and stop in time. But the rascals were running the risk of a smash. In any case, there was going to be a "hold-up"—and Billy Bunter had no taste for hold-ups off the films. He wanted to get away from that spot, and he wanted to get away quick!

Fortunately, that was easy. He could not have reached the road without revealing himself to the two hold-up men—in which case there was little doubt that Ferret and Smiler would have grabbed him at once, and very likely knocked him on the head. But it was easy to go farther into the wood—and that Bunter did, without losing time.

He trod softly and cautiously, in dread of being heard and followed. His heart missed a beat as a twig snapped under his foot.

He heard a sharp exclamation from the Smiler.

"What's that, Ferret? Did you hear—"

"O.K.! You're all nerves, Smiler!"

Grunt, from the man on the roadside.

Billy Bunter tiptoed away. It was a cold December day, but the perspiration clotted his fat face. Deeper and deeper into the wood the fat junior crept, till at last he was safe from sight and sound of the motor-bandits.

Then he turned in the direction of Redclyffe, to get back to the road at a safe distance from the ambush.

He emerged into the road, beyond a winding bend that barred him from the sight of the Smiler.

Once in the road, the fat junior took to his heels. He forgot that he was tired, in his eager haste to get to the safest possible distance from the two rascals behind him.

Puffing and blowing, gasping and gurgling, the fat junior ran. Seldom had Billy Bunter covered the ground so quickly.

Honk, honk!

A motor-horn sounded in front of him, from a car approaching from the direction of Redclyffe.

Bunter blinked at it, gasping.

Up to that moment Billy Bunter had been thinking only of his own fat and important person. Now he realised that this was the car that the two motor-bandits were watching for, beyond the bend down the road. It was a Ford car, driven by a chauffeur, with an old gentleman sitting inside, whose silvery hair showed under a shining silk hat.

Honk!

Bunter did not get out of the way. He stood in the middle of the road and waved his fat hand frantically.

"Stop!" he squeaked. "I say, stop! Danger! For goodness' sake stop! Oh crikey, stop!"

The driver stared at him and braked. The Ford car came to a halt a few yards short of the excited, fat Owl.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Gets a Lift!

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. The chauffeur stared at him. "What's up?" he demanded. "Road up, or what?" "Oh, no! Yes! Oh crikey!" gasped the fat Owl. "I say, don't go on! Stop! I say, they're watching for you! Stop, for goodness' sake! If you run into that rope— Oh crikey!" The chauffeur simply stared. Having stared at Bunter, he stared up the road. Nothing was to be seen as far as the bend.

"Yes, yes!" spluttered Bunter. "I say, you'd better turn back!" The old gentleman gave Bunter's fat, excited face a very keen look. The chauffeur gave a grunt. "You can see no one, Denham?" asked the man in the car. "No, Sir Peter! Shall I drive on?" Billy Bunter realised that the old gentleman was not Mr. Lanchester. He was Sir Peter Lanchester. "I say, don't go on," gasped Bunter. "You'll run into the rope—I say, one of them had a gun!" Another grunt from the chauffeur. Denham did not seem to believe in the

"I—I say, sir!" exclaimed Bunter. This was a chance the fat Owl was not likely to lose. "I was going to Redclyffe—I say, sir, if you're going back, will you give me a lift?" "Certainly, my boy! Step in!" Bunter fairly bolted in. Denham backed and turned the car. Billy Bunter blinked anxiously towards the bend in the road, beyond which the ambush was laid. He was in dread every moment of seeing Smiler or Ferret appear in view. But neither of them appeared. Utterly unaware of the fat junior's presence on the spot, and never dreaming that their intended victim had been warned, they



Billy Bunter laboured up the hill on the borrowed bike that was too high for him, happily unaware of the car rapidly overtaking him!

"Look 'ere—" he began.

A silk hat, with a fringe of silvery hair under it, was put out of the car. The chauffeur did not seem much impressed by Bunter's warning. But it was different with the old gentleman in the car. There was a very startled expression on his face.

"Stop, Denham!" he rapped quickly. "Here, my boy! Come here! What is it? Is there anything on the road ahead? Tell me at once!"

Bunter tottered to the side of the car.

"Yes," he gasped. "Two awful beasts—they're putting a rope across to stop a car—I say, are you Mr. Lanchester?"

"My name is Lanchester, certainly."

"That's the name I heard them mention—they said old Lanchester!" gasped Bunter. "I heard them—I was in the wood, see? I—I came away as quick as I could to—to—to warn you—"

"Two men, did you say?"

"Yes. One beast called the other Smiler, and the other beast called him Ferret!" gasped Bunter. "I heard them—"

"You heard them speak of me by name?"

rope, or the gun: or, indeed in the motor-bandits at all.

"No!" said Sir Peter Lanchester. "Turn the car, Denham! We shall certainly not go on to Greyfriars this way. Get back to Redclyffe."

"The road looks clear enough, sir!"

"The boy has heard my name!" said the old gentleman. "He could hardly have guessed it, Denham. He has heard it. Did you hear anything else in reference to me, my boy?"

"Yes," gasped Bunter. "One of them said the old fool—"

"Eh?"

"He said the old fool wasn't doing more than twenty in the Ford—"

"Oh!"

"I expect you saw them pass you!" said Bunter. "Two men on a motor-bike! They got ahead of you and stopped."

The chauffeur gave Bunter a quick look. Evidently, he recalled having seen two men on a motor-bike whiz past the car.

"Go back at once, Denham!" rapped the old gentleman. "This is another attempt of those scoundrels—I have no doubt of it! Back the car and turn at once, Denham."

"Very well, sir!"

were still waiting for the Ford to come by—Smiler watching for the car, Ferret holding the rope ready to cut across and bar the road with it. Probably, after a time, they would wonder why the Ford did not appear—but so far, they were waiting and watching.

They were not likely to see that Ford now.

Having backed and turned, Denham let the car out for Redclyffe, and whizzed away at a good speed.

The old gentleman looked back several times with an anxious puckered brow. But he settled down comfortably on the soft leather cushions at last.

Billy Bunter blinked at him, curiously and inquisitively.

He could see that the old gentleman, though startled and alarmed by his warning, was not surprised by it. His words to the chauffeur showed that he was not without some expectation of danger. He had said that it was "another attempt!" He was losing no time in getting out of that danger.

"I am very much obliged to you, my boy!" said Sir Peter, with a very benevolent glance at Bunter. "I had no idea THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,556.

that those rascals had been watching me—but they must have done so, to know that I was taking this road. I shall leave my car at Redclyffe, and take the train—do you know the station for Greyfriars School?"

"Oh, yes, rather, sir!" answered Bunter. "Change at Courtfield for Friardale. I belong to Greyfriars."

"Indeed!" said Sir Peter. "I am going there to see an old friend, whom I have not seen for very many years. Possibly you know Mr. Quelch?"

Billy Bunter grinned. He knew Mr. Quelch quite well: and had, in fact, been whacked by that gentleman, only that morning!

"He's my Form-master, sir. I'm in the Remove."

"What is your name, my boy?"

"Bunter, sir—William George Bunter."

"I shall remember you," said Sir Peter Lanchester. "I shall certainly mention to Mr. Quelch the service you have rendered me—the very great service." He gave Bunter a kindly smile. "Some boys would have been frightened, and would have run off—but you came to warn me of my danger! I shall not forget that, Master Bunter."

Billy Bunter opened his mouth—and shut it again.

Bunter, as a matter of fact, had been frightened, and had run off—and it was not till he saw the Ford in the road, that he remembered the motorist who was in danger.

Still, he saw no occasion for mentioning that circumstance to old Sir Peter.

If the old baronet supposed that Billy Bunter had displayed pluck and presence of mind, Bunter was not the fellow to undeceive him.

"Drive to the police station at Redclyffe, Denham!" added Sir Peter.

"Yes, Sir Peter."

"You had better come with me to the police station, and give what description you can of those rascals!" added the old gentleman. "It is possible that the police may be in time to find them and take them into custody."

"Oh!" stammered Bunter. "I—I've got to get somewhere in Redclyffe this afternoon, sir—I—I've got some friends expecting me at the Rotunda."

"I will drive you to the Rotunda, wherever that is, after we have seen the police!" said Sir Peter, with a smile.

"Oh, that's all right!" agreed Bunter.

The football match at Redclyffe School was almost over by this time, but that did not matter, so long as Bunter was in time for the Bouncer's spread.

True, it was only a Ford, and as a matter of choice, Bunter preferred a Rolls. Still, it was a very nice Ford—quite different from the paternal Ford at home. And Sir Peter Lanchester was a very wealthy looking old gentleman—titled, too. Bunter did not know whether he was a knight or a baronet, yet: but anyhow, he had a title, and Bunter liked titles. Swanking up to the Rotunda in a big car driven by a liveried chauffeur was quite agreeable to William George Bunter.

On the whole, he was not sorry, after all, that Wharton had recaptured that bike. His fat face was cheery and contented, as he rolled into Redclyffe in Sir Peter Lanchester's car.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

And a Boot!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"Bunter!"

"The fat bouncer got a lift!"

A good many Greyfriars juniors were strolling towards the tea-
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shop in Redclyffe High Street, after the football match. Harry Wharton & Co. came along in time to see a handsome car stop outside the Rotunda, and the chauffeur open the door for Billy Bunter to alight.

The car rolled away leaving the fat junior on the pavement blinking round through his big spectacles. He grinned at the sight of the Famous Five.

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Bunter.

"So you bagged a lift on the road, you fat fooler?" asked Harry Wharton.

"My friend Sir Peter offered me a seat in his car," said Bunter, loftily.

"Eh!"

"Who?"

"Which?"

"My friend Sir Peter Lanchester," said Bunter, breezily. "He's going to see old Quelch, you know—didn't you notice him in the car? An old sportsman with a white topknot. Decent old boy. You see, I saved his life—"

"You whatted?"

"Saved his life!" said Bunter, airily. "He was stopped by a gang of motor-bandits on the Redclyffe Road, and I weighed in. We've just been to the police about it."

The Famous Five blinked at William George Bunter. They were rather used to tall tales from Bunter, and they never expected him to tell the truth. But this seemed rather unusually tall, even for Bunter.

"You—you—you saved his life, did you?" gasped Bob Cherry. "You—you weighed in on a gang of motor-bandits—"

"Yes, rather! Knocked them right and left—"

"Oh crikey!"

"Dozens of them, I suppose?" asked Nugent.

"Well, to be exact, there were only two," said Bunter, "and I don't mind admitting I was glad of it—I'm not at all sure that I could have handled more than two of them—at once, you know."

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

They were quite sure that Bunter could not have handled more than two motor-bandits at once. They were sure that he could not have handled one. Indeed, they were quite sure that he could not have handled half a motor-bandit.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter, warmly. "You should have heard what Sir Peter said, that's all! He said 'Gallant lad! I owe you my life!' His very words."

"Did you have the neck to flag that car, and ask for a lift?" inquired Bob Cherry.

"No!" hooted Bunter. "Haven't I told you? The old Johnny offered me a lift after shaving his wife—I mean, saving his life! If you fellows don't believe me—"

"The believfulness is not terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I tell you they were holding up that car—that car that I came here in!" roared Bunter.

"Jolly obliging of them!" remarked Bob Cherry. "I suppose a car would need holding up with you in it—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass! I mean they were holding up the car, with guns and—things, and I jolly well tackled them, and then—"

"Then you woke up?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter snorted. Evidently, the Famous Five did not believe a word of it.

Had Bunter related exactly what had occurred, no doubt they might have

believed that much. But that was not Billy Bunter's way. Bunter never could tell a plain, unvarnished tale. Facts were always too commonplace for Bunter. He preferred the figments of his own fertile fancy to mere facts.

Bunter was annoyed. Naturally, he wanted the credit that was his due—in fact, he wanted more than was his due.

"Well, I fancy you fellows will hear about it at Greyfriars," he yapped. "Sir Peter will tell Quelch. He's an old pal of Quelch's, and he's going to see him. I say, you fellows, two bobbies have gone in a car to look for those motor-bandits, after what I told them at the station."

"Pile it on!"

"Sir Peter's going on by train, in case they're still after him. I'd be quite willing to go with him in the car, and see him through—after Smithy's feed, of course! But he's going by train. I fancy he's a bit nervous."

"Did anything happen on the Redclyffe road, besides a motorist giving you a lift in?" asked Johnny Bull.

"You silly fathead, haven't I told you?" hooted Bunter. "I'd walked a mile, when I came on those motor-bandits, and my legs were nearly dropping off, through your beastly selfishness in taking that bike, after all I've done for you! And that cad Smithy bringing you on in his rotten, hired car—not much of a car, compared with the one I came here in, though Smithy swanked off in it as if it was a gilt-edged Rolls-Royce—"

"Better not let Smithy hear you!" chuckled Bob. "He mightn't ask you to the spread, old fat man."

"Oh, Smithy wants a crowd at his spread," jeered Bunter. "He's asked all the Remove fellows who came over this afternoon—Pure swank! He likes showing off his money!"

"Shut up, you fat ass!" exclaimed Harry Wharton hurriedly.

The juniors were standing outside the Rotunda, where Herbert Vernon-Smith was standing that lavish spread to a crowd of Removites. Bunter had his back to the doorway, and did not observe Vernon-Smith arrive there from within, to look out for his expected guests.

Not having, of course, any eyes in the back of his fat head, Billy Bunter did not see the Bouncer in the doorway of the tea-shop. He saw, therefore, no reason for shutting up. Shutting up was not much in Bunter's line, anyhow.

"Shan't!" he retorted. "You jolly well know as well as I do that it's just swank—Smithy's swank all over! The fact is, I've a jolly good mind not to come in at all. Smithy likes to get fellows a bit above him socially, but I don't see why I should oblige him. He'd like to make the waiters think that I'm a friend of his, just to show off."

"Shut up!" hissed Bob. "Smithy is—"

The expression on Herbert Vernon-Smith's face, as he heard Billy Bunter's cheery remarks, from behind the fat Owl, was really alarming.

"Oh, blow Smithy!" said Bunter. "Fat lot I care for Smithy! I don't mind giving the fellow a leg-up, as far as that goes, but I can jolly well say I— Yarooop! Who's that kicking me? Yaroooooh!"

Billy Bunter nose-dived as a boot was planted heavily on him from the rear. As he tottered, the Bouncer followed it up with another. Bunter roared, and dropped on his hands and knees.

(Continued on page 10.)

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"Yoo-hoop! Who— Oh crikey! Is that Smithy? Oh crumbs! I say, old chap, I wasn't talking about you! I wasn't saying—yarooooop!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"
Thud, thud, thud!

Smithy's boot landed three times with vigour before Billy Bunter scrambled out of reach and jumped to his feet.

"I—I—I say—" gasped Bunter. "I wasn't— Beast! Keep off, will you? I say, you fellows, keep him off! If you kick me again, Smithy, you cad, I'll jolly well—yarooooop!"

Billy Bunter scudded. The Bounder, apparently not satisfied yet, rushed after him, and landed two more as he fled. He did not seem to think that Bunter had had enough yet. Bunter, on the other hand, felt that he had had quite enough, if not a little too much. He accelerated, and vanished round a corner.

Smithy's spread at the Rotunda was not graced by the winsome presence of William George Bunter, after all! His boot was ready for Bunter, if that fat youth showed up again.

Bunter did not show up; he had had more than he wanted of Smithy's boot!

But it was quite a jolly spread, in spite of the absence of Billy Bunter's fascinating company. So far from missing Bunter, the Remove fellows, for the second time that day, forgot his existence

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Invisible Owl!

"O H, lor'!" murmured Billy Bunter.

He leaned on an automatic machine, on the platform at Redclyffe Station, and looked on life with a pessimistic eye.

Everything seemed to have gone wrong that deplorable afternoon. The one bright spot in the gloom was the two shillings' worth of jam tarts he had parked before leaving Greyfriars. But that was only a happy memory.

Bunter was hungry. He was barred from the glorious feed going on at the Rotunda. He had to get back to Greyfriars for tea—if he was going to have any tea. And the problem of transport was almost insoluble.

He had not had much luck in borrowing a bike when he was outward bound. He had no chance at all of borrowing one homeward bound. Walking five miles was an awful impossibility. The railway was the only way—and the railway, with the usual selfishness of human nature, did not carry passengers free, gratis, and for nothing.

As Bunter was as stony as the most barren tract of the Sahara desert, he had to be carried free, gratis, and for nothing, if he was carried at all!

In a little country station like Redclyffe it was not difficult for a wary fellow to wedge in on the platform without a ticket. Trains were not fearfully frequent, and between trains there were not a lot of watchful eyes about. Bunter had got on the platform easily enough to wait for the next train to Courtfield.

But the next step was not so easy.

Bunter belonged to that peculiar class of persons who believe that a railway company is "fair game." He had no objections to bilking the railway, if he could get by with the same!

But he remembered an awful occasion when a nasty railwayman had taken him by the collar. That recollection had made him realise that whether railway

companies were fair game or not, honesty was often the best policy.

Blinking up and down the platform through his big spectacles, he was in hope of spotting some Greyfriars man, returning after the football match, whom he might "touch" for his fare.

No such person was visible. Greyfriars fellows who were going back by train had gone already. Billy Bunter was the only Greyfriars fellow in the station now.

He thought of the party at the Rotunda, and groaned. But for those unfortunate remarks about the founder of the feast, he would have been scoffing good things at Smithy's expense—with a healthy chance of borrowing his fare home from one of the numerous guests.

Now there really seemed nothing for it but bilking the railway; and at that idea he seemed to feel a nasty, rough hand on his collar again.

The train for Courtfield came in, and stopped. It was not going on again for several minutes, and it was easy to pop into a carriage. But getting away undetected at Courtfield or Friardale was another matter.

"Oh!" ejaculated Bunter suddenly.

A familiar figure walked down the train and stopped at a first-class carriage. It was an old gentleman in a silk hat, with a gleam of silvery hair showing under it.

Bunter blinked at Sir Peter Lanchester

He remembered that the old sportsman was going by train, leaving his car in Redclyffe. No doubt he had been parking the car somewhere while Bunter had been walking to the station from the Rotunda. Anyhow, here he was, taking the same train.

Bunter watched him as he placed a rug and an umbrella on a seat in the carriage, and then walked down the platform. That carriage remained empty; there was not a lot of traffic on the line, especially in the first-class compartment.

Bunter's fat face brightened.

He rolled towards the train and popped into the carriage.

After the service he had rendered Sir Peter that afternoon—the very great service, as Sir Peter himself had described it—surely the old gentleman could hardly refuse to come to the rescue, if necessary, of a fellow who had "lost" his ticket!

Bunter felt that he could bank on that.

All he had to do was to sit in that carriage, and discover at the end of the journey that he had lost his ticket—and leave the rest to Sir Peter Lanchester.

He felt that this was a winner.

In a greatly relieved frame of mind he sat down in a corner seat; he blinked cheerfully from the window, at Sir Peter's shining silk hat in the distance.

*Then the sight of another hat suddenly wiped the cheerful expression from his face. That hat—or, rather, peaked cap—was coming along the train, stopping at every carriage in turn.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

A beastly inspector was looking at the tickets before the train started. Bunter remembered that beastly custom on that beastly railway. It did not always happen, but it was liable to happen any time—which was terribly discouraging to bilks.

It was all very well to tell Sir Peter Lanchester at the end of the journey that he had lost his ticket, but it was of no use whatever to make that statement to a railway inspector before the journey started.

Bunter, in his mind's eye, saw himself hooked out of that carriage.

But he was not at the end of his resources yet.

He slid off the seat, extended his fat form on the floor, and rolled under the seat, packing himself carefully out of sight.

In that deep cover he waited with a palpitating fat heart.

He heard a sound at the carriage door.

If it was the railway inspector looking in, he did not see Bunter. But the fat junior did not think of emerging. It was better to remain parked under the seat all the way to Courtfield—which was only a short run from Redclyffe—than to risk being hooked out and left behind.

The fat Owl of the Remove remained where he was.

About a minute later he had a view of a pair of shiny shoes and a pair of trouser-ends. Somebody was getting in.

He had no doubt that it was Sir Peter.

The passenger sat down in the corner seat, quite unaware that there was anyone in the carriage with him.

The inspector probably had passed on by this time. But Billy Bunter did not think of emerging from cover. Really he could scarcely do so under Sir Peter's astonished eyes. A fellow who had hidden under a seat could hardly expect to get by with a story of a lost ticket; it was only too clear that such a fellow was a bilk.

After all, it was only fifteen minutes to Courtfield by rail. It was easy to remain where he was till the old gentleman had got out of the carriage; then he could follow him out and keep him in sight while he changed trains for Friardale.

Bunter settled down to it. It was not, in point of fact, the first time that he had made a railway journey parked under a seat.

Doors were slamming along the train now.

Just as the engine shrieked another passenger bolted at the last moment into the carriage.

He sat down in the corner seat opposite Sir Peter Lanchester, and the door slammed immediately after him and the train started.

The boots of the new passenger were only a few inches from Billy Bunter's fat little nose.

The train rolled out of Redclyffe station. Bunter heard the rustle of a newspaper; Sir Peter had opened "The Times."

Of the second passenger Bunter could see nothing but the boots. Those boots stirred a little a minute after the train was out of the station. He heard a crumpling sound of paper, and realised in great surprise that the second passenger had knocked Sir Peter's newspaper aside. There was a startled and annoyed exclamation from Sir Peter.

"What the dooce—"

"Don't move, Sir Peter Lanchester!" came a voice that made Billy Bunter start and quake as he heard it. "And don't try to reach the communication cord! I shall shoor you dead if you stir a finger!"

Billy Bunter wondered for a moment whether he was dreaming. For it was the voice of the Smiler that he heard. It was one of the pair of motor bandits who had jumped into Sir Peter's carriage at the last moment before the train pulled out of Redclyffe.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Butts In!

BILLY BUNTER made no sound. He hardly breathed. But he listened with all his ears.

"Good—good gracious!" He heard the old baronet's startled voice. "Who—who are you? What does this mean? You rascal, turn that pistol away! Is this an attempt at robbery? Good gracious!"

"Nothing of the kind," came the cool, cold voice of the Smiler. "Your note-case is quite safe, Sir Peter. I cannot say the same for your life. I warn you not to make a fool of yourself!"

Sir Peter had grasped the umbrella that lay on the seat beside him, but he released it again. A revolver in the hand of a man sitting opposite was looking him in the face; the muzzle was hardly a couple of feet from Sir Peter's nose; and a pair of icy eyes in a hard, cold face were gleaming over it.

"What do you want?" Sir Peter's voice was a little shaky.

"I think you know. You turned back in your car this afternoon—but you have been watched since," said the Smiler quietly. "I conclude that you have taken this train with the idea that the roads were not safe—what? You could not have suited me better. We have twelve minutes, undisturbed, for our little interview. You are going to answer my questions now, or it will be the worse for you."

"What—?"

"Is Lord Reynham at Greyfriars School?"

"No."

"Take care how you answer! You are on your way to Greyfriars; that has been ascertained beyond doubt. Why are you going there?"

"I am going to visit an old friend, a Form-master in the school."

"Name?"

"Mr. Quelch."

"An old friend—but this is your first visit to him?" sneered the Smiler.

"I fail to see how you know—"

"We know a good deal! Never mind that! You are asking me to believe that a Greyfriars Form-master is an old friend of yours, and you are going to visit him, when you have never done so before. I've warned you to be careful!"

"You are a rogue and a rascal, sir!" snapped Sir Peter. "Nothing would induce me to answer your questions, to the harm of a boy who is under my charge, if you blew out my brains on the spot. But what I have told you is the truth. I have not seen Mr. Quelch for years, but I am going to see him now."

"And why?"

"To ask his advice and assistance in the difficulties that have been brought upon me by a gang of rascals—of whom, I presume, you are the leader," snapped Sir Peter.

"You think a schoolmaster may help you to deal with us?" sneered the Smiler, his tone very plainly revealing that he did not believe the old baronet's statement.

"Possibly."

"You must think of something better than that, Sir Peter. I ask you again whether the boy is at Greyfriars School?"

"You seem to be able to obtain information for your purposes," said Sir Peter. "No doubt you could obtain a list of the names of the boys at Grey-

friars School and satisfy yourself on that point."

"I should not find the boy under his own name," said the Smiler, "and none of us know him by sight, owing to the precautions you have taken. Wherever he is, he does not use the name of Lord Reynham. Is that not the case?"

No answer.

"You deny that he is at Greyfriars School?"

"He is not there."

"But he is—and must be—at some such place."

"Perhaps."

"Give me the name of the school."

"I will tell you nothing!" said Sir Peter Lanchester, and his voice was not shaky now. "Who you are I do not know, but I conclude that you must be the scoundrel who has been seeking for years to get my ward into his hands. Where you have obtained your information I cannot guess; I have kept my own counsel on the subject. But it seems that you have learned that my ward has been placed at school under an assumed name to protect him from you. You will gain little by your spying. I will tell you nothing."

"I give you two minutes to cough it up!" came the cold, hard voice. "If you have not spoken by that time you are a dead man!"

"I have said all that I have to say."

Sir Peter sat bolt upright, facing the man with the gun. The train rushed on through the falling December dusk.

Under the seat, Billy Bunter had not stirred. What he had heard was Greek to the fat junior.

But one thing was clear to Billy Bunter's fat mind.

He had not forgotten the words of Smiler and Forret, in the ambush on the Redclyffe road.

Sir Peter Lanchester, looking the levelled revolver in the muzzle, had no doubt that it was loaded, in a desperate hand. Billy Bunter was aware that it was not loaded, and that the Smiler had no intention whatever of shooting. The rascal was banking on the threat of death to extract what he wanted to know from the old baronet.

Billy Bunter did not like fire-arms, when they were loaded. But an unloaded revolver had no great terrors, even for William George Bunter. Aware, from the rascal's own words to his confederate a few hours ago, that he was uttering only an empty threat, Billy Bunter was not greatly scared.

"One minute!" snapped the Smiler suddenly.

Sir Peter Lanchester breathed hard. He did not know what Bunter knew, and he had no doubt that he was looking death in the face.

"One minute more," came the hard, threatening voice, and then—"Oh!"

The rascal broke off with a sudden, enraged exclamation as the old baronet threw himself forward in his seat and grasped the revolver.

The Smiler did not fire—for a good reason!

Sir Peter grasped the barrel of the revolver with one hand, and with the other, clenched, struck at the Smiler's face. Old as he was, the baronet was evidently game.

But the next moment the Smiler was on his feet, grasped him; and the old gentleman crumpled up in that savage grip.

The Smiler forced him back on the seat and threw up the receiver, to use as a club.

Billy Bunter's startled and horrified eyes were on him, from under the other seat.

It was fortunate that Bunter was aware that the revolver was unloaded. But for that, the fat junior's terrors would probably have been too much for him. As it was, Bunter weighed in.

He made a sudden grab at the Smiler's ankle, from behind, and dragged with all his strength.

The Smiler gave a startled yell and stumbled over. Utterly unaware that there was a third party in the carriage, he was taken completely by surprise, and that sudden drag on his ankle tumbled him over headlong.

He bumped on the floor of the carriage, spluttering wildly with amazement and rage.

Sir Peter scrambled off the seat.

He gave one astounded blink at a fat face and a large pair of spectacles emerging from under the opposite seat—as amazed as the Smiler by Bunter's sudden and unexpected intervention. But he did not lose a moment. He flung himself on the sprawling rascal on the floor and pinned him down.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He rolled out and scrambled up.

The Smiler, on his back, struggled furiously. He had twice the old baronet's strength, but he was at a disadvantage.

"Pull the cord!" shouted Sir Peter.

"Oh crumbs!"

"The cord—the communication cord—quick!" shrieked the old baronet.

"Oh! All right! Oh crikey!"

Bunter dragged at the cord. Almost immediately there was a screech of brakes and the train slowed.

The Smiler, with a fierce and desperate effort, hurled the old baronet off. His own liberty was at stake now—the train was slowing to a stop. He pitched Sir Peter back, scrambled up, and spun round to the door. With lightning swiftness he threw it open and leaped out on the line.

The train was still moving; and the Smiler, as he landed, rolled headlong down an embankment. But he was on his feet again in a twinkling, and running.

Sir Peter, exhausted, panting, collapsed on a seat. Billy Bunter, spluttering, collapsed on the other. They blinked at one another. The guard came scudding along the train, and blinked at both of them.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bunter the Life-Saver!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. put up their bikes and cut across to the House to join the crowd of fellows going into the Hall for calling-over.

A crowd of fellows were coming back from Redclyffe, some sooner, and some later; but all—excepting one, were in by the time the bell rang. But in the ranks of the Remove, when they took their places in the Hall, one fat, familiar face was conspicuous by its absence.

Mr. Quelch was taking the roll. There was no answering "adsum" when he called the name of Bunter.

Frowning, Quelch marked Bunter absent; and went on with the roll.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Hasn't the jolly old porpoise rolled in yet?"

"Not here," said Harry Wharton. "Oh, my hat! If poor old Bunter's walking back from Redclyffe, he will arrive with the milk in the morning."

"Catch him walking!" grunted Johnny Bull. "More likely to bilk the railway!"

"He would have got in before us, by rail!" said Nugent.

"Unless he was copped!"

"Oh crumbs!"

There was a chuckle from Skinner.

"Fancy Quelch's face, if he has to go and bail him out!" he murmured.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Silence!" called out Wingate of the Sixth. And the Removites subdued their merriment.

After roll there was some interested discussion in the Rag, on the subject of the missing Owl. If Bunter was walking back from Redclyffe, estimates varied as to the time he was likely to reach Greyfriars. Not before dawn, was the general opinion; while some fellows put it at midnight, and others rather thought that Bunter might arrive with the early milkman.

On the other hand, it was extremely probable that the fat Owl had made an attempt to travel ticketless on the railway—his manners and customs in that respect being very well known in his Form. In which case, as he had not turned up, it looked as if he must have been "copped."

So it was quite an interesting question whether the fat Owl of the Remove was still wearily plugging the endless miles on the Redclyffe road, or whether he was quaking in charge of a policeman—whether he would crawl in at some unearthly hour, with his fat legs nearly falling off, or arrive with a man in uniform as an escort.

Certainly no one expected him to arrive, as he actually did arrive, about half an hour later.

When a taxi was heard to drive in at the gates and come up to the House and stop, the juniors did not guess that it was Bunter coming. Some of them had heard that Mr. Quelch was expecting a visitor that day, and so they supposed that this was probably the visitor, arriving rather late. Then Skinner, looking out of the window, gave a yell.

"Bunter!"

Billy Bunter alighted from the taxi and rolled into the House. And quite an army of fellows rushed to see him. As Bunter had been left in a stony state at Redclyffe, it was quite surprising to see him arrive in a taxi! Taxicabs cost money; and Bunter was well known to be in the same state as Peter of old—silver and gold had he none!

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Bunter. "I say—"

"Not me!" said the Bounder, grinning.

"Eh? Wharrer you mean—not you?" asked Bunter.

"I mean what I say—no good asking me to pay the taxi! Better try Mauly—he's soft!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"The taxi's gone!" said Bob Cherry, looking out at the door. "Mean to say that chap gave you a free ride, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Well, you haven't paid him, I suppose?" asked Bob. "And you can't bilk taximen as you do the railway company."

"Beast! A friend paid for the taxi at Courtfield!" said Bunter, with dignity. "One of my titled friends."

"Which, out of the hundreds?" chuckled Skinner.

"Sir Peter Lanchester!" answered Bunter calmly. "Sir Peter Lanchester, Baronet, of Reynham Castle, Sussex."

"Oh, my only hat!"

"Go it!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"You see, I saved his life—" explained Bunter.

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"Oh, I remember—you were doing life-saving stunts this afternoon, on the Redclyffe road!" chortled Bob. "Knocking out gangs of motor-bandits—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't mean that time—I saved his life again, in the train coming from Redclyffe—"

"Twice!" yelled Bob

"Yes, twice—"

"Oh crikey! You're making a regular habit of it, then!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked round at a crowd of laughing faces.

Certainly it looked as if something unusual must have happened, as Bunter had arrived in a taxi, without asking any fellow to pay the taximan. But nobody was likely to believe in Bunter's life-saving exploits—especially twice on the same afternoon. It was really rather a lot to believe!

"I say, you fellows, it's true!" said Bunter. "You see, this is how it was! After Smithy acted like a beastly hooligan, I refused to come to his spread at the Rotunda."

"You'd have got some more boot, if you had," remarked the Bounder.

"Beast! So I went to the railway station, and, as it happened, my friend, Sir Peter, was taking the same train," explained Bunter. "I—I decided to keep an eye on him, and see him safe. That was why I hid under the seat in the carriage—not because I hadn't got a ticket, you know."

"We can believe that much," chuckled Bob. "You hid under the seat of a railway carriage, because you hadn't got a ticket. You've done that before, you bloated bilk!"

"Well, Sir Peter believed me, anyhow, when I told him," snorted Bunter. "And I can tell you, it was jolly lucky for him I was there. One of the motor-bandits got into the train at the last minute. He drew a revolver—"

"Not a machine-gun?" asked Skinner.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No!" roared Bunter. "A revolver! I didn't know it wasn't loaded, of course. How could I? He attacked the old sportsman, and I—I—I jumped out and knocked him spinning. Felled him with a blow. Knocked him right out, you know."

"Dead for a ducat—dead!" said Wibley.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"No, not dead, old chap," said Bunter. "I hit him pretty hard, but not so hard as all that. But he had enough, I can tell you. Then I pulled the cord, and the train stopped, and the guard came, and—"

"And got him?" grinned Bob.

"No; he jumped out and bunked."

"Then you won't be able to produce him?" chortled Skinner.

"No; you see, he got away. There was no end of a fuss guard and passengers crowding round, and all that, all wondering at my pluck—"

"At your whatter?" gasped Bob.

"Pluck!" roared Bunter. "I'd jolly well like to see you do what I did on that train, Bob Cherry, but I jolly well never shall!"

"No fear," agreed Bob. "I never travel under a seat without a ticket."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! Well, that's why I'm late for roll," said Bunter. "I came on to Courtfield with Sir Peter, and, as I'd lost my ticket in the—the desperate struggle, the old boy paid my fare, and we went to the police station, same as at Redclyffe—not that those bobbies

are much good—and then the old boy put me in a taxi for Greyfriars, and—and here I am. He hasn't come on to the school. You'd jolly well have seen him, if he had, but—"

"The butfulness is terrific!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But he's phoning Quelch from Courtfield," said Bunter. "He was coming here to see Quelch, but, being a bit upset, he's putting it off till to-morrow."

"You're not going to tell Quelch that that's why you're late for roll?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Eh? Yes, of course."

"You're going to spin that yarn to Quelch?" yelled Bob.

"Of course, it's true."

"True! Oh, suffering sardines! You'd better pack some exercise-books in your bags before you try it on Quelch."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"For goodness' sake, Bunter, tell Quelch an easier one than that!" exclaimed Peter Todd. "Can't you see that it won't wash?"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"Do you think Quelch will believe a word of it?" gasped Toddy.

"Don't you?" demanded Bunter.

"Eh—what? Oh crikey! Hardly!" stuttered Toddy.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled on, heading for his Form-master's study, to report his return.

The juniors stared after him blankly. What would be the result, if the fat Owl spun that remarkable yarn to Quelch, they could hardly imagine.

But Bunter seemed to have no doubts. He rolled on cheerily to Mr. Quelch's study, tapped, and rolled in.

And when he reappeared a few minutes later, without any sign of having had the whopping of his life, the Remove fellows could only conclude that he had not, after all, tried that remarkable yarn on Quelch.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Unsettled!

"DON'T say Christmas!" Five voices delivered that injunction in chorus.

After dinner the following day, Harry Wharton & Co. were sauntering in the quad, discussing the Christmas holidays. As Billy Bunter rolled up, they all addressed him together.

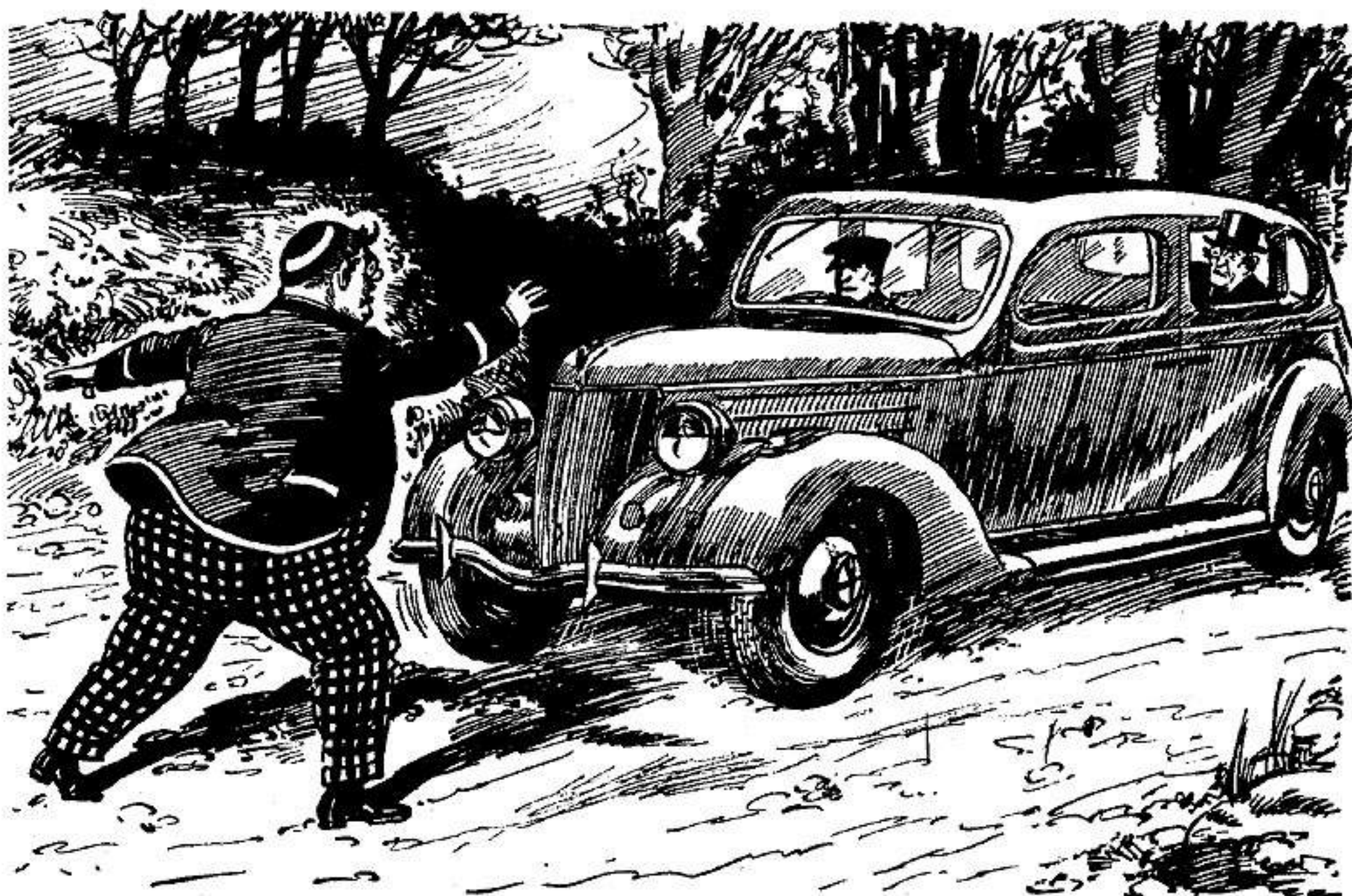
As the time drew near for breaking-up at Greyfriars, the Christmas vacation became a favourite topic with Billy Bunter—but a topic which no other fellow seemed keen to discuss with him.

That glorious residence, Bunter Court, failed, as was usual in holiday time, to attract Bunter. He had made up his mind to spend Christmas with his old pals. But if Bunter merely said "About Christmas, you fellows," it seemed enough to make fellows remember other engagements, or pop round corners.

This was rather irritating to Bunter, who naturally wanted to get the matter settled.

The Famous Five were a little unsettled, as well as Bunter. Harry Wharton's uncle, the old colonel, and his aunt, Miss Amy Wharton, were absent from home—Aunt Amy having had to go away that winter for her health.

It had been understood that they would return to Wharton Lodge before Christmas; but the return was post-



"Stop! I say, stop! Danger!" squeaked Billy Bunter, standing in front of the oncoming car and waving a fat hand frantically. The gentleman in the car thrust out his head and inquired: "What is it, boy?" "Two awful beasts!" gasped Bunter. "They're going to stop your car!"

poned, which rather knocked on the head Harry's plans for the festive season.

Wharton Lodge not being available, the next best plan was for Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh to put in the holidays with the other members of the Co.

That was the subject of discussion when Bunter rolled along, to be promptly warned off by five voices speaking in unison.

Bunter, however, was not to be warned off. Bunter could not possibly continue to leave things in this unsettled state.

"I say, you fellows, about Christmas—" he began.

"Don't!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Eh? Don't what, you ass?"

"Don't say Christmas!"

"You can shut up, Cherry! I'm speaking to Wharton about the Christmas holidays," said Bunter. "If you think I'd be found dead in your mouldy little show in Dorset, you're mistaken—see?"

"You'll be found dead, or nearly, if you're found there at all," remarked Bob Cherry.

"Yah! I say, Harry, old chap, I'd like to get this settled," said Bunter, blinking at the captain of the Remove through his big spectacles. "I've had some rather decent invitations for Christmas; but the fact is, I prefer to stick to my old pals. Mind, I can't give you the whole vacation. I have to consider my other friends. I can manage a week at Wharton Lodge."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Only a week?" he asked.

"Well, I might make it a fortnight," admitted Bunter. "If you'd really like me to stay a couple of weeks, old chap, I might manage it. After all, we're pals, old chap."

"Are we?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Why not make it the whole vac?" asked the captain of the Remove. "No objection whatever, so far as I'm concerned."

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

Billy Bunter blinked at them in surprise.

He had hardly expected this whole-hearted invitation to Wharton Lodge, but he could see nothing to laugh at in it. The Co., who were aware that nobody would be at home at Wharton Lodge for Christmas, could.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter. "I say, Harry, old chap, I'll accept that invitation—"

"It isn't an invitation," explained Wharton. "What I said is, that there's no objection to your staying at Wharton Lodge all through the holidays, if you want to."

"Well, that comes to the same thing, doesn't it?" asked Bunter. "I'm on, anyhow. I hardly know how I shall put off all my other friends; but I'll do it, for your sake, old chap. Rely on me. Anybody else coming?"

"No."

"Not a party, or anything?"

"Not at all."

"I say, it will be a bit quiet, won't it?"

"Fearfully."

"Well, I'll come, all the same," declared Bunter. "I'm not going to let a pal down, because he can't afford much in the way of Christmas festivities. We'll travel down together, old fellow."

"Can't be done."

"Eh—why not?"

"Because I'm not going there."

"Eh? What the dickens do you mean?" ejaculated Bunter. "You can't ask a fellow home for Christmas if

you're not going to be at home, I suppose?"

"But I haven't asked any fellow home for Christmas!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, shut up that cackling!" hooted Bunter. "Look here, you silly ass, do you think I'm going to stay at your place with your old uncle and aunt and nobody else?"

"No!"

"What do you mean then?"

"I mean that my uncle and aunt won't be at home."

"They won't!" yelled Bunter.

"No!"

"You—you—you silly ass!" shrieked Bunter. "Who will be there, then?"

"Nobody!"

"Wha-a-a-t?"

"I mean, as all the family will be away, most of the household will go away, too! I think one old couple will be left in charge."

"One old kik-kik-couple!" stuttered Bunter.

"Yes! I shouldn't wonder if they'd be glad to see you, Bunter!" said Harry Wharton gravely. "You'll cheer them up very likely! There won't be any festivities, of course, or much in the way of grub—"

"Eh?"

"But stay there as long as you like! If your other numerous friends will let you off, put in the whole vacation there! Go straight there when we break up and stay till first day of term. You're absolutely welcome."

Billy Bunter glared at the captain of the Remove, his very spectacles glinting with wrath.

He understood now the meaning of that unexpected permission to spend the whole of the Christmas holidays at Wharton Lodge.

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(Continued from page 13.)

The expression on his fat face made the Co. roar.

"You—you—you silly idiot!" gasped Bunter at last. "You—you—you blithering fathead! Think I want to stick in a place that's shut up, with nobody there, and perhaps not even a Christmas pudding—"

"No perhaps about it; there won't be!"

"You—you—you footling fathead!" gasped Bunter. "Well, I jolly well won't go—see?"

"Please yourself, of course!" said Harry, laughing. "Now roll away, old barrel, and give us a rest."

"But I—I say, if you're not going to be at home for Christmas you'll be somewhere else."

"Fancy Bunter guessing that!" ejaculated Bob. "Did you work that out in your head, Bunter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You shut up, Bob Cherry! You needn't expect to see me at your mouldy place, anyhow! I say, Wharton, old chap, where are you going? I'll tell you what—I'll come, too, if you like!"

"Wharton's coming to my mouldy place!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

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

"Oh!" repeated Bunter.

"And you wouldn't be found dead there, you know!" grinned Bob.

"I—I—I would, old chap! I mean, I—I'll come with—with pleasure!" gasped Bunter. "What I really meant to say, old fellow, is that I'd come to Cherry Place with—with pleasure, real pleasure, Bob, old chap!"

"Well, you might come with pleasure," remarked Bob thoughtfully, "but you'd leave without pleasure, I feel sure of that—with my boot to help you! I hardly think you'd enjoy a visit to Cherry Place, Bunter! It would be so brief—only long enough for me to boot you off the premises."

"Beast!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five walked on, chuckling. Billy Bunter blinked after them—not chuckling. Bunter's arrangements for Christmas were still unsettled—and looked now like remaining unsettled.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Expensive Eavesdropping!

MR. QUELCH stepped out of his study and walked down the passage.

He did not specially notice a fat member of his Form standing by the window, near the corner, looking out into the quad.

But Billy Bunter noticed Quelch.

His eyes gleamed behind his spectacles as the Remove master walked away to the door of the House.

Bunter knew why Quelch was going to the door. He was expecting a caller after lunch that day.

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Not a fellow in the Remove believed a word of Billy Bunter's startling tale of the previous day's happenings. But Bunter knew what he knew, so to speak. He knew that Sir Peter Lanchester was going to call on Mr. Quelch after lunch that day, having put up overnight in Courtfield. Billy Bunter was extremely and intensely interested in that visit.

Bunter's besetting sin was inquisitiveness. Bunter always wanted to know.

A less inquisitive fellow than Bunter might have been curious about the strange affair. He had pondered a good deal over what he had heard in the railway carriage and was unable to make head or tail of it. He was simply bursting with curiosity to know what it all meant.

He was going to know if he could.

In the way of acquiring information when his curiosity was whetted the fat Owl had no scruples whatever. So long as keyholes were made to doors Billy Bunter was always likely to learn what went on. In the Remove he had been kicked times without number for eavesdropping.

So intensely curious was Bunter to hear what old Sir Peter had to say to Mr. Quelch that he even thought of putting a fat ear to the keyhole of Quelch's study door when the visitor arrived!

But that was an awfully risky proceeding in Masters' Passage. Billy Bunter thought of it—but it was not probable that he would have done more than think of it. It was altogether too dangerous.

But when Quelch left his study to go along to the door and await his visitor there Bunter's problem was solved for him.

He blinked cautiously after Quelch, and then rolled up the passage to his Form-master's study.

By leaving his study just then the Remove master had fairly played into the hands of the inquisitive fat Owl.

Bunter popped into the study, breathlessly, and closed the door behind him. Putting a fat ear to the keyhole would have been altogether too risky when another master might come along the passage at any moment. But Bunter's present scheme seemed to him as safe as houses.

Certainly a fellow who was "copped" hidden in a master's study, lending a surreptitious ear to the conversation there, was likely to be dealt with in the most severe manner—nothing short of a Head's flogging. But Billy Bunter was not going to be caught.

In the corner of that study was a large cupboard. It had a lock and key. The upper part of the cupboard was occupied by bookshelves laden with hefty volumes. The lower part contained various odds and ends, such as a bundle of canes, and a rolled map, and other such things. But there was plenty of room for a Peeping Tom!

Bunter had it all cut and dried. He had thought out his plan—if only Quelch left that study and gave him a chance. Now Quelch had left it, and the fat Owl had his chance.

Quickly he put the key on the inside of the cupboard door. Then he parked himself inside and drew the door shut and locked it.

He was absolutely safe from discovery now.

Quelch, certainly, was not likely to guess that a member of his Form was hidden in the study. He was not likely to want anything from that cupboard while his visitor was there. But, in the remote contingency of Quelch coming to the cupboard, the door was locked and the key missing. He would suppose that the key had fallen out, and perhaps been

swept up by a housemaid—as sometimes happened to keys. Whatever he supposed, he was not in the least likely to suppose that a member of his Form was locked in that cupboard.

Billy Bunter grinned over his astuteness.

After the visitor had gone Quelch would leave the study sooner or later, and the way of escape would be open to Bunter. At the worst he would have to remain parked there till the bell went for classes—when Quelch would have to go to the Form-room. It was worth while getting lines for being late for class—when he so keenly wanted to know!

To do Bunter justice, it did not occur to him that he was acting like an unscrupulous young rascal. He did not think of what these proceedings would have looked like in the eyes of other fellows. He did not, in fact, think at all.

Thinking was not Bunter's long suit. He wanted to know—and he was jolly well going to know, and that was all there was to it!

If he thought at all it was only to reflect what a clever fellow he was. Nobody else in the Remove, he was sure, would have thought of a dodge like this. On that point, undoubtedly, Bunter was right!

More than ten minutes had elapsed before Billy Bunter heard a sound in the study. Then there was the opening of a door, footsteps, and the closing of the door. Quelch had brought his visitor in.

Bunter heard a voice—the slightly wheezy, but pleasant voice of the old gentleman of the day before. To his surprise, it was pronouncing his own name. He heard it distinctly.

"Bunter—"

"Bunter?" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"The boy who was of such service—such inestimable service—to me yesterday. He told me that he was in your Form here, my dear Quelch."

"That is certainly correct."

"I should like to see him, while I am here. You will have no objection, I feel sure, to my bestowing upon him some slight token of my gratitude for services rendered—"

"Hem!"

"In my own schooldays, Quelch—a long time ago now—a little tip in addition to the usual allowance was never found unwelcome. Moreover, Christmas is approaching—a time when young people, I believe, find many roads for their money."

"No doubt, But—"

"In the circumstances, if you, as the boy's Form-master, have no objection, I should really like to make the boy a present of, say, a five-pound note! You will not refuse to permit this."

"Oh, certainly, if you so desire, Sir Peter. You shall certainly see the boy—I will send for him to come here before you leave me."

"Thank you, Quelch!"

"Pray be seated, Sir Peter."

Sir Peter Lanchester sat down.

Mr. Quelch followed his example.

Billy Bunter, in the cupboard, had a wild desire to kick himself.

That old bean wanted to tip him a fiver before he left. Bunter was to be sent for, to receive that handsome "tip." And there was Bunter, parked in the study cupboard, unable to emerge until after Sir Peter had gone.

No words could have expressed Billy Bunter's awful feelings at that moment. His remarkable cleverness in parking himself in that cupboard, to listen to what did not concern him, was going to cost him exactly five pounds.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Very Extraordinary!

"MY dear Quelch—"

"I am all attention, Sir Peter."

"I am going to surprise you very much."

"It is a surprise, and a very agreeable one, to receive a visit from an old friend I have not seen for so many years," said Mr. Quelch. "I gathered from your letter, a few days ago, that you desired to consult me upon some matter of urgent importance—"

"Very urgent, and very important, Quelch!" said Sir Peter. "It is a matter that may concern my life! You have not forgotten what I told you on the telephone last evening—my life has been in danger—"

"The police—"

"So far, they have not been able to trace the men who attacked me yesterday, and I have little hope that they will succeed in doing so," said Sir Peter. "All that is known of them is what was heard by the boy Bunter—two names, evidently nicknames, and the description I was able to give of the rascal who attacked me in the train. It is little enough for them to work upon."

"True! But—in what way can I be of assistance?" asked Mr. Quelch, evidently puzzled. "Anything, of course, that I can do—"

"I will explain. You are aware that Lord Reynham, now a lad of nearly sixteen, is my ward. He is an orphan, with no near relations, excepting his cousin Rupert. I am a very distant connection of the family; but I was appointed his guardian under the late lord's will—and I have found it a very onerous duty, Quelch. Four years ago a succession of desperate attempts were made to kidnap the boy."

"For what reason?"

"That remains unknown, unless ransom was the object. The boy will be very rich when he comes of age. Whatever the reason, William had several very narrow escapes. He is a boy of delicate health, and it told upon him severely, Quelch—so much so that I dreaded to see his nervous system absolutely shattered by a constant sense of danger. Every effort to discover the kidnappers failed—even their motive could only be guessed at—and I was driven, at last, to take very extraordinary measures for his protection."

Sir Peter paused.

"These were the measures, Quelch—he was placed at a certain school, under an assumed name, to remain there in safety till the kidnapping gang could be discovered and dealt with by the police."

"And he has remained safe?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"Perfectly so. I see him only at rare intervals, and never at the school where he boards. He has been practically adopted into his headmaster's family, spends his holidays with them, and is quite happy and contented, and perfectly safe. This, you will understand, was intended only as a temporary measure. I had no idea, at the time, that it would last over years."

"And it has?"

"It is still going on. The kidnapping gang are still at large, and I have the strongest proof that they have not abandoned their design. I had hoped, of course that they would be laid by the heels, but no trace of them has been found. On many occasions I was aware that I was watched—the rascals

no doubt hoped to discover, sooner or later, what had become of Lord Reynham. It was given out that he was abroad for his health; and as it was known that he was delicate, no doubt this deluded the rogues for a time. Aware that the boy would be in danger if they were able to trace him, I have allowed this state of affairs to go on. He is still safe—under another name—but—"

"But there has been some new development?"

"Exactly!" said Sir Peter. "In some manner—I cannot even guess how—they have learned of the measures I have taken—though, fortunately, they know neither the school nor the name under which Lord Reynham passes there. This is known only to his headmaster, to myself, and to my solicitors. The boy is still perfectly safe from them; but I—"

"But you are not?"

"That is how the matter stands," said Sir Peter. "During the past few months several attempts have been made on me personally. The object, I presume, is to get me into their hands and force me to reveal the boy's present whereabouts—which, of course, I should never do."

"That demand was made yesterday, Quelch, under the muzzle of a revolver, in the train from Redclyffe—and though I doubt whether the rogue really intended to fire, I should certainly have been severely hurt in my struggle with him, but for the boy Bunter. I am an old man, Quelch, and this kind of thing is affecting me severely."

"I imagine so!" said Mr. Quelch.

"What to do, in the extraordinary circumstances, has been a mystery to me," went on the old baronet. "But it happens that a short time ago Rupert returned from abroad—Captain Reynham, I should say, William's cousin and heir to the title. Rupert gave me some advice—upon which I do not care to act."

"And that advice?"

"To bring Lord Reynham home to Reynham Castle, to guard him with detectives, employed as servants in the house, and thus to ensnare the kidnapping rascals. The boy would be, as it were, a bait to draw them into an attempt, in which they might be captured."

"That is not a bad plan, Sir Peter. Sooner or later, the boy must resume his own name—the present position cannot be kept up after he comes of age, obviously. If every precaution were taken—"

"I should think of it, Quelch, if the boy were strong, sturdy, in good health. But, as I have said, he is delicate—utterly unfitted physically to go through such experiences. I do not wish to run the risk of it. His health requires care, in the best of circumstances. You will see, from that, that it is impossible to expose him to dangers and alarms."

"Quite!" agreed Mr. Quelch.

"But," went on Sir Peter slowly, "my nephew Rupert's suggestion put another idea into my mind—which is what I have to discuss with you. I have warned you that I am going to surprise you."

"Please proceed," said Mr. Quelch.

"No living soul, but yourself, has heard any whisper of this," said the old baronet. "No word of it, of course, will ever pass your lips. I have given Rupert no hint of it—he might have a careless tongue."

"If my plan is carried out, no one must have the slightest suspicion, or

the whole plan would be a failure. Lord Reynham has not been seen by any of those lawless rascals for over four years—and the change from a child of eleven to a youth of nearly sixteen is very considerable, Quelch. Obviously, he would not be known by sight to anyone who saw him only as a child. Why should not another lad take his place—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Some boy of strong character, courage, and physical fitness," said Sir Peter. "He would arrive at Reynham Castle, under the name of Lord Reynham, as if coming home for the Christmas holidays from school. I should greet him as Lord Reynham—everyone would suppose him to be the young lord—even his cousin Rupert. He would continue to play the part, in order to draw the fire, so to speak, of the kidnapping gang—Rupert's plan, but carried out by a boy able to stand the strain. That is the scheme I have formed, Quelch."

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Mr. Quelch. "Are you serious, Sir Peter?"

"Quite."

"But—but—"

"That is why I am here to consult you, Quelch. As a Form-master in this school, you must be acquainted with the characters of all the boys who come under your authority. It is possible that in your Form here there is some boy—some strong, sturdy, and courageous boy—who would be able and willing to play such a part."

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, quite taken aback.

"Some Greyfriars boy—" said Sir Peter.

"But—but—" stammered Mr. Quelch.

There was no doubt that the old baronet had surprised him.

He had, in fact, astounded him.

"These rascals," continued Sir Peter, "already suspect that his lordship is at this school, under some assumed name. My visit to you has given them that impression; the rascal in the train yesterday said so plainly. If, therefore, a Greyfriars boy—any Greyfriars boy of a suitable age—arrived at the castle and was accepted by me as Lord Reynham, they could have no suspicion whatever that they were being deluded."

"But," gasped Mr. Quelch, "what of the boy? I certainly, as a Form-master, could never advise a boy to undertake so dangerous a task. The boy's parents would have to be consulted, and they would undoubtedly refuse their permission. My dear Sir Peter, have you not overlooked what really are insuperable difficulties in your very natural anxiety to secure the safety of your ward?"

"Possibly, possibly!" said the old baronet. "I desired to discuss the matter with you, Quelch, and should be glad if you could help me. If no Greyfriars boy is available, I must seek elsewhere. But of the plan itself, what is your opinion?"

"No doubt an excellent one, Sir Peter—if a boy can be found to play the part required of him. But I doubt very much whether such a boy can be found."

Sir Peter smiled faintly.

"Not in your Form here, at all events, I take it?" he asked.

"I am bound to say no," said Mr. Quelch. "I could not possibly advise you—"

"I shall seek elsewhere," said Sir Peter, rising from his chair. "I had hoped that you might be able to assist me, Quelch, in carrying out this plan. It appears that you cannot—"

"I regret it very much, Sir Peter—very much indeed. But really—really, I—"

"Then let us say no more about it," said Sir Peter Lanchester. "I must not trespass further on your time, my dear Quelch. If I may see the boy Bunter before I leave—"

"I will send for him at once."

Happily unaware that the boy Bunter was parked in the cupboard, only a few feet away, Mr. Quelch rang, and sent Trotter to fetch the boy Bunter.

Gladly enough would the boy Bunter have shown up, to receive the handsome tip intended for him by the old baronet.

But the boy Bunter, although blessed by Nature with an uncommon allowance of "neck," had not neck enough to emerge from the study cupboard under the eyes of Sir Peter and Mr. Quelch.

The boy Bunter had to remain where he was, while Trotter returned with the information that the boy Bunter was not to be found.

Sir Peter Lanchester, to his regret, had to go back to his car without having seen the boy Bunter—though he did not regret it half so much as the boy Bunter himself.

"Upon my word!" said Mr. Quelch aloud when the old baronet was gone. "Upon my word. What a very extraordinary idea—very extraordinary indeed! Upon my word! Most extraordinary!"

It was evident that Sir Peter's idea was a good deal too extraordinary for the Remove master of Greyfriars to have any hand in it.

Sir Peter had been gone some little time when the bell rang for afternoon class, then Mr. Quelch headed for the Form-room.

And then, at long last, Billy Bunter was able to emerge from his parking-place and scuttle out of the study—to receive fifty lines for being late in Form!

Mr. Quelch supposed that Bunter had been out of gates as Trotter had not been able to find him. Billy Bunter was more than content to let Mr. Quelch suppose so.

What would have happened to Bunter had the Remove master learned where he had spent the last half-hour would hardly bear thinking of.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Gammon!

"ABOUT Christmas—"

"Shut up!" roared five fellows.

"I was going to say—"

"Don't!"

"That I might ask you—"

"Ring off!"

"To come with me—"

"Eh?"

"To Reynham Castle—"

"What?"

"For Christmas with Sir Peter Lanchester—"

"Oh crikey!"

"Some place, I can tell you! Terrific old castle in Sussex; Norman keep and all that!" said Billy Bunter, blinking at the astonished five. "Dozens of menials, cars and things—everything of the best. Like to come if I can fix it for you?"

The Famous Five gazed at Bunter.

Tall tales from Bunter, of course, they were used to. They had heard all about Bunter Court—and had seen Bunter Villa. They had heard all about his titled relations—but had not seen them. They had heard about deeds of daring

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that Bunter had performed, such as terrific scraps with bargees in the holidays—but they had never seen him engaged in any terrific scraps with bargees in term-time. They had heard of the Bunter wealth—but had seen none of it at Greyfriars.

So they did not, naturally, expect anything in the nature of truth from Bunter.

Truth and Bunter had long been strangers, and were never expected to strike up an acquaintance by anyone who knew Bunter.

Still, even Bunter ought to have had a limit. The Famous Five felt that. And this, they could not help thinking, was a little over the edge.

"I daresay you saw the old bean who came to see Quelch yesterday," went on Bunter. "That was Sir Peter Lanchester, the old sportsman whose life I saved twice on Wednesday."

"Only twice!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Haven't you saved it again since?"

"Eh? No! He hasn't been in danger since, that I know of," said Bunter.

"Then you're not making a habit of it?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Did he ask you for Christmas while he was here yesterday?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Not exactly—"

"I rather thought not."

"But the fact is—" continued Bunter.

"Oh, let's hear the fact!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We've never heard a fact from you before, old fat man!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"The factfulness will probably not be preposterous," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"What I mean is I've been thinking a good bit since the old bean was here yesterday," said Bunter, "and I think I shall very likely be at Reynham Castle for Christmas. I mean, I've got pluck."

"You have?" exclaimed Bob. "Where do you pack it?"

"And why don't you ever use it?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Yah! It wants pluck—but I've got lots of that!" said Bunter. "It wants nerve—but I've got lots of nerve!"

"You must have, to spin a yarn like this," agreed Bob. "Never heard of a fellow with such a nerve."

"I don't mean that you fathead! I mean, I've got tons of pluck and nerve; and as for danger, I rather like it."

"Oh crumbs!"

"I'm jolly well going to chance it!" declared Bunter. "I fancy I can fix it all right with the old bean. After all, I'm the chap to face danger."

"When there isn't any," agreed Harry Wharton. "But is it dangerous to spend Christmas with that old bean who called on Quelch yesterday? Does he bite?"

"But I should like to have a few pals with me, all the same," went on Billy Bunter, unheeding. "It would be safer. Look here, you fellows, you don't seem to be settled about the hols. If I go to Reynham Castle, would you like to come?"

"If!" chortled Bob.

"The if-fulness is terrific."

"You fat ass!" roared Johnny Bull. "What are you burbling about? You don't even know that old bean who called on Quelch!"

"I saved his life—"

"Gammon!"

"Twice—"

"Fathead!"

"And I'm the man he wants. According to what he said to Quelch—"

"How on earth do you know what he

said to Quelch?" exclaimed Frank Nugent.

"Oh! Ah! Oh! I—I mean—" stammered Bunter.

"You fat villain!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Have you been doing key-hole stunts in Masters' Passage, like you do in the Remove?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"It's all gammon from beginning to end!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, is it?" yapped Bunter. "Well, look here, I'm going to drop Sir Peter a line—about Christmas. I fancy it will be all right. Now, suppose I fix it to spend Christmas at Reynham Castle, and take a few friends with me, will you fellows come? Mind, I'm not afraid—"

"What is there to be afraid of—except the butler's boot—if you butted in?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be an ass! I'm not afraid. Still, it would be safer with a few pals round me. Now—yes or no?" snapped Bunter. "If I fix up Christmas at Reynham Castle, with Sir Peter Lanchester, will you fellows come?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Oh, certainly!" he answered. "We'll come—if you land yourself at Reynham Castle!"

"Quite!" grinned Nugent.

"Is there such a place as Reynham Castle?" asked Bob.

"Yes, you fathead—in Sussex."

"Not in dreamland?"

"You silly ass—" roared Bunter. "It's a magnificent establishment—just like Bunter Court, in fact."

"I fancy it's rather like Bunter Court!" chortled Bob. "Every attraction, except one—it doesn't happen to exist!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you'll jolly well see!" snorted Bunter. "It's settled, then, you fellows come with me for Christmas to Reynham Castle, if I fix it up."

"Ha, ha! Yes, certainly!"

"That's all right, then!" said Bunter. "Lend me a stamp, will you? I've got to write to Sir Peter."

"Oh, my only hat!" roared Johnny Bull. "Have you spun this yarn simply to get a three-ha penny stamp?"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Dash it all, the yarn was worth three-ha'pence!" chuckled Bob. "Here you are, Bunty, here's a stamp. Now own up that it's all gammon."

"Yah!"

Bunter took the stamp and rolled away to his study.

Harry Wharton & Co. gazed after him in wonder.

"I suppose," said Harry thoughtfully, "that there can't, by any chance, be a word of truth in it?"

"Hardly!" grinned Bob.

"Truth—from Bunter!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Dreaming?"

Really, it did not seem probable to the Famous Five. So far from believing that Bunter was going to land himself at a magnificent castle for Christmas, they did not believe in the castle—except as a castle in the air! In which circumstances, it seemed quite safe to agree to accompany Bunter to that castle—if he went.

But, as the novelists say, they little knew!

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Tries It On!

"TODDY, old chap—"

Peter Todd, in Study No. 7, held up a warning hand.

Billy Bunter, sitting at the study table, with a pen in his fat paw

and a thoughtful wrinkle in his fat brow, blinked at him.

"Nothing about Christmas!" warned Toddy.

Bunter gave a contemptuous snort.

"If you fancy I'd put in Christmas in Bloomsbury, Toddy—" he said, with ineffable scorn.

"I fancy you would!" agreed Toddy.

"And I fancy you won't! If it's not about Christmas, you can run on."

"Beast! How many 'k's' in accident?" asked Bunter.

"Oh crikey!"

"You see, I spell better than you, Toddy—still, I don't want any mistakes

in a letter to a baronet," explained Bunter.

"One of your titled relations?" grinned Toddy.

"Not exactly a relation—old friend of the family!" said Bunter airily.

"I've got to get this letter off by the post, Toddy. I say, how many 'k's' do you put in accident?"

"None, as a rule. A couple of 'c's' are good enough for me."

"Oh, don't be an ass, Toddy! I know there's a 'k,' as well as an 'x,' but I want to know if there's more than one!" said Bunter peevishly.

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled Peter Todd.

"You'll make that baronet jump if he gets 'x's' and 'k's'!"

"Well, how do you spell it?" demanded Bunter.

"A-c-c-i-d-e-n-t!" spelt out Toddy.

Snort, from Bunter. He was not satisfied with that.

"Oh, you can't spell!" he snapped.

"Fat lot of good asking you, Toddy! I say, look it out in the dick for me, will you?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Toddy.

He did not look that word out in the dictionary for Bunter. He walked out of Study No. 7, laughing.

(Continued on next page.)

LEARN TO PLAY FOOTBALL!

OUR INTERNATIONAL COACH

A NARROW SHAVE!

I HAVEN'T told you a fraction of all there is to know about football, of course. If you could do everything I have told you, however, you would all be pretty good footballers by now. Some of you have improved this season. I know that a lot of you have been practising really hard ever since I told you how important practice at football is.

Anyway, you all know enough about it now to make this game of ours really interesting for yourselves. You know how you ought to be controlling and kicking the ball, what you are expected to do in your various positions and which opponents you must each mark. So let's get on and see how well you can remember all these things in an actual game.

We had reached the stage where the ball had been kicked off, and had been passed to our outside-right. It failed to reach him, because a player on the other side was doing his marking job properly, and nipped in to get the ball. Well, he has it now. He passes it to his outside-left, who runs on a bit, and then kicks it into the middle where two of his pals are waiting for it. It has gone to the centre-forward. He's shooting—lucky for us, he shot over the bar.

Let's stop the game for a moment and think about that narrow shave we had. Why was the ball allowed to get to the centre-forward of the other side without one of our players touching it? I'm afraid the answer is that we weren't marking our men as we should have been. It was a good pass which the left-half gave to his outside-left, I know, but our right-back was supposed to be marking the outside-left. If he had been in the right place, the winger wouldn't have been allowed to put the ball across so accurately that it fell right at the feet of his centre-forward.

And where was our centre-half? He was supposed to be marking the centre-forward of the other side, yet he left him with plenty of time to take careful aim and shoot. I am not suggesting that both our right-back and our

KEEP IT ON THE CARPET!

Ballooning the ball is a bad fault with a number of footballers—always keep the ball low when passing or shooting at goal!

centre-half should have got the ball before the fellows they were marking. Defenders can't be expected to do that every time. The point is, that if they had been somewhere near, the fellows with the ball would have had to hurry—wouldn't have been given so much time to think about what to do next.

SHOOT LOW!

THE second lesson of this incident concerns the "over the bar" shot by the centre-forward. Why did he do that? Simply because he did not remember the rule I gave you about keeping the ball low. If he had kicked with his instep, and had got his weight "on top," instead of behind the ball, it wouldn't have gone into the air, but into the goal.

As a general instruction for shooting—always tend to keep the ball low rather than high. It is much easier for a goalkeeper to jump up to a ball than it is for him to bend down to it. Watch a first-class player taking a penalty kick. The successful ones are the fellows who make the ball just skim the ground.

The best penalty-kicker I ever saw was Jacky Mordue, who used to play for Sunderland. In one season I think he scored fifteen goals from the penalty spot. The only one I ever saw him miss was when the opposing goalkeeper was a very small fellow. Mordue's secret of success was that he always kept the ball low. This little goalkeeper was able to get down to the low shot, and he saved miraculously. I shall have more to say about penalty-kicks later on. But what applies to them, applies to all shooting—keep the ball low.

GOAL-KICKS!

I HOPE the centre-forward who fired over the top when he had a chance to score will have learned his lesson. Now the goal-kick is being taken. Have a look at the plan of the field in your rule-book, and you will notice what is called the goal-area marked in front of the goal. For the goal-kick the ball must be placed in the goal-area. It is usually put on the corner, on the side of the goal where the ball went out of play. When the opposing centre-forward shot over the bar, the ball went rather more to the right than to the left. So the goalkeeper places the ball in that portion of the goal-area.

Two years ago it would have been permissible for a full-back to tap the ball to the goalkeeper, who could then pick it up and kick it down the field. You must have seen goalkeepers doing that when they have been taking goal-kicks. That isn't allowed now, however. A new rule says that the goalkeeper must kick the ball direct into play—must not have it tapped to him by a full-back, or pick it up in any other way. Some goalkeepers found the new way a bit hard at first. In fact, several of them, even in first-class football, couldn't kick the ball very well off the ground, so the full-back had to do it. That is allowed by the rules, but it is really the goalkeeper's job, so he should learn to take the goal-kicks.

When I say learn, I mean it, because taking goal-kicks is an art in itself. It is not just a question of kicking the ball hard. Attacks can be started by accurately placing goal-kicks. I remember a game not long ago when Ted Sagar, Everton's goalkeeper, took a goal-kick which brought a goal for his side. The wind was behind him, and so hard and straight did he kick the ball, that it went straight to one of his own forwards, who gathered it and scored without another player touching the ball. That just shows you that taking goal-kicks is all a part of football. Try, goalkeepers, to place your kicks, thus playing your part in helping your forwards.

Bunter snorted, and resumed letter-writing. He wanted to be rather particular with that letter, as it was going to a baronet, who lived in a castle. He was too lazy, however, to look out the word in the dick for himself; but, after a little reflection, he decided on one 'k.' He knew there was an 'x.'

Bunter was giving that letter a lot of thought. It was—he hoped, at least—going to settle the rather urgent problem of landing him somewhere for the Christmas holidays—a problem that was growing more and more urgent as breaking-up day drew nearer.

The Peeping Tom of Greyfriars had played the eavesdropper, in Mr. Quelch's study the day before, from sheer inquisitiveness. But since then Bunter's powerful brain had been at work.

What he had heard had astonished him. It had astonished Quelch, in the study, and Bunter, in the study cupboard.

It was not surprising that Mr. Quelch had failed to play up. There was no doubt that old Sir Peter, in his keen and dutiful anxiety to secure his ward from unknown, mysterious, and dangerous enemies, had rather omitted to consider what might happen to the boy who was to take the young lord's name and place—if the plan was carried out.

Certainly, Mr. Quelch, as a school-master, could not possibly have had a hand in placing any boy in such a dangerous position.

Sir Peter's visit to Greyfriars had, in fact, drawn blank, so far as Sir Peter was concerned; but it had not drawn blank, so far as Bunter was concerned. Bunter was "on" this!

It was one of Billy Bunter's little ways to feel a lofty and scornful disregard of danger—so long as danger was not in the offing. Distant dangers had no terrors for Bunter.

What Bunter thought of, chiefly, was that the fellow who played the part of Lord Reynham would pass the Christmas holidays at a magnificent castle, surrounded by all that wealth could buy, my-lorded by a host of servants, and feeding on the fat of the land.

That was a very attractive prospect to Bunter.

It was worth a spot of danger.

Certainly, had the danger been on the spot, Bunter would have jibbed at it. At close quarters Bunter disliked danger extremely.

But it was distant; and besides, the fat Owl immediately thought of the idea of taking a party of fellows with him who would rally round him and keep him safe. The Famous Five were exactly the fellows to deal with danger if it happened along. Bunter would be quite prepared to let them deal with it. They could, in fact, have it all to themselves!

The danger being remote, Bunter thought less of it than of stately halls, liveried funkeys, turkeys, and Christmas puddings.

Plenty of fellows, with a good deal more courage than Bunter, might have hesitated to take on a part to play which exposed them to the attacks of a gang of kidnapping crooks. Bunter was, in fact, exemplifying the truth of the ancient proverb that fools rush in where angels fear to tread!

Bunter was going to rush in, anyhow—if he could!

He thought he had quite a good chance. He had already made a very good impression on old Sir Peter. Had he not tackled a man with a gun in his hand, on the train from Redclyffe? True, he had known that the gun was unloaded—but Sir Peter was not aware of that circumstance. Bunter had impressed the old baronet as a very plucky fellow.

For the rest, he was a Greyfriars fellow—and Sir Peter preferred a Greyfriars fellow, if available. And he would, of course, prefer a fine, up-standing, handsome sort of fellow, with an air of native nobility—a fellow like Bunter. Bunter was sure of that. So he was feeling fairly confident as he indited that epistle to Sir Peter.

"Dear Sir Peter,—Owing to an akcident, I happened to heer what you said to my Form-master on Thersday."

Bunter paused a little. He had to account for his knowledge of what Sir Peter required. But he realised that he could not tell Sir Peter that he had deliberately played the eavesdropper.

He was aware that other people's views on the subject rather differed from his own.

But he was not long at a loss. Fibbing was Bunter's perpetual resource in moments of difficulty. It required only a short pause for Bunter to think of a fib that would serve his turn.

He gnawed the handle of his pen for a few thoughtful moments, and then grinned and resumed.

"Sum fellows lokked me up in the cubbord in Quelch's studdy for a praktical joak. Of corse, I coodn't let Quelch find me there, or it wood have got them into a row."

Bunter thought this rather good! It showed what a loyal fellow he was, will-

ing to stand anything, rather than land his thoughtless schoolfellows in a row!

"Owing to this, I herd what you said to Quelch, much against my will. I hoap you will excuse me, in the cirkumstances."

Of course, you may rely on me not to say a single word about it. I shoood not think of breething a sillable.

I am riting to say that I think I am the man you want. I am perfektly willing to do what is rekired, and if there is anny danger, I shall enjoy it. I think you must have notised that I have plenty of pluck, and I certanely cannot remember ever having bean afrade of anything.

If you wood like me to do it, I am kwite at your service. A lot of fellows here want me to go hoam with them for the hols, but I am kwite ankshus to be of service to you.

Yours truly,

W. G. BUNTER."

Billy read that letter over twice and was satisfied with it. Then he enclosed it in an envelope, addressed it to Sir Peter Lanchester, Bart, at Reynham Castle, Sussex, and stuck on Bob Cherry's stamp.

With the letter in his hand, he rolled down to the quad.

A crowd of Remove fellows were punting a footer, after class, the Famous Five among them. As Bunter emerged from the House with the letter in his hand, Bob Cherry's eye fell on him, and he cut across.

"Done it?" he grinned.

"Eh? Yes!"

"Written to the jolly old Baronet?"

"Yes: I'm just posting the letter."

"I don't think!" chuckled Bob.

Bunter blinked at him and held up the letter.

"Look!" he jeered.

"Oh, my hat!" ejaculated Bob, as he looked. There was no doubt that that letter in Bunter's fat hand was addressed to Sir Peter Lanchester, Bart, Reynham Castle, Sussex.

Bob blinked at it.

"Going to post it?" he asked.

"You silly ass!" hooted Bunter. "Think I've written it just to stuff you?"

"Sort of!" admitted Bob.

"Well, come along to the letter-box and see!" snorted Bunter.

Bob, grinning, accompanied the fat Owl to the letter-box in the school wall. To his surprise, Bunter slipped the letter in at the slot, and it dropped into the box.

"Well, what do you think now?" yapped Bunter.

"Blessed if I know what to think!" gasped Bob. "It's almost enough to make a fellow think that you've been telling the truth, old fat man. In fact, I should think so, if it wasn't impossible."

"Yah!" retorted Bunter.

And he rolled back to the House—and Bob, quite puzzled, rejoined the fellows who were punting the ball.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Is Wanted!

BUZZZZ!

Mr. Quelch had retired to his study, after lunch the following day, for a little rest. He had settled down in his armchair, his feet on the fender, and an entrancing volume of Sophocles in his hands, when the telephone-bell rang.

The Remove master was far from

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wishing to be disturbed at that moment. But it is, of course, always at such moments that telephone-bells ring.

He laid down Sophocles and took up the receiver.

"Mr. Quelch?" came a voice over the wires; and the Remove master, who had been about to bark into the transmitter, checked that bark, as he recognised the voice of Sir Peter Lanchester.

"Speaking, Sir Peter!" he answered amicably.

"I am sorry to disturb you, Quelch—"

"Not at all!"

"But in reference to my conversation with you a couple of days ago—"

"I am afraid, Sir Peter, that I can have nothing to add to what I said at the time. I could certainly not recommend—"

"I have received an offer—"

"Oh!"

"From a Greyfriars boy—"

"What?"

"That very plucky lad, Bunter, who was of such service to me on Wednesday," said Sir Peter. "I received a letter from him this morning."

"Upon my word!"

"Owing to—to certain circumstances into which, perhaps, I need not enter, Bunter is acquainted with what I require!" said Sir Peter. "Very pluckily, he offers to play the part which I discussed with you, Quelch."

"Really, Sir Peter—" gasped Quelch.

"Before accepting this brave and generous lad's offer, I feel bound to ask your permission, as his Form-master. You have no objections, Quelch?"

"I—I—I'm quite astonished!" gasped Mr. Quelch. "Are you sure that Bunter is acquainted with the full circumstances of the case?"

"Yes, there is no doubt about that."

"And he has offered to play a part which may involve him in serious peril?"

"Precisely."

"Extraordinary!" said Mr. Quelch.

"I see nothing extraordinary in it, Mr. Quelch—a lad of courageous character like Bunter—"

"He has certainly never impressed me as a lad of courageous character!" said Mr. Quelch dryly. "Quite the reverse, I should have said."

"That is hardly in keeping with his act in tackling a man armed with a deadly weapon, Quelch, which he certainly did."

"Oh, quite! But—"

"Needless to say, I shall close with this offer from Bunter, eagerly, if you have no objection, Quelch!"

"It is not for me to object, if the boy understands what he is facing, and is willing to face it," said the Remove master. "But the consent of his father must be obtained."

"Naturally. I shall require Bunter to obtain his father's consent, as a matter of course. For the rest, you have no objection to make?"

"None!" said Mr. Quelch.

"Very good then. Subject to Mr. Bunter's consent, I shall accept the offer made by the boy. I must see him, to make arrangements. I have little doubt that I shall be watched, and, in the circumstances, I desire Bunter to be seen in my company, by any eyes that may be watching—you understand why. I think, therefore, of driving to Courtfield: and perhaps Bunter could come there—I believe it is a half-holiday to-day at the school—"

"That is the case."

"Bunter, perhaps, might like to come to tea with me, at the Hotel Royal, in Courtfield—"

"I have no doubt of it."

"Will you, then, tell him that I shall expect him at the Hotel Royal, at four o'clock, and over tea we shall have a discussion."

"Very good, Sir Peter."

Mr. Quelch sat blinking at the telephone for a whole minute after the baronet had rung off.

Sir Peter's extraordinary scheme for securing the safety of his ward had surprised him. But he was still more surprised now.

There was no doubt that the fellow who played the part of the young lord, at Reynham Castle, would be playing a dangerous game. A fellow like Harry Wharton, or Bob Cherry, might have been prepared to take the risks. But it was very surprising to hear that Bunter was prepared to take them.

Mr. Quelch was pretty well acquainted with all the fellows in his Form, and he had certainly never attributed any heroic qualities to the fattest member thereof.

He stepped to his study window, and glanced out into the frosty quad. Most of the fellows were out of the House after dinner, and among them the fat figure of Billy Bunter was visible.

Bunter was talking to the Famous Five. The five were grinning. As Mr. Quelch opened his window, Bob Cherry's face floated to his ears:

"Gammon!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—" squeaked Bunter.

"Spoof!" said Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Bunter!" called Mr. Quelch.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, spinning round like a fat top towards his Form-master's study window. "Oh crikey! Yes, sir!"

"Come to my study at once, Bunter!"

"Oh lor'! It—it wasn't me, sir!" stammered Bunter. That summons to his Form-master's study seemed to alarm the fat Owl. "I—I say, sir, I—I wasn't there at the time!"

"What?"

"I wasn't, really!" gasped Bunter. "I never went down to the pantry in break, sir. I—I don't know my way there. If the cook—"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "You have been in the pantry again, Bunter?"

"Oh, no, sir! It wasn't me. If—if there's a pie gone, sir, I don't know anything about it. I—I think it was the cat, sir—"

"Come to my study at once, Bunter!" thundered Mr. Quelch, and he closed the window with a bang.

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter. "I—I—I say, you fellows, do you think Quelch knows anything about that pie?"

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

"Beasts!"

Billy Bunter rolled into the House, in a very apprehensive frame of mind.

He had no doubt that he was going to be suspected of having had that pie. People always did seem to suspect Bunter of such things, somehow. It was fearfully unjust, of course. Bunter could not help feeling how frightfully unjust it was. His only consolation was that the pie, like the dear dead days in the old song, was gone beyond recall.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise for Skinner!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry. "Enjoying life?"

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter. "What-ho!"

Bob was surprised.

Having seen Billy Bunter called into Quelch's study, he had naturally expected to behold signs of woe and tribulation next time he saw the fat Owl.

Instead of which Bunter was beaming.

The happy grin on Bunter's fat face extended almost from one fat ear to the other. If ever a fellow looked as if he were enjoying life, William George Bunter did.

The Famous Five were going over to Highcliffe that afternoon to say good-bye to their friends, Courtenay and the Caterpillar, before break-up for Christmas. But at the sight of Bunter's beaming face in the quad they stopped, quite interested to know the cause.

Fellows did not always look so merry and bright, after being called into Quelch's study.

"Not licked?" asked Harry Wharton.

"No fear! It wasn't about the pie, you know," said Bunter. "Quelch never mentioned the pie. I've had some rather good news."

"Don't say your postal order's come?" ejaculated Bob.

"Better than that," grinned Bunter. "I rather fancy I shall have a tip of a fiver this afternoon."

"What a fertile fancy," remarked Nugent.

"Well, I mean to say, the old bean was going to tip me a fiver the other day," argued Bunter. "So why shouldn't he to-day—what?"

"What old bean?" asked Harry.

"Oh, really, Wharton, I've told you all about Sir Peter Lanchester—"

"Are you still keeping that up?" asked Johnny Bull. "Why not put on a fresh record? Tell us about your uncle, the marquis, for a change."

"Eh? I don't know any marquises, fathead!"

"I know you don't. But you know exactly as many marquises as baronets."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, you'll jolly well see!" snorted Bunter. "Guess what Quelch wanted? It was a message from Sir Peter. I'm going to tea with him this afternoon."

"Bit of a walk to Sussex, isn't it?"

"He's going to be in Courtfield this afternoon. I'm teeing with him at the Hotel Royal," said Bunter loftily. "I'd take you fellows, only—only—"

"Only you're not going?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Only I have to be a bit particular whom I take to a swanky place like the Hotel Royal," said Bunter calmly.

"Why, you cheeky porpoise—"

"And we've got some rather private matters to discuss, too," said Bunter. "I say, you fellows, it's settled about Christmas. I shall be at Reynham Castle."

"If any—" murmured Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'm going to take you fellows," said Bunter. "That's arranged, isn't it? I shall expect you to behave yourselves, put on your best manners—such as they are, you know."

"Oh crumbs!"

"I mean, I want you to do me credit," explained Bunter. "Don't let me down before a lot of liveried servants, and all that. When we're at

Reynham Castle, you'd better keep your eyes on me, and do exactly as I do."

"When?" gasped Bob.

"The whenfulness is terrific!"

"As I'm standing you a first-class Christmas holiday at a magnificent castle with my titled friends, I suppose you'll lend me my taxi fare to Courtfield this afternoon?" asked Bunter.

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

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" hooted Bunter. "What are you sniggering at, you silly asses?"

"Taxi fare to Courtfield is five bob," chuckled Bob Cherry. "Anybody going to stand five bob for a holiday with Bunter's titled friends, at a castle in the air?"

"Hardly," grinned Nugent. "Dear at the price."

"But what do you want to go to Courtfield for, fathead?" asked Harry Wharton.

"I've told you that I'm going to tea with a baronet."

"Yes, I know. But what are you going for, all the same?"

"Beast!"

The Famous Five walked out of gates, laughing. Why Bunter was looking so bucked, they did not know. But they did not believe in his baronet, his tea at the Hotel Royal, or his castle in Sussex. They did not, in fact, believe a word of the whole story.

Billy Bunter snorted. Really, it was rather hard not to be believed when he was, for once in a way, telling the truth. Still, that was so unusual and unexpected, that the Remove fellows could not be expected to guess it.

A fellow who was going to tea with a wealthy baronet at a swanky hotel, naturally preferred to arrive there in a taxi, instead of foot-slogging across a muddy common. But Bunter, as usual, was short of cash.

"I say, Smithy!" He spotted the Bounder, and ran him down. "I say, old chap, will you lend me—"

"No!"

"Five bob—"

"No!"

"Only till I get back from Courtfield?" urged Bunter. "Only a couple of hours, Smithy?"

"Not a couple of years?" asked the Bounder sarcastically. "Not a couple of centuries?"

"You ass!" howled Bunter. "I say, I'm going to tea with Sir Peter Lanchester—that old bean who came to see Quelch the other day, you know. I'm spending Christmas with him at a castle in Sussex. I'd ask you, Smithy, only it would hardly do, would it?"

"What?"

"I mean, at a place like Reynham Castle, I have to be a bit particular," explained Bunter. "You're a bit too loud, I'm afraid. Otherwise, I'd really ask you there, Smithy—I would, really. You'll lend me five bob, won't you?"

Herbert Vernon-Smith looked fixedly at Billy Bunter for a moment. Then he took him by the neck, twirled him round, and planted a boot on him.

"Yarrah!" roared Bunter. "Ow! Beast! Wharrer you kicking me for, you rotter? Wow!"

The Bounder's foot was rising again; and Bunter rolled away hastily. Why Smithy had kicked him, Bunter did not know; but he could see that Smithy wasn't going to lend him the five bob, anyhow.

Up and down and round about Billy Bunter rolled for the next half hour, in quest of that taxi fare. He did not

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succeed in raising it. But Skinner had a suggestion to make.

"Why not leave it to the jolly old baronet?" he asked, with a wink at three or four grinning fellows. "Mention to him that you've left all your banknotes on the grand piano in your study."

Skinner & Co. did not believe, any more than the Famous Five, in the baronet from Sussex, or the tea at the Hotel Royal. They only believed that the fat Owl was spinning a steeper yarn than usual, to raise the wind for jam tarts at the tuckshop. So Skinner was surprised by the thoughtful expression that came over Bunter's fat face.

"Oh, good!" exclaimed Bunter. "Of course, I can do that. After all, as he's asked me to tea, he can pay the taxi. Why not?"

And Bunter rolled into the House, to request permission to use a telephone to call up a taxi.

Skinner & Co. stared after him.

"Does that silly fat ass think we believe a word of it?" grunted Bolsover major.

"Blessed if I make him out!" said Skinner, in wonder.

Bunter came out into the quad again, ten minutes later, in coat and hat. He looked rather unusually well-dressed—which was accounted for by the fact that the coat belonged to Harry Wharton and the hat to Lord Mauleverer. Bunter felt that he ought to dress a little carefully, on an occasion like this.

He rolled cheerfully down to the gates, and Skinner walked after him.

At the gates, Bunter blinked up the road towards Courtfield.

"Waiting for your taxi?" asked Skinner sarcastically.

"Eh? Yes!"

"Keep it up!" grinned Skinner.

Bunter disdained to answer.

He waited—and Skinner waited. A taxi came whizzing from the direction of the town. It stopped at the school gates.

Skinner stared at it. Bunter clambered into it.

"Hotel Royal, Courtfield!" he said to the driver, with a vaunting blink at Harold Skinner.

"Yes, sir!"

The taxi cut away up the road, with Bunter sitting inside.

Skinner stared after it quite blankly, for a moment.

"Gammon!" he said, aloud. "Pure gammon! He's said that for me to hear—I'll bet he tells the driver something different, farther on." Skinner grinned. He had no doubt that he had it right!

"By gum, I'll jolly well get after him, on my bike, and spot him—ha, ha!"

Skinner rushed for his bike.

It seemed to Skinner no end of a joke, to bowl Bunter out, and to be able to reveal exactly what Bunter had done, that afternoon when he came back telling the tale about gorgeous teas with wealthy baronets at swanky hotels!

He grinned as he shot away on the bike up the Courtfield road.

He sighted the taxi again on the road over the common. He kept it in sight. To his astonishment, it stopped at the Hotel Royal—the most expensive place in Courtfield.

Skinner dismounted on the other side of the street, and stared across.

Bunter got out of the taxi.

He rolled up the steps into the hotel entrance.

An aristocratic-looking old gentleman with silvery hair met him there, and shook hands with him. Skinner recognised Mr. Quelch's visitor of a day or two ago. He simply stared.

Bunter disappeared into the entrance,

with the old baronet. Skinner, rooted to the opposite pavement, could only stare.

A minute or so later, a gold-laced commissionaire came out, and stopped to the waiting taxi. The latter then drove away. Evidently, the taxi-fare had been sent out.

Skinner blinked.

"My only summer hat!" he murmured. "My only single, solitary, sainted aunt! It's true! Great pip!"

Skinner felt quite dazed, as he got on his bike to ride back to Greyfriars.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Lost!

"HAD a good time?"

"How's the jolly old baronet?"

"Did he tip you that fiver?"

"Did he make it a tenner?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a ripple of merriment in the Rag, as Billy Bunter rolled into that apartment, after tea. Most of the Remove were there: and most of them seemed quite interested in Billy Bunter.

Skinner and Bolsover major, who were whispering together, did not join in the merriment. They looked curiously at Billy Bunter. But everybody else appeared to be amused. The fat Owl's antics, for the last few days, had caused quite a lot of merriment in his Form.

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Bunter.

"Had a good spread with jolly old Sir Peter?" chortled Bob Cherry.

"Ripping!" declared Bunter. "They do you jolly well at the Hotel Royal—if you can pay, of course. Frightfully expensive place. Of course that's nothing to my friend Sir Peter."

"And where have you been this afternoon?" asked the Bounder.

"Eh? Don't I keep on telling you that I've been teeing with my friend Sir Peter, at the Hotel Royal?" yapped Bunter.

"Saved his life again?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Eh? No!"

"Why not?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" hooted Bunter. "How could I save his life, if it wasn't in danger?"

"Well, you jolly well couldn't if it was in danger!" chuckled Bob.

"But I did—twice!" yelled Bunter.

"Still twice!" exclaimed Bob. "But it's days since you saved it twice, Bunter! Hasn't it grown since then?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you fellows cackle at everything I say, I jolly well shan't take you to Reynham Castle for Christmas!" roared Bunter, wrathfully. "Then you'll jolly well miss the time of your lives."

"The missfulness will be truly terrific!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But did he tip you that fiver?" chuckled Vernon-Smith. "Wasn't there going to be a fiver? Did he forget it?"

"No, he didn't! I've got it here!"

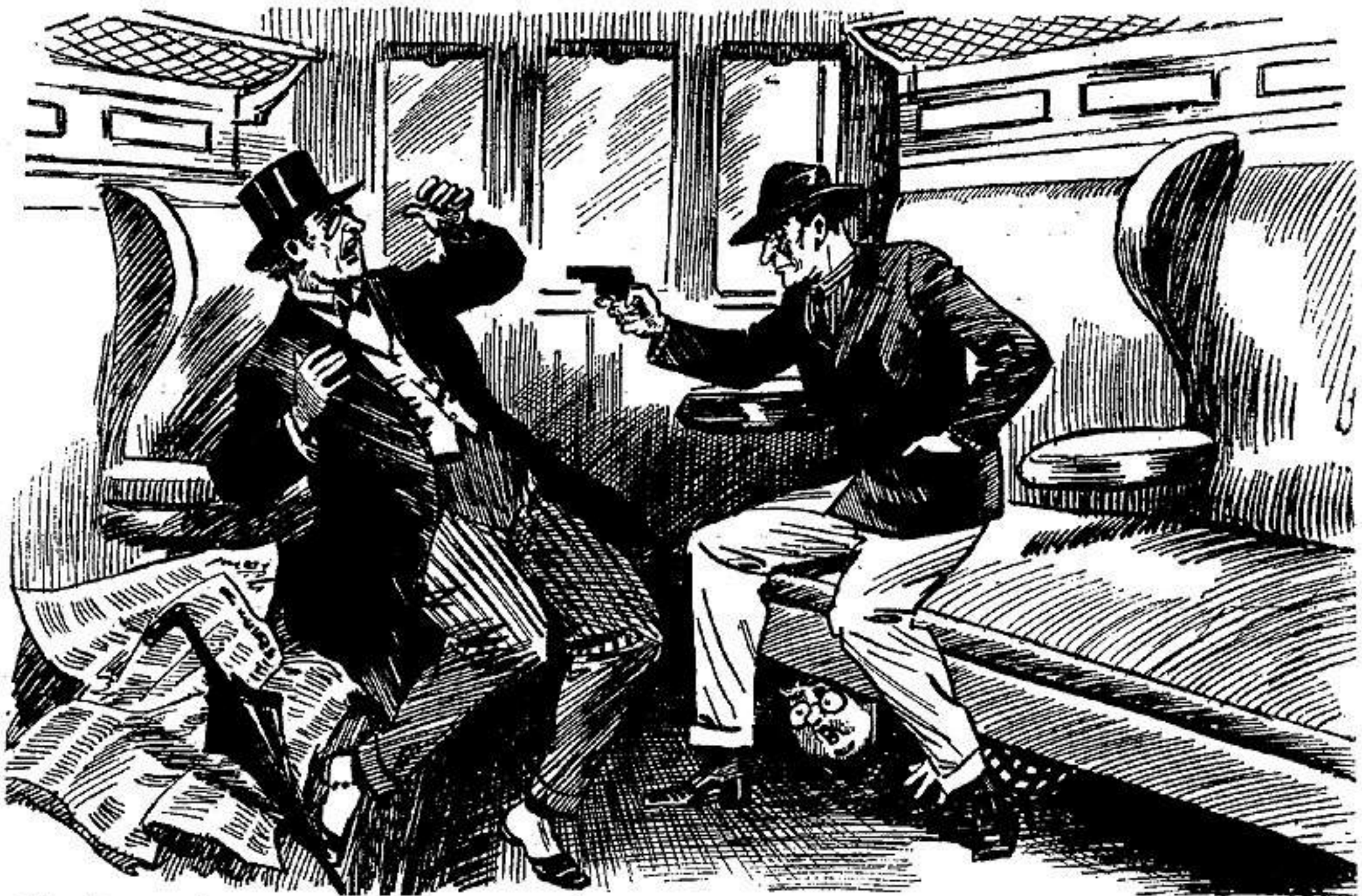
"Wha-a-t?"

"Seeing is believing!" sneered Bunter.

"The old sportsman was going to tip me a fiver, the day he came here for saving his life, only—only I wasn't on the spot. I rather thought he'd remember it to-day. And he jolly well did."

"The seefulness is the esteemed believefulness!" said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Let us feast our absurd eyes on the fiver."

"Well, I've got it here in my pocket!" said Bunter. "Perhaps you'll believe it when you see it."



"Don't move!" said the bandit, knocking Sir Peter Lanchester's paper aside and levelling an automatic. "I shall shoot if you stir a finger!" Hidden underneath the carriage seat, Billy Bunter watched spellbound.

"The perhapsfulness is—"

"Preposterous!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Trot it out!" said Hazeldene.

"What's the betting that he'll suddenly remember he's left it in his study, you fellows?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked round indignantly through his big spectacles. He slid his fat hand into his jacket pocket.

It was an actual fact, that Sir Peter had remembered that "tip." Billy Bunter had rolled out of the Hotel Royal, in Courtfield, with a five-pound note parked in his pocket. Now he was going to produce it, to overwhelm all these doubting Thomases.

He groped in the pocket.

The juniors watched him, with great entertainment. Not believing a word of the whole affair, from beginning to end, they certainly did not expect Bunter to produce a five-pound note!

They were prepared for him to keep up the game to the very last moment—to pretend to be about to produce a fiver, and then to remember, suddenly, that he had left it somewhere else, or discover that he had lost it. They were prepared for anything except the actual sight of an actual fiver.

Bunter groped.

A startled and dismayed expression came over his face. Apparently his groping fat paw failed to clutch a fiver in that pocket.

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter.

"Left it somewhere?" chortled Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Nunno! I—I put it in this pocket all right! But—"

"Ah!" said Bob, "There's a 'but'. I was sort of afraid there would be a 'but'."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I say, you fellows, I—I've lost it!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared all the Rag.

Billy Bunter drew out the lining of

his pocket. There was a hole in that lining. Bunter often had holes in his pockets—but seldom anything of any great value to lose therefrom. The fiver was gone!

"Oh lor!" gasped Bunter, "I—I say, you fellows, it—it's lost! I—I must have dropped it somewhere, through this hole in the lining—"

"Doesn't he do it well?" gasped Toddy. "Wouldn't anybody almost believe that he'd really had a fiver?"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, I never knew there was a hole in that lining when I put the fiver in that pocket!" groaned Bunter. "Now it's lost!"

"You're not much the poorer!" grinned Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"You fat ass!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Own up that you've been spoofing all the time!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Own up, you frabjous, footling freak!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Beast! I say, you fellows, I was going to stand a study supper out of that fiver. Now it's lost. I say, who's going to lend me a quid?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of merriment in the Rag. But there was no offer to lend Bunter a quid. There was no quid for the fat Owl; neither did anybody but William George Bunter believe that there had ever been a fiver.

the Greyfriars fellows were out on "Sunday walks" that fine morning, the last Sunday before breaking-up.

Harry Wharton & Co. had walked over to Cliff House to see Marjorie & Co. for the last time before clearing off for the Christmas holidays. Billy Bunter had something much more important than that to think of.

Bunter believed—if nobody else did—in that fiver. He nourished a hope of seeing it again.

Sir Peter had sent him back in a taxi after tea on Saturday. It was possible that that banknote, which had certainly slipped through the hole in the lining of his jacket pocket somewhere or other, had fallen in the taxi. If so, its recovery was probable.

So as soon as he was free from "divvers" that morning, Billy Bunter started walking to Courtfield. The walk across the common did not attract him, but the chance of recovering the fiver did.

So there was Bunter, rolling by the rather lonely road over the common, and, like Iser in the poem, rolling rapidly.

A car, which had been aimlessly crawling on the road for some time, slowed down behind Bunter, and the driver called to him.

Never had a voice been more welcome.

A walk of two miles was awful. Bunter remembered his walk to Redclyffe, and groaned at the idea. But there was no help for it, if he was to get on the track of that fiver. So the offer of a lift before he was a hundred yards from the school gates came like corn in Egypt, or manna in the desert. The fat junior beamed at the kindly motorist.

"I say, thanks!" he said. "I'm going to Courtfield."

"Right! That's where I'm going. Hop in!"

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THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Man in the Car!

"CARE for a lift, sir?"

"Eh? Yes, rather!" said Billy Bunter promptly.

It was Sunday morning—a bright, frosty December day. Many of

Thankfully Bunter rolled to the door of the car.

There was a man sitting inside who obligingly pushed the door open for Bunter to enter, and shut it again after he was in.

The car, which had hitherto been crawling, shot away at quite a good speed. The driver, of whom Bunter had seen little more than a peaked cap and a large, thick moustache, bent over the wheel, driving hard. The fat junior blinked at the other man in the car.

He was a stranger to Bunter's eyes—so far as Bunter knew, at all events. He had a pointed black beard and twisted moustache, which gave him rather a foreign look. But there was something in the rather slim form and stocky shoulders that seemed a little familiar to Bunter. He had a pair of very keen, hard, cold eyes, which fixed curiously on the fat and fatuous face of the Owl of the Remove.

"A Greyfriars boy—what?" asked the man in the car, with a smile. As Bunter had a Greyfriars cap, it was not hard to guess, if he knew the Greyfriars colours.

"Eh? Yes," said Bunter.

"I think I have seen you before," remarked the man with the pointed beard. "Were you not at the Hotel Royal in Courtfield yesterday?"

Bunter blinked at him.

"Yes. I don't remember seeing you there!" he said.

"I thought I remembered you," smiled the man in the car. "You had tea with Sir Peter Lanchester, I think."

"That's right," agreed Bunter.

"Old friend of yours, no doubt?"

"Oh, quite!" said Bunter.

"I thought so," said the man in the car, with a grimace that made Bunter blink at him. "What is your name?"

Bunter gave him another blink. He thought that rather a cheeky question from a perfect stranger. However, he answered.

"Bunter."

"Bunter?" repeated the man in the car.

"Yes, Bunter."

"You are sure your name is Bunter?" asked the man in the car, with a tone of mockery that made Bunter blink again.

"Eh? Yes, of course!" stuttered Bunter. "I suppose a fellow knows his own name. Wharrer you mean?"

The man laughed.

"Quite!" he agreed. "A fellow knows his own name, but might have excellent reasons for not mentioning it—what?"

Bunter stared at him. It seemed to him that there was a familiar tone in that mocking voice, though he had certainly never seen that face with the pointed black beard before.

"But I've told you my name!" he said. "I've mentioned it, haven't I?"

"Oh, quite! How long have you been named Bunter?" continued the man in the car, in the same tone of mockery.

"Eh?" gasped Bunter. "All my life, of course!"

He began to wonder whether the man in the car was quite right in the head. Certainly his questions were very extraordinary.

"All your life—really?" grinned the black-bearded man.

"Yes, of course!"

"You're more than five years old, I think?"

Bunter jumped.

"Of course I am!" he gasped.

"Wharrer you mean? I—I—I say, I—I think I'd rather walk, after all. Tell the driver to stop, will you?"

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Bunter was quite alarmed now. A man who asked a Remove fellow whether he was more than five years old, could hardly be sane.

But the man in the car certainly did not look like a lunatic. He looked like a man in a grimly sardonic and bantering humour.

"I'll tell you what I mean." He laughed again. "If you're more than five years old, my boy, you haven't been named Bunter all your life. You've been named Bunter rather less than five years. See the point?"

"I—I say, I—I want to get out!" gasped Bunter.

"Probably," assented the man in the car. "But you are not getting out just now, my lord."

Bunter bounded.

The man was mad; that was certain now.

Bunter, it was true, had a secret conviction that he looked like a lord—at least, how a lord ought to look, if he lived up to the best traditions of the nobility. Still, he was not, as a matter of fact, a lord.

A man who stated that he had only been named Bunter for the last five years, and called him "my lord," was a man Bunter wanted to get away from just as fast as he could.

He rose to his feet.

"I—I say, stop the car!" he gasped. "I—I want to get out. I—I say, I—I'd really rather walk—I would really!"

"I have not the slightest doubt of it, my lord! But your lordship is not going to walk. Sit down!"

"I—I—I say——"

"Sit down!" rapped the man in the car, so sharply and savagely that Bunter collapsed on the seat.

He blinked wildly from the window.

Lazy as the fat Owl was, he wished from the bottom of his podgy heart that he had never accepted that lift!

As he blinked out he saw that the car was turning from the main road and taking a lane that led towards the bridge over the river. That car was not, after all, going to Courtfield.

"I say, you're going the wrong way!" gasped Bunter. "I say, that way will take you to the sea!"

"You are not fond of the sea, my lord?"

"Oh, yes! No! I——"

"You would not care for a sea trip?"

"Wha-a-t?"

"I am sorry, my lord, for that is exactly what is in store for you," said the man in the car, "and though my instructions are not to hurt you in any way, if it can be avoided, I warn you that if you give me the slightest trouble I shall shoot you!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

The man slid his hand into the pocket of his coat. He half-drew a revolver from that pocket. He slid it back again at once, but that glimpse was more than enough for Bunter.

He leaned back in his seat in a state of utter terror and bewilderment.

"You young fool!" said the man in the car, in tones of amused contempt. "Do you fancy that I do not know who you are?"

"I—I—I'm Bunter!" stammered the fat Owl helplessly. "Bub-bub-Bunter! If you're taking me for somebody else," he added, as that idea suddenly occurred to him, "I—I can say I—I'm not somebody else! I—I—I'm me, you know!"

"You can bank on it that I am taking you for somebody else, my lord!" grinned the man in the car.

"But I ain't somebody else!" gasped Bunter. "How could I be somebody else? I—I ain't really!"

"You young fool! I knew how the matter stood when the old fool went to Greyfriars the other day—and when you went to meet him in Courtfield yesterday, it was as good as telling me! Do you think that Sir Peter Lanchester was not watched yesterday?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He began to understand at last.

And, as he began to understand, it dawned on him what there was familiar about the man in the car. The black beard and the moustache and the foreign look were disguise that had deceived him—but he knew now. The voice of the man in the car was a voice he had heard before—the voice of the Smiler. It was the man who went by the peculiar name of the Smiler who was kidnapping him.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter again.

"You!"

"Do you know me now?" grinned the Smiler.

"The—the man in the train——" stut-tered Bunter.

"Precisely!" assented the Smiler.

"The man in the train! And the old fool who refused to answer my questions need not tell me anything now—I know all that I want to know! I've got you in my hands now, Lord Reynham!"

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

His Lordship Bunter!

LORD REYNHAM!

That name made it all clear—to Bunter.

That was the part he had to play at the castle in Sussex, if he carried out the compact made with Sir Peter Lanchester.

Bunter had entered on that compact with a light heart, not to mention a light head. Disregarding remote dangers, and thinking only of immediate advantages, the fat Owl had fancied that he was on to a very good thing.

It did not seem quite so good now.

He had not expected the dangers to begin, anyhow, till he arrived at the castle in Sussex. Neither, indeed, did Sir Peter.

They were starting earlier than expected.

Evidently, old Lanchester had been watched in Courtfield, and the crooks had drawn their own conclusions from Bunter's visit there. Already convinced that the young lord was at Greyfriars under an assumed name, the fact that Sir Peter had made a special journey to meet a Greyfriars boy in Courtfield was as good as proof to them.

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter.

He realised now that the man in the car was not a lunatic. He was the leader of the kidnapping gang who had been "after" young Lord Reynham for years; and he believed now that he had got hold of the young nobleman.

Sir Peter had expected and planned to give that impression, when Bunter arrived at the castle under the young lord's name. He had expected to be watched in Courtfield, thus setting the rascals on Bunter's track; giving colour in advance to the game that was to be played at Reynham Castle. Probably, however, he had not expected the kidnappers to get going so promptly.

Certainly, Bunter hadn't. He had not given them a thought.

Now he knew that they had set to work right on the spot. That car had been crawling on the road near the

(Continued on page 26.)

HORNBY TRAINS

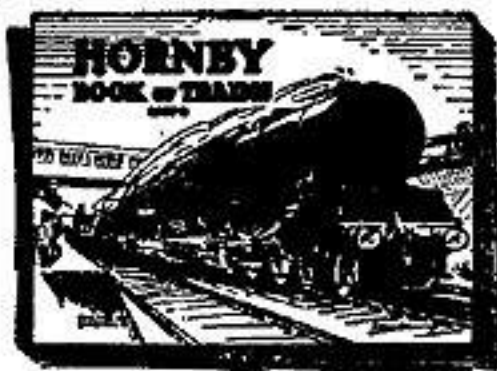
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school, looking for a chance to pick him up if he came out of gates, as he was likely to do on a Sunday morning.

No doubt the rascals had been prepared to grab him and pitch him head-first into the car, if necessary. But offering him a lift had done the trick.

Neither would it have been of much use to refuse that lift, had Bunter thought of doing so. Obviously, he would have been grabbed.

"Oh lor'!" repeated Bunter.

"You understand now, my lord?" grinned the Smiler.

"Oh, not Yes! No! Oh crikey!"

Bunter gave a despairing blink from the window. The car had cut across the bridge, and was taking a lane by Redclyffe Woods, which led down to the sea, by way of Pegg, past the gates of Cliff House School.

From what the man had said, some vessel was waiting in the bay at Pegg, to take on board the supposed Lord Reynham. Evidently the plot had been carefully and elaborately laid.

The fat Owl wriggled with apprehension.

In half an hour, at this rate, he would be on that vessel, steaming out to sea. After that—what?

He could not imagine what.

He knew that this could be no ordinary case of kidnapping for ransom. Bunter was not bright, but he was bright enough to realise that!

No gang of kidnappers, for such a reason, would keep on the trail of one special victim for a period extending over years.

It was not merely a rich nobleman that they wanted: it was young Lord Reynham specially!

For some utterly mysterious reason, at which Bunter could not even guess, young Lord Reynham was marked out as the victim of this lawless gang—they wanted him, and no other member of the peerage would serve their turn.

That looked as if there was some special enmity in the case—and as if the young lord's fate, when he was got hold of, was likely to be an unenviable one!

It was no wonder that, in such strange and mysterious circumstances, old Sir Peter was anxious about his ward, and had taken extraordinary measures for his security.

But Billy Bunter, at the moment, wished that old Sir Peter's measures had not been quite so extraordinary.

Playing the part of a lord in a magnificent castle was all right! Bunter revelled in the idea. But sitting in a car with a man who had a revolver in his pocket was not all right. It was far from all right. And the doubtful prospect of his ultimate fate was still less all right!

At the moment the fat Owl would rather have been plain Billy Bunter than Lord Reynham, owner of a great estate, a huge fortune, and a magnificent castle!

The car rushed on.

"Oh lor'!" said Bunter, for the third time.

He had one spot of comfort, now that he knew that this man was the Smiler.

That revolver, the sight of which had given him a spasm of terror, was unloaded.

Bunter knew—though the Smiler, of course, could not guess that he knew—that loaded firearms played no part in this strange scheme.

The Smiler was plainly a desperate rascal, but not desperate enough for that, and no doubt he attached an undue value to his neck. He might threaten Bunter with the deadly weapon—but he was not going to use it.

If Bunter got a chance of jumping out of the car, Bunter was going to jump—quite assured that no bullet would follow him.

But he did not look like getting a chance. In a struggle the stocky Smiler could have handled a dozen of him. And the car was going fast—too fast for a jump, if Bunter had a chance of dodging the Smiler's grasp—which he hadn't!

Bunter was "for it."

"I—I—I say, you—you're making a silly mistake!" pleaded Bunter. "I—I ain't Lord Reynham, and never was. I'm Bunter."

"That is the name the old fool gave you when he hid you at a school under an assumed name, you mean."

"Nunno. I—I never even saw old Lanchester before last week—" stammered Bunter.

"Ten minutes ago you said he was an old friend of yours."

"Oh! I—I—I meant that—that he wasn't—"

The Smiler laughed.

"Nothing of the kind!" gasped Bunter. "Look here, you ask any Greyfriars fellow, and they'll tell you I'm Bunter—just Bunter. I say, there's some Greyfriars chaps in Pegg this morning—you stop the car and ask them—they're in my Form—they'll tell you—"

"You mean that they know you by the name of Bunter, Lord Reynham?"

"Oh dear! Yes. But it's really my name!" groaned Bunter. "Look here, if you've ever seen that beastly lord, do I look like him?"

To Bunter's great relief, that remark seemed to make some impression on the Smiler. The man's sharp eyes narrowed almost to pin-points, as he scanned the face of the hapless Owl.

"I have not seen him since he was a boy of eleven," said the Smiler slowly. "He is now nearly sixteen. In that time, he must have changed too much to be recognised. But I remember that he was very plump—in fact, a fat boy."

"Well, then, that proves it!" gasped Bunter. "I ain't fat!"

"What?"

"I'm not skinny, like Wharton—but I ain't fat. The fellows make out that I am because they're jealous of my figure. Look at me!"

The Smiler looked at him—hard!

"I remember," he said, "that the boy seemed rather a fool! That fits!"

"Look here—"

The Smiler scanned him—harder and harder. Bunter realised that, having watched the meeting in Courtfield, the Smiler had jumped to a conclusion—the conclusion, in fact, at which Sir Peter had intended the kidnappers to jump. But he seemed to have some doubt now, and, clearly, he did not want to risk wasting his time bagging the wrong bird.

He was about to speak again when the car slowed down. Taking his eyes off Bunter's fat face, the Smiler snapped at the driver:

"Ferret, you fool! What—"

"O.K., Smiler! Level-crossing!" answered the Ferret over his shoulder. "I'll mention that I can do anything—with this bus except make her jump over a railway line!"

Billy Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his spectacles as the car stopped at the level-crossing in Pegg Lane. If there was half a chance—

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Removites to the Rescue!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"
"Jolly old Bunter!"
"The esteemed and idiotic Bunter!"

"What the dickens is he doing in that car?"

"Looks like a foreign chap in it."

Harry Wharton & Co., on their way to Cliff House, had stopped at the level crossing. The gates were shut, and the train was signalled, so they leaned on the gate and waited for it to pass.

Not many cars used Pegg Lane; still, it was not an unusual sight to see a car slow down at the level crossing, and the chums of the Remove gave it no special heed till they caught the gleam of a pair of big spectacles flashing back the wintry sunshine, and recognised Billy Bunter in the car.

They glanced at him, and at the foreign-looking man sitting by his side, as the car slowed to a halt at the gate. They were rather surprised to see the fat Owl sitting in the car with a man who looked like a foreigner, but they supposed that he had picked up a lift, that was all.

Bob Cherry waved a cheery hand to him.

Bunter blinked out of the car.

He had had a faint hope that with the car at a halt there might be a chance of jumping out. That hope was nipped in the bud by the Smiler, who fastened a grasp of iron on his fat arm.

But as he saw the Famous Five standing by the gate, it was renewed in his podgy breast. With all the strength of his lungs, Bunter gave a sudden yell.

"I say, you fellows! Help! Help!"

The Famous Five jumped almost clear of the ground in their astonishment.

"What—" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Help!" yelled Bunter frantically.

"Rescue! Help! Oh, help!"

Almost petrified, the chums of the Remove stared at him.

They were so astounded that they might have supposed that Bunter was pulling their leg, or that he had gone suddenly off his "dot." But the prompt action of the man in the car was even more startling than Bunter's wild yell for help.

He grasped the fat junior and pitched him down on the floor of the car, pinning him there with his foot.

At the same moment, he almost screamed to the driver:

"Quick! Ferret, you fool—quick!"

But the driver had no chance. The railway gates were locked in front of him; the car could not move on. High-hedged banks shut in the lane, which was narrow, and difficult for turning a car in. Backing and turning was not a quick process.

But the Famous Five were quick enough.

Amazed, as they were—utterly astounded, in fact, the action of the foreign-looking man left no doubt on the subject. Billy Bunter was in that car against his will, and was kept there by force.

It was beyond comprehension, but

there it was. Bunter was a prisoner in that car, in violent and lawless hands, and the Famous Five were not the fellows to leave him to it.

"Come on!" roared Bob.

They rushed at the car.

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent grabbed at one door and dragged it open. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull dragged at the other. Both doors flew open at the same moment as the car backed. And as the driver reached round, with a heavy spanner in his hand, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh lashed out with his walking-cane and slashed it from his hand.

"Bunter!" gasped Wharton.

"Ow! Help!" yelled Bunter. "I'm kidnapped! Help! I say, you fellows—yooooooooop!"

Bunter wriggled and gurgled under the jamming boot.

"You scoundrel, let Bunter go!" shouted the captain of the Remove, clambering into the car on one side while Bob plunged in on the other.

"Stand back!" yelled the Smiler.

The revolver came out of his coat pocket, and he brandished it at the schoolboys.

"Look out!" gasped Nugent.

"I say—help! Yarooooop!" squeaked Bunter.

"Stand back, or——"

Harry Wharton, half in the car, paused as the muzzle of the firearm was almost thrust in his face. But Bob Cherry, plunging in on the other side, hit out, catching the Smiler behind the ear.

The Smiler, spluttering, rocked over on the seat. Harry Wharton hurled himself forward, grabbing at him.

His grasp closed on the black beard. To his utter amazement, the beard came off in his hand.

Up went the Smiler's right arm, the pistol clubbed in his grip. But as the desperate rascal struck at Wharton Bob grasped him and dragged him over.

He turned on Bob like a tiger, but Harry Wharton grasped his arm and twisted it so savagely that the revolver dropped to the floor.

Struggling between Wharton and Bob, the Smiler had no time for Bunter, and the fat junior wriggled away and rolled out of the car.

He bumped down in Pegg Lane, spluttering.

But he did not stay there.

Bunter's movements, which were generally modelled on those of a snail, now resembled a flash of lightning.

He leaped up like an indiarubber ball, and bolted.

In a split second Bunter was up the grassy bank beside the lane, in the wood, and running.

He vanished like a ghost at cock-crow.

It did not occur to Bunter, at the moment, to lend any aid to the juniors who had come to the rescue. All Bunter was thinking of was getting to a safe distance from the Smiler. That he did, promptly.

Wharton and Bob were still struggling with the Smiler in the car when Bunter did the vanishing act.

The Ferret jumped down and made one stride across the lane, apparently thinking of pursuing Bunter. Johnny Bull, Frank Nugent, and the Nabob of Bhanipur jumped in front of him at once.

He backed away promptly.

There was a bump in the road as three struggling figures rolled out of the car. They separated as they rolled, and jumped to their feet, the Smiler with his beard and moustache gone, and his

cold, hard, clean-shaven face red and distorted with rage.

He gave a quick, fierce stare round, for Bunter was already out of sight. The Smiler stood panting with breathless rage.

His prisoner, whether Lord Reynham or not, had escaped. That meeting with the Famous Five at the level-crossing had put "paid" to the kidnappers' game. In his rage, the Smiler seemed disposed to rush on the schoolboys. They were quite ready for him.

The Famous Five drew together, barring the way Bunter had gone. For whatever mysterious reason the two rascals had bagged Bunter, Harry Wharton & Co. were quite determined that they should not bag him again.

"Pack it up, bo!" said the Ferret, who, from his choice of language, seemed to be a native of the other side of the ocean. "I'll say this lets us out! This is where we beat it!"

The Smiler gave him an angry glare for a moment, and then, with a curt nod, stepped back into the car.

Ferret resumed his place at the wheel. He backed, and turned, and the car shot away the way it had come.

The chums of the Remove watched it go. Who the two men were, why they had bagged Bunter, utterly mystified the Co. But the juniors had, at all events, rescued the fat Owl from their hands. Breathless and amazed, they watched the car whiz away and disappear in the distance.

"Well," said Harry Wharton, with a deep breath, "anybody got any idea what this means?"

"Ask me another!" said Bob.

"That blighter was got up in a false beard and moustache!" said Harry, in wonder. "And they'd got Bunter! What on earth for? What the dickens could they want Bunter for?"

"First time I've ever heard of anybody wanting him!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Kidnapping!" said Nugent.

"But why?"

"Goodness knows!"

Bunter had vanished in one direction—the car in another. The level-crossing gates having opened, the chums of the Remove resumed their walk to Cliff House—utterly mystified by the strange affair.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter's Pals!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"How did Bunter know we had a cake for tea?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"If you think I've come to tea, Nugent——"

"Haven't you?"

"No!" roared Bunter.

On Monday afternoon, the fat Owl of the Remove blinked in at the door of Study No. 1—from which the Famous Five, who were tea-ing there, naturally concluded that Bunter had come to tea. The trifling circumstance that he had not been asked to tea, was not expected to make any difference to Bunter.

But the fat Owl, it seemed, was not, for once, in search of a free feed. He did not roll into the study. He adorned the doorway with his podgy person, blinking in through his big spectacles, with a disdainful blink.

"Keep your measly cake!" he said contemptuously.

"Thanks—we will!" agreed Harry Wharton. "Glad of the chance!"

"Something a bit better than that, up the passage!" sneered Bunter. "I've

got friends who stand a fellow a decent spread."

"You're getting frightfully pally with Skinner," remarked Bob Cherry. "Does Skinner believe in Reynham Castle?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle," said Bunter. "But some fellows can take a fellow's word."

"Skinner's a bit too wide, I should have thought," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Yah!"

It was rather a puzzle to a good many Removites. Skinner, well known to be a wary fellow, and extremely close with his money, had been pally with Bunter, ever since the fat junior had gone to tea with Sir Peter on Saturday. That very night he had stood Bunter supper in his study; on Sunday he had cashed a postal order that Bunter was expecting on Monday—but which Skinner certainly did not expect to see: on Monday he had stood him tarts in break, and dough-nuts after dinner. Now, apparently, he had asked him to tea.

Being pally with Bunter meant being Bunter's banker. Except Fisher T. Fish, Skinner was the stingiest fellow in the Form. So it really was puzzling and surprising.

True, if Skinner believed in Reynham Castle, that explained it. In that case, Skinner, no doubt, was expending a sprat to catch a whale. But as much less suspicious fellows than Skinner did not believe a word of it, it seemed unlikely that Skinner did. Still more surprising, Bolsover major, the bully of the Remove, was associated with Skinner in this new stunt.

Bolsover, as a rule, was more likely to boot Bunter than to waste a civil word on him. Now he was friendly, and had been heard to call Bunter "old chap," and "old pal."

Skinner had not mentioned his discovery on Saturday afternoon—except to Bolsover major. So nobody knew that they were in possession of private information. Had Skinner spread the news, no doubt Bunter would have found more than two friends in his Form.

"I'm going to tea with Skinner and Bolsover," said Bunter, "and I can jolly well tell you they've got something better than a measly cake. Keep that mouldy cake! Who wants it? Yah!"

"Shut the door after you, old fat man!" said Wharton politely.

"I've looked in to speak to you about the hols!" yapped Bunter.

"Like to go to Wharton Lodge?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" snapped Bunter. "It's arranged for you fellows to come with me to Reynham Castle——"

"If any!"

"Well, you'll believe it when you see it!" jeered Bunter. "And Skinner's coming, too—and so is Bolsover. I've invited them. And if you fellows don't like their company over Christmas, you can lump it, see?"

"We're not likely to see them over Christmas, are we?"

"Of course you will, you silly ass, as they'll be at Reynham Castle with me, and you'll be there, too!" roared Bunter.

The Famous Five gazed at Bunter. Whether there was such a place as Reynham Castle, or not, they did not know; but if there was, they had not the slightest belief that Bunter had been asked there by the silver-haired old baronet who had called on Quelch. It looked as if Skinner and his pal were more credulous than themselves.

"Now, about getting there!" went on Bunter.

"Better go by plane, I think!" said Bob Cherry.

"By plane?" repeated Bunter.

"Yes—that's the only way to get to a castle in the air!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Will you talk sense?" roared Bunter.

"You begin, old fat bean!"

"The day we break up," hooted Bunter, "the car will come for me. A magnificent Rolls, with a liveried chauffeur—I shall travel in it to Reynham Castle. I can't take you fellows in it. I've got reasons."

The Famous Five chuckled. They had no doubt about Bunter's reasons—as they did not believe in the magnificent Rolls, any more than in the castle.

But, in point of fact, Bunter had his reasons. He had not mentioned to Sir Peter that a crowd of Greyfriars fellows were coming.

As he was to be called lord at the castle, it might be rather awkward to have a lot of fellows there who knew him as Billy Bunter.

This might not agree with the old baronet's plans. He might kick. So Bunter had sagely decided to arrive first—and let his friends arrive a little later.

Once he had been greeted at the castle as the young lord, it would be too late for Sir Peter to kick, if he wanted to.

Bunter thought this rather strategic. There was a difference between his viewpoint and Sir Peter's.

Sir Peter was thinking wholly of the success of his measures for securing his ward. Bunter was thinking wholly of having a tremendously good time and keeping perfectly safe all the time. His wild adventure with the man in the car had made Bunter quite determined on that. Kidnappers were not going to get another chance at Bunter—not if Bunter knew it!

"You see how it stands?" went on Bunter. "Sir Peter Lanchester will come here in the car for me. I can't have him crowded out with a lot of noisy schoolboys. You see that?"

"Go it!" said Bob, encouragingly.

"Pile it on!"

"You'd better come by rail, the next day or the day after," said Bunter. "In fact, I'll let you know, from the castle. See? I mean to say, I shall have to be a bit tactful about it, and those beasts can hardly start anything the first day—"

"Eh?"

"I—I mean—"

"Well, what do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Bunter hastily. "Nothing at all, old chap! I'll phone you from the castle—I suppose you're on the phone at your poor little place, Cherry! I'll phone you up, see? That will be best! Now, do you understand?"

"Not quite!" said Harry Wharton, shaking his head.

"Beast! Look here, it's settled that you come on to the castle when I phone for you?" roared Bunter.

"When!" chortled Bob.

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter slammed the door and rolled away. He had no more of his valuable time to waste on those doubting Thomases; especially with a feast awaiting him in Skinner's study.

Bunter was annoyed—but his fat brow cleared, when he sat down to tea with Skinner and Bolsover major.

The only two fellows in the Remove who believed in Reynham Castle were very keen to visit that magnificent abode. They pooled their financial resources to load the study table with good things for Bunter.

Feeding Bunter was not a light matter. It was rather an expensive sprat to catch the whale. But they agreed that it was worth it. For the next half-hour they had the pleasure, or otherwise, of watching Bunter feed. Judging by their polite and pleasant smiles, it was an agreeable sight.

When the foodstuffs were finished Bunter was finished. He rose from the table, after a careful blink round to make sure that nothing eatable was left.

"Thanks, you chaps!" said Bunter. "I'll stand you something better than that when you're my guests at the castle."

And with that graceful acknowledgment of the spread, the fat Owl rolled out of the study.

THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER.

Bunter in all his Glory!

"WHERE did you get that hat?"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Where did you pinch that coat?"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Where did you bag that suitcase?"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Where did you snaffle that necktie?"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

It was breaking-up day at Greyfriars. Harry Wharton & Co. had been busy with packing. Coming out into the frosty quad, they glanced at a handsome Rolls-Royce car that was standing by the steps, with a liveried chauffeur standing by it like a graven image.

Then they spotted Bunter.

Bunter was standing by the House steps—remarkably and unusually well-dressed, with a happy grin on his face.

But he looked rather worried as the Famous Five came up. On that bright and happy morning he did not want any sordid dispute about the ownership of a hat, an overcoat, a suitcase, or a necktie. Such things were below the notice of a fellow who was about to arrive at

a castle as a lord. They were not below the notice of the fellows to whom the articles belonged.

"You fat, foozling, bloated burglar!" said Bob.

"Hush!" said Bunter reprovingly.

"What! What do you mean by hush, you fat pincher?"

"I mean Sir Peter might hear you—"

"All the way from the castle in Sussex?" snorted Bob.

"He's here—"

"You gammoning us—"

"He's gone in to speak to Quelch," said Bunter. "He came in that car. He may be out any minute. I'm waiting for him. You see, that's the car I'm going in!"

"The spoofing octopus!" hooted Bob. "Let's bump him!"

"I say, you fellows—" yelled Bunter. "I say—"

"Scrag him!"

"Dear me! What is the matter?" asked a voice, as a tall, silver-haired gentleman came out of the House.

Another moment and Billy Bunter would have been bumped. But Harry Wharton & Co. stopped in time and "capped" the old baronet instead. Bunter could wait till Sir Peter Lanchester was gone.

Sir Peter gave them a nod and a smile, and then, to their utter amazement, addressed Bunter.

"Come, my boy!"

"What-ho!" chortled Bunter.

The chauffeur lifted Bob's suitcase—now Bunter's—on to the car. The fat Owl stepped in with Sir Peter.

The Famous Five, spellbound, watched, like fellows in a dream.

The magnificent car rolled away to the gates, Billy Bunter sitting by the side of Sir Peter Lanchester.

He grinned back at the staring five. He waved a fat hand—probably grubby, as usual, but nicely encased in a glove of Nugent's.

The car turned out at the gates and disappeared.

Harry Wharton & Co. were left staring; they could do nothing else.

Bob Cherry was the first to find his voice.

He gasped.

"Can you beat it?"

His friends shook their heads. They couldn't!

THE END.

(Don't miss the second story in this exciting series, entitled: "KING OF THE CASTLE!" which, together with other splendid Yuletide features, will appear in next Saturday's GRAND CHRISTMAS NUMBER of the MAGNET. As there is always a rush for this special issue, readers are strongly advised to order their copy TO-DAY!)



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THE BEWTY AND THE BEAK!

A Rib-Tickling Yarn of Jack Jolly & Co. of St. Sam's!

By DICKY NUGENT

I.

"He's got it!" Frank Fearless of the St. Sam's Fourth made that announcement in tones of suppressed egotism, as he sat down at the breakfast-table.

"What—the letter? Good egg!" cried Jack Jolly, gleefully. "How do you know?"

"I saw it in Sorter's hand when he was delivering this morning's post!" chortled Fearless. "I reckoned my pater's fist on the envelope and I saw it was addressed to Doctor Birchmell."

"Do you think your pater did as you asked him?" asked Merry anxiously.

"Trust the pater!" grinned Fearless. "The moment I asked him over the tellyphone if he'd give prizes to the best dancers at the St. Sam's Ball, he said he'd do it like a shot. Our wheeze is simply bound to succeed. As soon as the masters hear that there are prizes to be won for dancing, they'll all want to dance."

"In which case they'll have to get a real band for the ball instead of inflicting their garstly mewick on us!" chuckled Jack Jolly. "Good old Fearless!"

"Quiet, you fellows!" hissed Bright. "Here come the beaks!"

The chums of the Fourth glanced towards the door and saw Doctor Birchmell entering with

half-a-duzen Form-masters on his heels. The Head, who held a letter in his somewhat grimy paw, was grinning all over his face, while the other masters all looked as eggstated as Second Form fags. Putting two and two together and making five, Jack Jolly & Co. could see that Mr. Ferdinand Fearless' letter had had the desired effect!

So eggstated was the Head that he had to dip into the contents of his letter again before he dipped into his porridge bowl.

"Boys!" he cried, standing up at the head of the Sixth Form table and waving the all-important letter above his head. "I have topping news to announce to you in regard to the grate St. Sam's Ball—news that will make you feel as pleased as Punch—and the girls of St. Lizzie's as pleased as Judy!"

"Spill the beans, then, sir!"

"On the bawl!"

"I have just received a letter from the welthy and jennorous pater of a Fourth Form boy," went on Doctor Birchmell. "This noble-hearted gentleman, Mr. Ferdinand Fearless by name, has offered two valuable trophies in the shape of cups to the couple who dance the best fox-trot on the nite of the Ball!"

"Hear, hear!"

"Good old Ferdy!"

"The cups in ques-

tion," grinned the Head, "will be real imitation gold of the very finest quality and worth at least five shillings each."

"Few!"

"This magnificent offer, boys, is all that was needed to complete the nite of nites to which we are all looking forward so gratefully!" said Doctor Birchmell. "There is only one drawback about it. My original intention that the mewick should be supplied by Alf Birchmell and His Boys must now be abandoned for the eggcellent reason that we shall all be entering for the dancing kontest. We shall now have to rely on the Muggleton Melody Makers, who are offered to us free of charge by Sir Gouty Greybeard."

The Head quite egg-spected that the fellows would tear their hair and nash their teeth out of sheer disappointment on hearing that his band would be unable to play. But instead of that, they all grinned from ear to ear and cheered and cheered again. It quite annoyed the Head, and he wrapped the table sharply for silence.

table-tennis autographs, another for footer autographs, and so on!

The Open Debate in the Sixth Form Debating Society last week ended up in a regular riot owing to these frenzied collectors. They invaded our meeting without even waiting for the chairman to sum up, and we had to send a hurried SOS for ashplants before we could get rid of them.

As for footer—words fail me! At the close of the last match of the term on Big Side, when we beat St. Jim's 4-2, they swarmed on to the pitch like a plague of locusts, and, as they included visitors from St. Jim's as well as home supporters, I had no alternative to wading through their wretched

"Silence, you disre-spectable yung cubs!" he roared, hitting the table for all he was worth. "Stop cheering at once or—yarooo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" Doctor Birchmell broke off with a feendish yell and the fellows' cheers changed to doffening larfter. Not noticing eggstately where he



was banging, the Head had accidentally hit the edge of his porridge-bowl—with the result that the porridge had shot up in the air and landed on his face!

Doctor Birchmell's interest in the St. Sam's Ball petered out promptly when he found himself gowging hot porridge out of his eyes. He left the table and made a rush for the door,

leaving the skool almost historical with larfter; and he was seen no more at breakfast-time that morning.

Jack Jolly & Co., however, knew that he would be as keen as mustard again by the end of the morning, and they were not serprized when they came out of morning classes to see him link arms with Mr. Lickham and march the Fourth Form master away, eagerly chattering about the prizes which Mr. Ferdinand Fearless had offered.

"Let's follow the old fogeys, you chaps!" grinned Jack Jolly. "They may put in a bit of dancing praktiss—and then we ought to see some fun!"

"Yes, rather!"

corussed the other members of the Co. And they followed the two beaks—and were duly rewarded by getting the larf of the term for their trubble.

Just as Jolly had suspected, the old fogeys were going off on the sly for a little dancing praktiss. The place they chose to do it in was the last place where people would have dreamed of looking—the cole-cellar.

The chums of the Fourth were almost busting with suppressed larfter, as they gazed down at them through air-holes at the top. Doctor Birchmell and Mr. Lickham looked as graceful as a couple of elephants, capering about in the dim illumination of the single electric light.

The most commical moment was at the end. Unbeknown to the would-be dance champions, a load of coke had just arrived for delivery. The two old fogeys were so engrossed in watching their feet that they did not notice the cole-hole open above their heads. But it opened all the same, and after a brief interval somebody above up-ended a sack of coke over the hole just at the moment when they happened to be underneath it. Then the two old fossils woke up to what was happening and found themselves struggling on

the floor under a roaring cascade of boiler-fuel!

"Yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!" howled the Head, as he vanished from site.

"Yoooooop! Wooooop!" shrieked Mr. Lickham, as he vainly tried to swim to safety.

Jack Jolly & Co. decided that it was time they vanished, too. They gulped away, larfing fit to bust.

They had often felt like telling Doctor Birchmell and Mr. Lickham to go and eat coke, but they had never hooped to see them actually doing it; yet they had now been given that unexpected treat.

As Fearless remarked, the St. Sam's Ball seemed to be making their dreams come true in a way that had never antissipated!

II.

Thump, thump, thump!

Crash! Bang! Wallop! The old Skool House at St. Sam's was fairly shaking!

A new-comer mite have thought that an earthquake was in progress. But such was not the case. It was merely the light and delicate tread of hundreds of dancers at the St. Sam's Break-up Ball.

The crowded ball-room, packed with circling dancers, looked like some grate round-about—and everything was going with a swing. The dance was simply terrific! The merry mewick of the Muggleton Melody Makers mingled with the clatter of crockery and the patter of feet and the chatter of dancers.

The girls from St. Lizzie's looked simply topping and all were in grato daps, and as partners for the yung gallants of St. Sam's. But the bell of the ball was natcherrally the Head's winsome dawter, Molly Birchmell. Miss Molly, who was the apple of her father's eye, had a peach-like complexion and cherry lips. She wore a delightful orange dress. Every body wanted to dance with the Head's pretty dawter; but Miss

Molly's favors were reserved for a chosen few, among whom Frank Fearless figured most prominently. All were agreed that the St. Sam's Ball was proving a grate success and this applied especially to the masters.

"It's a really ripping nite!" said Mr. Justiss. "Topping, by Jove!" grinned Mr. Swishing-ham. "Magnifeek!" was Monsure Froggaya's opinion.

"Hock! Hock!" cheered Hair Guggenheimer.

Mr. Lickham was not to be seen; but the others were too bizzy enjoying themselves to trubble about him. It was not till later that they realised there was more in his absence than met the eye.

Doctor Birchmell was here, there, and everywhere. He started the evening by dancing with Miss Buttercup, the headmistress of St. Lizzie's. Unforechuntly, their



dance was somewhat spoilt by misunderstandings. The Head thought it was a tango, whereas Miss Buttercup was under the impression that it was a fox-trot. In actual fact, it was a waltz.

"I wonder if he'll choose Miss Buttercup as his partner in the prize fox-trot?" grinned Jack Jolly to the charming yung lady with whom he was hopping round the ball-room.

"I shouldn't be a bit serprized!" replied the yung lady, with a trilling little larf. But the kaptin of the Fourth and his partner were wrong. When at last the grate moment arrived for the fox-trot

kontest, they and everybody else were amazed to see the Head trot over to the door and lead in a lady nobody had ever seen before.

Even Mr. Ferdinand Fearless, who was present to judge the fox-trot kontest, stopped in the middle of his announcement to look at the Head's partner. As Jolly remarked, her appearance was enuff to stop a bus!

There was something familiar about her; but what it was, nobody could say. Before they had time to speculate on the matter, Mr. Fearless had given the signal to the band, and the fox-trot kontest had started.

Everybody was as keen as mustard on winning the prizes, and they all put their best feet forward while the judges, who had been invited from Muggleton, stood in the middle eggsercising their powers of judgment. But, concentrate as they mite on the dancing, the other com-



petitors could not keep their eyes off the Head and his partner. Often in the past Doctor Birchmell had cut a commical figger; but never before had he cut such a commical figger as on this occasion.

Loud and long was the larfter, as the Head careered round the ball-room; but the larfter changed to yells of pane from the unlucky dancers who came within reach of his lashing legs.

The dance came to a close at last amid loud cheers, and the crowd waited anxiously for the verdict of the judges. But Doctor Birchmell and his fair lady seemed to feel no anxiety what-ever regarding the result.

They walked cheerfully up to Mr. Fearless, who was consulting the judges, boughing on both sides as though they had already won the coveted trophies.

"Well, that's that, Mr. Fearless!" grinned the Head, mopping his perspiring brow. "No need to ask for the verdict, I suppose? My partner and I have won the prizes, of course!"

Much to the serprize of the crowd, Mr. Fearless nodded.

"Yes, of course, my dear sir," he said. "You've won!"

The crowd gasped, and then their gasps changed to grins, as Mr. Fearless added:

"But not the real prizes, natcherrally. The judges have awarded you the BOOBY PRIZES!"

"W H A - A - A T ?!" shrieked the Head.

"The first prizes have been awarded to my son, Frank Fearless and your charming dawter, Miss Molly Birchmell!"

Loud cheers greeted this announcement; no verdict could have been more popular. But the Head and his partner did not cheer. They glared at each other, instead, and then, to the amazement of the crowd, the Head made a grab at his partner's nose.

"You silly ass!" he roared. "It's all your fault for not dancing well enuff!"

The next moment, a gasp of sheer astonishment went up from the onlookers. As the Head reached forward, his partner jerked her head back—and immediately afterwards, her yellow mop detached itself from her head.

"It's only a wig!" yelled Jack Jolly.

"Lickham!" shrieked Merry.

It was none other than Mr. Lickham, the master of the Fourth, disguised! Now the crowd knew why the Head's partner had seemed vaguely familiar.

"Lickham! Oh, grate pip!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The crowd fairly yelled. Forchuntly.

"LET ME STAY AT SCHOOL FOR XMAS!"

Bunter's Amazing Plea

Bunter nearly brought down the house when he calmly told us the other evening that he wanted to stay at school for Christmas!

A sort of frozen silence descended on the Rag. One or two nervous chaps made ready to dash for a doctor as soon as the Porpoise became violent.

"You whatter?" was the incredulous question that was flung back at Bunter, when we had recovered our breaths.

"I want to stay at school for Christmas," repeated Bunter. "I feel I should—er—like to carry on my studies during the vac. in the proper atmosphere and all that sort of thing, you know."

"Ye gods!"

"I'm not the kind of chap that dotes on Christmas as a holiday," went on Bunter, with a disdainful sniff. "I dare say it's all right for fellows who are keen on tucking in and making pigs of themselves—"

"Great pip!"

"But there's not the attraction about it for a chap like myself. Far better for me to stay on at school and spend the time in quiet study and what not."

"Let's get this straight, Bunter," put in Tom Brown. "Do you seriously intend to stay on at the school during the vac. all by yourself?"

"Yes. I mean, no—not exactly!" corrected Bunter, hastily. "I shan't be entirely by myself, of course. Fishy's staying on, too. I'm keeping him company."

We still stared blankly. Bunter had never in the past shown any particular affection for Fisher T. Fish. Why the prospect of his company should attract the Porpoise to spending Christmas at school was utterly beyond us.

Then Fishy himself came into the Rag. There was a wide grin on his hatchet face.

"Howdo, everybody!" he greeted. "I'll tell the world it looks like being real genu-wine Christmasy Christmas for somebody this year. Yes, sirce!"

"My hat! Here's another one gone off his rocker!" gasped Brown. "You've never looked forward to Christmas at school before, Fishy!"

"You've said it; but it so happens that I ain't staying at school this Christmas," grinned Fish. "You see, I happened to win a Christmas hamper sufficient for twelve in a noospaper puzzle competition—"

"Oh!" yelled the entire Rag, as the light of understanding dawned on them.

"An' I've traded that hamper with an hotel at Margate for one week's free board an' room—"

"W h a - a - a ?" shrieked Bunter.

"So I guess I'll be spending my Christmas in style! Whoooooopes!"

And Fish chortled. And we yelled. Bunter's mood of studiousness was fully explained now. He had heard of Fishy's win and decided to stay on and help him out with the hamper. Apparently, that help would not be required now after all!

"Still staying on at school for Christmas, Bunter?" asked Brown. "Boast!" said Bunter.

From which remark we gathered that he wasn't!