

THE
MAGNET

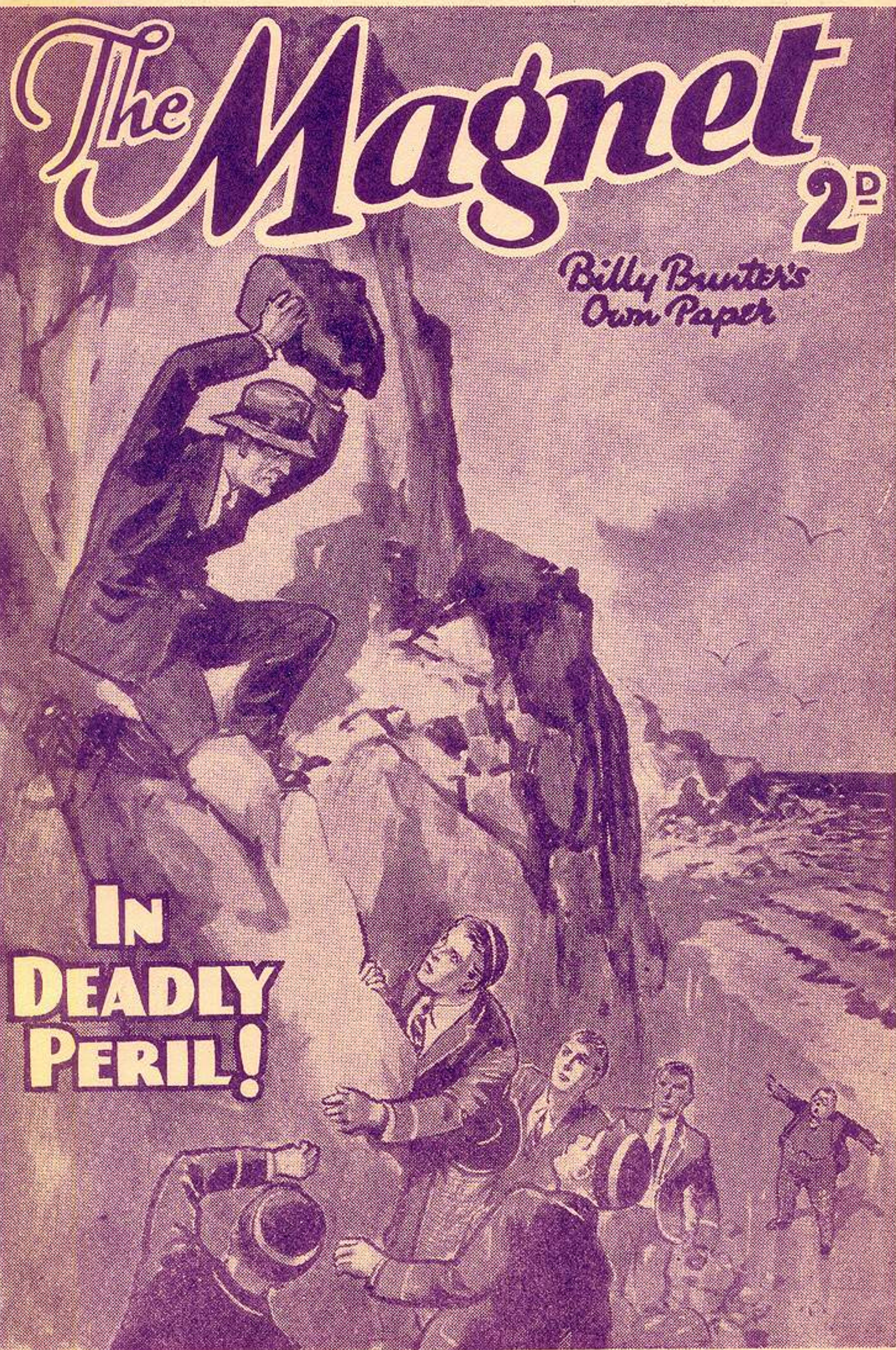
"THE UNSEEN ENEMY!" Thrilling story in this issue.

The Magnet

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*Billy Brunter's
Own Paper*

**IN
DEADLY
PERIL!**





The GREYFRIARS HERALD



EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON

MAKE GREYFRIARS A DEMOCRACY!

Coker's Clarion Call

JUST before the hols., when Mr. Prout called on Coker to construe, he had a severe jolt on hearing Coker reply:

"Certainly, old chap!"

Mr. Prout jumped.

"Wha-a-at?" he asked, quite faintly.

"Certainly, old chap!" said Coker, quite cheerfully. "Quite a pleasure, old bean!"

"Coker!" gasped the Fifth Form beak. "Boy! How dare you?"

"Nothing very daring about it, is there, old sport?" asked Coker. "I can do my con. all right, old lad!"

Prout stood up; his stool toppled over with a fearful clatter. Prout did not heed it. His eyes were fixed on Coker with a basilisk glare.

"Coker! Boy! Have you taken leave of your senses? Are you utterly mad? How dare you address me by that unspeakably familiar appellation 'old chap'? How dare you designate me by the monstrous colloquialisms 'old bean' and 'old sport'?"

"Oh, that!" said Coker, with a condescending smile. "Yes, I suppose it does seem a little unusual for you at first. But you'll soon get used to it, old top!"

Mr. Prout hung dizzily on to his desk for support.

"If you are not completely insane, Coker," he choked, "will you tell me what is the meaning of this outrageous talk?"

Coker frowned.

"Oh, it's not outrageous—far from it!" he said, quite indignantly. "It's only democratic!"

"D-d-democratic?"

"Just that. We're fighting for democracy, ain't we? Liberty, equality, fraternity, you know. Well, I've decided to live up to the nation's ideals," explained Coker. "Calling you 'sir' is only a survival from feudal times. All that sort of thing will have to go now. Make Greyfriars a democracy! That's my idea of it!"

Evidently it was not Prout's idea of it. Prout gave Coker five hundred lines, and promised to march him straight to the Head if it happened again—just to illustrate his own idea of it!

We need hardly tell you that Coker's enthusiasm for democracy at Greyfriars has not been diminished by his little set-back.

Notwithstanding Prout, he has

since made great efforts to turn the place into a democracy.

He gave Potter and Greene a lecture for doffing their caps to the Head.

He cuffed Gatty for running an errand for Blundell.

He urged the Second to go on strike against fagging, and promised a licking to any fag he caught black-legging.

He visited the Remove to tell them the slogan of the day was "No dictatorship," and warned them that any Remove man who submitted to dictatorship would be whopped.

Probably he is still wondering why the Remove promptly ran him to the end of the passage and pitched him down the stairs.

Coker never was strong on logic!

Cecil Reginald Temple Advises—

USE LESS CLOBBER!

It seems we have to do on less clothing to win this war, chaps. Pulling up our socks is not good enough—we have also got to wear 'em till they're as full of holes as a dashed sieve!

It's a little rough on blokes who take a pride in their personal appearance. They talk about equality of sacrifice. Where's the equality, I ask, when well-dressed chaps like me are expected to do on inferior clobber, while chaps like Fry, who spend all their money on stamp-collecting, can buy stamps of pre-war quality without rebuke?

One must do it, of course—*noblesse oblige*, and all that stuff, you know. I merely point out that it doesn't seem quite fair. Furthermore, what's going to be the end of it, goodness only knows!

Only recently I heard Smith major boasting—**BOASTING**, mind you!—that his minor was wearing his old blazer and footer togs. To think, dear men, that Greyfriars should ever come to such a pass!

DOING HIS BIT!

By **DICKY NUGENT**

(The famous Third Form author)

"Like to help win the war, boys?"

Dr. Birchmall stood outside his garage and asked that intreging question.

Jack Jolly & Co., who were on their way to footer, stopped immejately. No four fellows at St. Sam's were more patriottick than the chums of the Fourth.

"Yes, rather!" they promptly corussed.

Dr. Birchmall grinned.

"In that case, you cannot do better than help me to do my patriottick duty."

Jack Jolly larfed hartily.

"If you're thinking of joining the Army, sir, I advise you to think again. They don't axcept old fogeys of a hundred or so."

The Head cullered.

"I wish you wouldn't be so dashed personal, Jolly. As a matter of fakt, I am only ninety-nine—a mere strippling, as you mite say! But, anyway, I am not thinking of joining the Army. The duty I have in mind is to save the country's petrol. See this car?"

"Ah! Then that's what it is!" eggscclaimed Fearless, with the air of one making a grate discovery. "Now, if you hadn't told us, sir, I should have said it was a travelling rabbit-hutch!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"In this car," said the Head, disdainfully ignoring Frank's yewmerous remark, "I am going to have a ride for fresh air and recreation—a matter of grate national importance. At the same time, I want to run the car without using up my petrol ration. Now, how do you suppose I can run the car and at the same time help to win the war by not using petrol?"

"I know, sir!" said Bright brightly. "You're going to use ginger-pop instead."

"Or Chinese crackers!" suggested Merry merrily.

Dr. Birchmall smiled roguishly.

"I can see you'll never guess, boys, so I'll tell you. I am going to do my bit by using your strong yung mussels instead of petrol! In other words, while I sit at the wheels and steer, you are going to push me!"

"Grate pip!"

"I am sure you will be delited to help me to do my bit towards winning the war," went on the Head cheerfully. "But in case you are not delited, I have an eggcellent birchrod which will soon encurridge you to be delited!"

Snapshots!

"Prout," says a Fifth-Former, "is noted for his pi-jaw."

Which possibly explains why he is sometimes called "Puddenface."

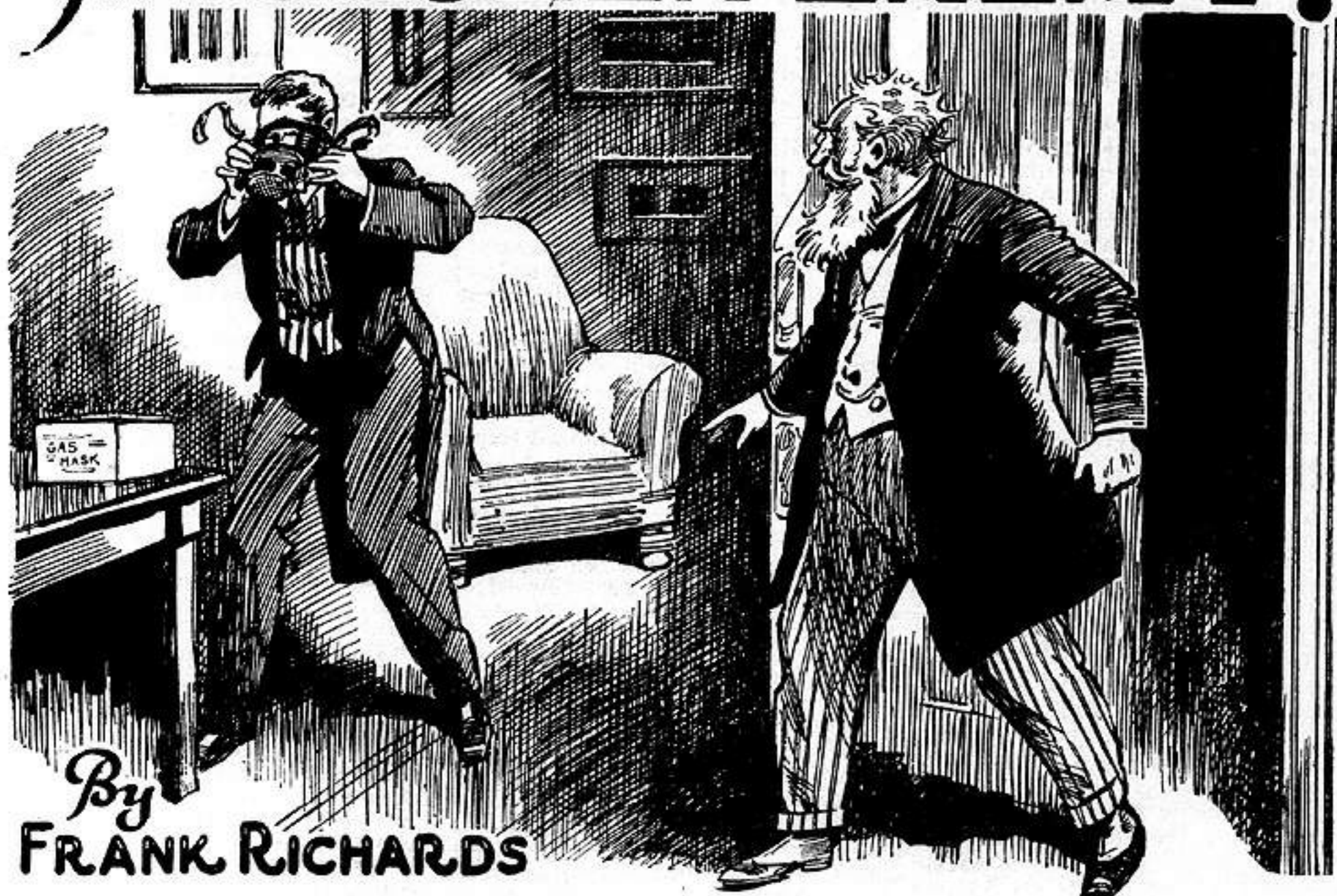
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Fisher T. Fish intends to take up tennis.

He simply cannot resist the idea of handling a new "racket."

THAT SOAMES IS A VILLAIN, HARRY WHARTON & CO. WELL KNOW. WHAT GAME CAN HE BE UP TO IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF EAST-CLIFF LODGE ?

The UNSEEN ENEMY!



By
FRANK RICHARDS

"Pray excuse me, sir," came Jermyn's muffled voice. "I am having a little difficulty with this gas-mask!"

DANGER!

"POTTY!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Mad as a hatter!" agreed Bob Cherry.

"Has Bunter gone cracked, or what?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in wonder.

"Looks like it!" grinned Frank Nugent.

And Hurrce Jamset Ram Singh, the dusky member of the Famous Five of Greyfriars School, remarked, in his remarkable English, that the crackfulness of the absurd Bunter was terrific.

Really, it looked like it!

Unless Billy Bunter, the fat Owl of the Remove, had gone suddenly cracked, there seemed no way of accounting for his strange and mysterious antics.

On that sunny April day, Harry Wharton & Co. were cliff-climbing. In single file, they threaded their way up a narrow, rugged, precipitous ledge, on the face of the high chalk cliffs that fronted Eastcliff Bay.

Back of the cliffs lay Eastcliff Lodge, where the chums of Greyfriars were putting in the Easter holidays as the guests of that venerable old bean, Sir William Bird.

The mansion was out of sight from

the sea. The wide sandy beach was solitary, save for the fat figure of Billy Bunter.

Bunter, of course, was not joining in any cliff-climbing stunts. Billy Bunter found it exertion enough to clamber down a steep gully to the beach, without clambering up steep cliffs after he got there.

Why Harry Wharton & Co. wanted to climb the cliff was really a mystery to Billy Bunter. They could have sat on the soft sand, like Bunter, and scooped toffee, like Bunter, and passed the sunny hours in happy and complete laziness, like Bunter.

Instead of which, they had no sooner spotted that rugged path winding up the face of the cliff, than they were smitten with a desire to climb the same—just for the sake of doing it, apparently.

Billy Bunter remained contentedly

Amazing Story of Harry Wharton & Co. and William Wibley, the Schoolboy Impersonator, on holiday at Eastcliff Lodge.

sprawling in the softest of sand, his podgy back resting against a chalk boulder that cropped up from the beach, devouring toffee till his packet was empty.

By that time the five juniors were half-way up the cliff, on a steep and broken ledge of chalk, that was nowhere more than three feet in width, and in places less than two. There was risk, as well as exertion, in that climb, for which reason, perhaps, it appealed all the more to the Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove.

Looking down at the beach, the juniors could see Bunter—but not, as they naturally expected, sprawling in the sand, taking it easy.

Bunter had jumped up.

His eyes, and his spectacles, were fixed on the fellows up the cliff, and he was waving two fat hands frantically. His face was crimson with excitement. His little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles. His mouth, wide open, emitted excited yells—which did not, however, reach the ears of the cliff-climbers, being carried away by the strong sea wind.

They stared down at him blankly.

He waved, he gesticulated, he

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yelled, he almost danced in frantic excitement. Obviously he wanted to draw their attention. Why, they could not guess. But it was clear that the fat Owl was in a perfectly frantic state.

Really, it looked as if the Owl of the Remove had suddenly taken leave of his senses—such as they were!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" bawled Bob Cherry. "What's up?"

Bob's powerful voice reached Bunter. When Bob Cherry put on steam, his vocal powers were nearly equal to those of a megaphone.

Bunter yelled back. But his excited fat squeak did not carry the distance. Harry Wharton & Co. could see that he was yelling. But they could not catch a syllable of it.

"Potty!" said Johnny Bull. "Come on!"

"Something must be up!" said Harry Wharton.

"The upfulness seems to be——"

"Terrific!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "But what——"

"We can't stick here all the afternoon, watching Bunter play monkey-on-a-stick!" argued Johnny Bull. "Get a move on!"

"Hold on!" said Harry. "Is he trying to warn us of something?"

"Well, what?"

"Goodness knows!"

Harry Wharton swept the beach with his eyes. Nothing was to be seen there but sand, chalk boulders, seaweed, wreckage, and Bunter.

The tide was well out; there was no danger of being cut off by the sea. Out at sea, the smoke of a vessel could be seen, probably mine-sweeping. But if there were German mines about, the schoolboys were in no danger from them. Often enough, the windows of Easteliff Lodge were rattled by the explosion of a mine out at sea, but beyond a cracked pane now and then, no harm was done to people ashore by those nefarious devices of the unspeakable Hun.

Up in the blue, an aeroplane winged its way, its drone faint in the distance. But there was no sign of an air raid—which certainly would have accounted for Bunter's excitement.

Absolutely nothing was to be seen to account for Billy Bunter's antics!

Yet he was growing more frantic every moment.

Now that he saw that the attention of the cliff-climbers was fixed on him, the fat Owl waved, gesticulated, beckoned, yelled, and squeaked, with redoubled energy, almost dancing in his excitement.

"Mad as a whole family of hatters!" said Bob Cherry. "Is he doing that song and dance because he's run out of toffee, and wants to ask us if we've got any more?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"He might!" grinned Nugent. "Well, I suppose we're not going down to ask him what he wants? It's taken us over half an hour to get this far."

"Not likely!" chuckled Bob.

"But something must be up!" said Harry, in perplexity. "Bunter's a

born idiot, but he's not idiot enough to be dancing like a cat on hot bricks for nothing."

"Isn't he idiot enough for anything?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Well, yes; but——"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! He's doing a new turn!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "He's pointing up at something! What?"

Bunter, evidently in despair of being heard or understood, had changed his tactics. He ceased to wave and brandish his fat paws, and, with a podgy right arm extended, pointed up at the cliff, where the five juniors were lodged on the jutting ledge of chalk.

"What the thump," said Johnny Bull, "is that fat ass pointing at us for?"

"He isn't!" said Bob. "He's pointing above our heads, I think! Anything up above that he wants us to see?"

"Oh! Look out!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "That may be it. There's jolly often a chalk-slip on these cliffs. All those stacks down below have fallen at one time or another."

"By gum! If that's it——"

Unless Bunter had gone cracked, it seemed that he must be trying to convey a warning to the cliff-climbers. From the beach he might have seen something on the cliff which they were too close to the rock to have seen.

Five faces were turned upward, to scan the rugged face of the cliff that soared above the heads of the cliff-climbers. If, by chance, the fat junior on the beach had spotted some mass of chalk tottering to its fall, the warning was a timely one.

Then, as they looked up, the Famous Five saw—and understood.

About a dozen feet above their heads, that slanting ledge widened into a broad plateau of rock jutting out from the cliff. On that plateau stood a figure—a man who had, apparently, clambered down from the top, to meet the climbers from below half-way.

In his hands was a large chunk of chalk, weighing several pounds, which he had detached from the cliff. He held it as if about to hurl.

Over it, a smooth, clear-cut, clean-shaven face looked down at the juniors with a faint, sardonic grin. The Famous Five, at different levels on the slanting ledge, stared up at him, their hearts jumping.

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry Wharton breathlessly. "Soames!"

"Soames!" breathed Bob Cherry.

The chums of Greyfriars knew now what Bunter had seen from the beach—of what he was seeking to warn them. But the warning came too late! The Famous Five, strung out on the narrow, slanting path, were at the mercy of their old enemy, standing above them with the rock in his hands.

FACE TO FACE!

"SOAMES!" repeated Harry Wharton.

"That villain!" muttered Johnny Bull.

The juniors stood quite still, staring up.

They had no chance of reaching the man above. The rock, if Soames had hurled it, would have swept them from the narrow ledge, to fall crashing on the beach forty feet below. Neither could they retreat—unless Soames chose to hold his hand.

Soames looked down at them, his hard, smooth face sardonic and mocking. He had been waiting for them to get nearer. But they were near enough now to be at his mercy.

"Good-afternoon, young gentlemen!" said Soames smoothly.

The man who had been a valet, who looked like a well-trained manservant, spoke in the smooth, deferential tones that the juniors remembered so well from the time when Soames had been valet to Mr. Vernon-Smith, the father of the Bounder of Greyfriars.

They remembered his respectful, deferential ways, but they also remembered the holiday cruise on the millionaire's yacht, when the sleek manservant had unexpectedly revealed himself as a desperate and unscrupulous freebooter, and they had seen him dominating a ship's deck, single-handed, with an automatic in his grasp.

"You rotter!" said Harry Wharton, breathing fast. "What are you doing here?"

Soames smiled.

"At the present moment, Master Wharton, I am seeking a little friendly conversation," he answered.

"You have nothing to say to us?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"On the other hand, I have a great deal to say—and you are not, I think, in a position to refuse to listen!" smiled Soames. "I warn you not to take a single step back—this rock will follow you, and you can guess what the result will be."

The juniors could guess only too well. And smooth as Soames' manner was, they could read the cold, hard, ruthless glint in his eyes.

Had Bunter's warning reached them sooner, they could have backed behind a curve of the cliff face a little lower down. But they had passed above that curve now, and there was nothing to be done.

"I should be sorry," went on the smooth voice, "to use rough measures with a party of holiday-making schoolboys whom I really esteem——"

"Oh, shut it!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"You were always a plain-spoken lad, Master Bull!" smiled Soames. "I remember it well, from the happy cruise we had together, when I had the honour of serving Mr. Vernon-Smith. But in the present circumstances, I suggest that a spot of civility would not come amiss."

Grunt from Johnny Bull. Johnny, at least, had no civility to waste upon a lawless desperado.

"I assure you," went on Soames, "that personally I esteem you, and that it would be with the greatest regret that I should knock you off that ledge. But personal feelings must be set aside in matters of business. I hope that we shall be able to come to an amicable arrangement."

"We knew you were hanging about this district, Soames!" said Harry Wharton quietly. "We nearly collared you the night you got into Eastcliff Lodge. We knew it was you!"

"I had no doubt that you recognised me on that occasion," assented Soames. "An awkward matter for me, Master Wharton, and one that must be set right. You will appreciate, I am sure, how very awkward it is for me to have a number of schoolboys come here, all of whom know me so well."

"That means that you're up to some rascally game in this neighbourhood, and are afraid of being shown up," said the captain of the Greyfriars Remove contemptuously.

"No doubt that was an easy one for you to guess," said Soames, with a nod. "I am, as you say, up to something, and I do not choose to run risks. From what I have heard, you lads have been asked to spend the Easter holidays at Eastcliff Lodge, by Sir William Bird, the proprietor."

"That is so."

"I have seen Sir William," continued Soames. "A venerable old sportsman, with silvery hair. You might enjoy more youthful company in some other quarter."

"Oh, Sir William's a jolly old bean!" said Bob. "He looks about seventy, but he skips about like a kid. We're having quite a good time here, Soames—if that's what's worrying you."

"You might have a better time elsewhere," said Soames. "You have many places to choose from—your own homes, or those of your many friends at Greyfriars. Master Herbert, I am sure, would welcome you—or Lord Mauleverer—and many others."

"You mean that you want us to go, you cheeky cad!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I was about to suggest it!" assented Soames.

"Then you can save your breath."

"Sorry you've been troubled, as they say at the telephone exchange," grinned Bob. "But we're not going, Soames! Forget it!"

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh, who was in the rear of the rest of the party, lowest down on the ledge, stood with his dark eyes fixed on the smooth face above, and slowly, and almost imperceptibly, slipped his right hand into his jacket pocket.

In that pocket was an apple. The Indian junior's dusky fingers closed hard on that apple—the only missile available. But he did not withdraw his hand from the pocket yet. He stood watching Soames.

"Let us talk sense!" said Soames. "I have been waiting and watching for days for an opportunity such as this. I shall be sorry, as I have said, to harm you. But you must go! I do not choose to have you in this vicinity. I can trust your word, if you give it. Will you take your leave of Sir William Bird, and leave Eastcliff Lodge in the morning—and pass the remainder of your school holidays elsewhere?"

"And leave you to get on with your rascality, whatever it is!" exclaimed

Harry Wharton. "What is your game here, you villain?"

"I am afraid I cannot confide that to you, Master Wharton. But I will tell you this much—I have obtained a situation with a very good master, who is completely satisfied with me, and whom I do not desire to quit."

"I could guess that much," answered Harry. "Have you told your new employer that your name is Soames?"

"I have not mentioned that trifling circumstance, Master Wharton."

"Have you told him that you were a mutineer and freebooter in the South Seas?"

Soames grinned.

"I hardly think, Master Wharton, that I should have obtained my present situation had I done so," he answered.

"Have you told him that when you were Mr. Vernon-Smith's valet you deceived and robbed your master, and that you are up to the same game now?" exclaimed Wharton.

"No; I cannot remember referring to such matters!" grinned Soames.

"But let us be clear. If a valet feathers his nest, it is the way of valets—and no business of yours. I have other work on hand—perhaps in some respects a little questionable, yet of a patriotic nature—"

"You—patriotic!" ejaculated Wharton.

"Why not?" said Soames. "We are all in the same boat in these war days, rogues and all, and if I can give the enemy a dig I will give him the hardest dig I am able to give. It is in my power to do so—if I am not meddled with and compelled to leave this quarter in flight."

"Gammon!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"I scarcely expect you to believe me, yet it is true," said Soames. "You may take my word, or leave it. In any case, you are going—and at once! Your answer?"

"We refuse!" said Harry Wharton curtly.

Soames made a gesture with the chalk rock in his hands.

"Think again!" he suggested. "I was always a man for mild measures, yet I can deal with a heavy hand with those who get in my way, as you will surely remember from those South Sea days."

"Do you think you can frighten us away?" roared Johnny Bull.

"I trust so, Master Bull. The alternative is to hurl you from that ledge, to death on the beach! Take your choice!"

The juniors gazed fixedly at the man above.

They could hardly believe that he would carry out so deadly a threat. Yet, if there was much at stake, they knew that the one-time freebooter of the Pacific would not hesitate.

"Think!" said Soames, smoothly and quietly. "I will tell you this much—there is a fortune at stake—not my master's—do not misjudge me, I beg—but money that will be used for the enemy if it does not fall into my hands. I cannot afford to let you betray me!"

"If you have any knowledge of any-

thing of the kind, it is your duty to go to the police at once!" said Harry.

Soames laughed.

"The police and I have never been friends," he answered, "and it is my intention to feather my own nest—at Herr Hitler's expense. You will do more good than harm by leaving me to it. Will you go?"

"No!"

Soames' lips set hard.

"I will give you two minutes to reconsider," he said. "If, after the lapse of two minutes, you do not give me your word of honour to leave this district, and not return to it, I shall hurl this rock down the ledge, and you will be swept away to death. It is for you to choose."

He lifted the heavy rock in both hands above his head.

As he poised it in the air, Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh's hand came suddenly out of his pocket. With the same motion of his arm, he hurled the apple up at the threatening face above. His aim was unerring, and the shot was so sudden that Soames had no chance of guarding against it.

Crash!

The whizzing apple struck full in the sleek face, and Soames went over backwards as if a bullet had struck him.

He crashed down on his back on the jutting plateau, the chalk rock in his hands falling on his own knees. He disappeared from the sight of the juniors below, only his feet being visible as he sprawled.

"Oh!" gasped Harry Wharton & Co. together.

The Co. were taken as much by surprise as Soames by the nabob's sudden action.

"Hook it, my esteemed chums!" panted Hurree Singh. "Quick—terrifically quick!"

The juniors did not need telling twice. They had a few moments before Soames could scramble up. In wild haste they scrambled down the slanting ledge and round the curve of the path below, where bulging rock protected them from missiles from above. High over their heads, they heard the voice of the one-time sea-lawyer in a howl of pain and rage.

A NARROW ESCAPE!

"O H crikey!" gasped Billy Bunter.

The fat Owl of the Remove gazed up from the beach, his eyes almost bulging through his spectacles.

He saw the man on the high, jutting plateau scramble to his feet, the sleek face distorted with rage. There was a drip of red from Soames' nose. He had had a terribly hard knock on that feature. Soames' nose felt, indeed, as if it had been driven through his head like a nail!

Scrambling up, panting, he dashed a trickle of crimson away with the back of his hand and glared down the cliff path.

But the juniors were out of his sight.

Once round the curve, they were safe from him. The lower path wound down an embayment of the high chalk cliff, and jutting rock bulged between them and the man above.

Bunter, watching, saw Soames make a stride, as if intending to follow the juniors down the narrow path. But that step, dictated by rage, was checked at once.

On the lower edge, the juniors were descending at reckless speed—scrambling, jumping, clambering, to get down to the beach. The ascent had taken them half an hour, but the descent was much more rapid work. They seemed, to Bunter's watching eyes, to come down the cliff in a flash.

Soames stood panting, and clawing at his crimson-dripping nose. The nabob's sudden and unexpected action had defeated him, and it was useless—or, rather, worse than useless—to pursue the schoolboys. He had no chance against the five in a struggle.

A moment's reflection was enough for the cool-headed sea-lawyer. The schoolboys had escaped, and if Soames himself was going to escape now, he had no time to lose.

Bunter watched him turn and begin to climb the upper cliff. He ascended it rapidly to the summit.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

One by one, the Famous Five jumped clear of the cliff and landed in the sand. In a breathless group, they stared up.

"There he is!" panted Bob Cherry, pointing.

Soames, clambering fast, had almost reached the summit by the time Harry Wharton & Co. jumped clear at the base of the cliff.

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter came plugging towards them through the thick sand. "I say—Oh crikey! Why didn't you come back when I called to you, you silly asses? He nearly had you!"

"We didn't hear you, fathead!" said Bob.

"Well, you saw me, I suppose?" said Bunter. "What did you think I was waving for?"

"Thought you'd gone cracked, old fat bean!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"By gum, we're well out of that!" said Nugent, with a deep breath. "Do you fellows think he would have chucked that rock?"

"I'm not sure," said Harry slowly. "I think he would, unless we'd agreed to clear off. Inky, old man, you pulled us through!"

"Good old Inky!" said Bob, giving the Nabob of Bhanipur a smack on the shoulder. "Frightfully obliged to you, old black bean!"

"Ow!" howled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the row?" asked Bob.

"Wow! The obligefulness may be terrific, but there is no need to dislocate my idiotic shoulder!" gasped the nabob.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Come on!" said Harry Wharton, his eyes on the clambering figure high above. "We've got a chance of

getting that scoundrel, if we hurry up the gully!"

"I say—" howled Bunter.

"Yes, come on!" exclaimed Bob. And the Famous Five started at a run along the base of the cliffs to reach the gully that led up to Eastcliff Lodge.

Soames was near the top of the cliff. But at the top the climb was almost sheer, and he had to clamber up hand-over-hand. There was a chance of getting him if the juniors lost no time.

"Hold on a minute!" yelled Bunter, plugging breathlessly after the Famous Five as they ran. "I say, Wharton—"

Harry Wharton paused for a moment and looked back.

"What is it?" he exclaimed impatiently. "We've got to get after that rotter! What—"

"Oooogh!" gasped Bunter. "I'm out of breath! I say—"

"Quick!"

"Have you got any more toffee?"

"What?" yelled the captain of the Remove.

"Toffee! I've finished that packet—"

"You howling idiot!"

Wharton turned again and rushed after his friends.

Billy Bunter was left blinking after him in great indignation.

"Well, I'm blessed!" ejaculated Bunter. "Of all the beasts! He jolly well knows I've got nothing to eat! A fat lot he cares! Beast!"

Heartlessly regardless of the fact that Bunter had nothing to eat, Harry Wharton tore on, and overtook his chums in the gully.

The gully was steep, but the Famous Five ascended it rapidly. Soames had time to clamber over the summit of the cliff before they could reach the road that ran above. But they hoped that he would still be in sight when they reached it.

In hot haste they clambered up the steep gully, and came out at last on the road which ran along the cliffs, bordered on the other side by the fences and hedges of Eastcliff Lodge.

They stared round them eagerly.

On either hand ran the long white road, gleaming in the sunshine of April. But no one was to be seen on it. They could see to a great distance in either direction, but they could not see Soames.

Evidently he had clambered over the cliff-top while they were ascending the gully. But it seemed almost impossible that he could have got out of sight since. Yet he was not to be seen.

"Gone!" said Bob.

"He can't be gone!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "He couldn't have got out of sight in the time, if he ran like a hare. He must have dodged into the grounds across the road."

"By gum! If he has, we'll root him out!"

A white-painted gate opened from the road into the avenue that led up, through the extensive grounds, to the mansion of Sir William Bird.

Harry Wharton ran to it, his comrades at his heels. It seemed certain

to him that Soames must have dodged out of sight into the grounds of Eastcliff Lodge.

"Oh, look!" exclaimed Nugent, as Wharton grasped the gate to throw it open. He pointed to a blotch of dull red on the white paint.

"That does it!" exclaimed Bob. "That's from Soames' boko—you tapped the claret with that apple, Inky. He went this way!"

That tell-tale stain on the gate was unmistakable. Soames, evidently, had stained his fingers with red in dabbing his streaming nose, and where he had grasped the top bar of the gate to fling it open he had left that clue. There was no doubt now which way he had gone.

"Come on!" panted Wharton.

The juniors ran in, the gate swinging shut behind them. Soames was either in hiding among the trees and bushes or he had cut across the estate to escape on the other side. At all events, that much seemed certain to the Famous Five, and they scattered in the grounds, searching high and low for traces of the fugitive.

"Here!" yelled Bob Cherry suddenly.

"Seen him?"

"No! But look here!"

Bob had stopped on a path which led round the mansion, through a little fir wood. His comrades ran to join him.

It was a well-worn path, used by the servants of Eastcliff Lodge, of whom there were a dozen or more. It led to the servants' door at the side of the house.

Chalk cropped out of the soil, gleaming white in the sunshine. Bob was pointing to a dull red blotch on the chalk in the path.

"Another jolly old clue!" he grinned. "He was running, and slipped on the chalk—what?—and scattered these giddy dewdrops. Soames' boko was going strong."

"Looks like it!" exclaimed Wharton breathlessly. "Come on! If he kept on by this path, he must have passed the servants' door, and someone may have seen him."

The juniors pushed on, certain now that Soames had passed that way. In a few minutes they came in sight of the servants' door. It was open, and a portly figure stood in the doorway, glancing out.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! That's Blump!" exclaimed Bob. "He may have seen him—"

They ran on.

The butler of Eastcliff Lodge eyed them as they came up breathlessly.

"Have you seen anyone pass, Blump?" called out Harry Wharton.

"Only Jermyn, sir."

"Jermyn?"

"Sir William's valet! He came in a few minutes ago! I have seen no one else, sir!" answered Blump.

"He must have cut back through the firs—perhaps he saw Jermyn or Blump about!" said Bob. "Let's try back!"

And the Famous Five cut back to the fir wood.

But they did not find Soames there.

THE SCHOOLBOY ACTOR!

WIBLEY yawned. William Wibley, the schoolboy actor of the Greyfriars Remove, was enjoying life at Eastcliff Lodge in the holidays.

At the moment, however; Wibley was rather bored.

Wibley was seated on an ottoman in Sir William Bird's room, under a big window. From that window he had an extensive view of land and sea—the gardens and woodlands of the estate, the white road that ran along the cliffs, the blue sea stretching far beyond the cliffs.

A "Holiday Annual" lay on his

They had been a little surprised when Sir William asked them to the Lodge for Easter; but they never dreamed of suspecting that Sir William was a fellow they knew well in their Form at Greyfriars!

Only Billy Bunter had nosed it out; and Bunter was keeping the secret—though he had been on the verge of letting it out about twenty times a day since the Easter holidays had started.

Wibley yawned—and yawned again—and then touched a bell. A communicating door on the other side of the room opened and the baronet's man stepped in.

His eyes narrowed and hardened as he glanced at his reflection in the glass.

Wibley grinned.

Sir William's valet was smooth and sleek, and seemed to Wibley rather more like a machine than a man. But the look on his face, for a moment, showed that he had a temper. It was only for a moment; but that moment revealed that Jermyn was deeply and intensely exasperated by the damage to his nose.

But his sleek face was almost expressionless, as usual, as he turned to the schoolboy actor again.



"Listen, fool!" hissed Soames into Bunter's fat ear. "You are not wanted here! You leave Eastcliff Lodge in the morning! Do you understand?"

knees. Wibley had finished reading that attractive publication. Now he was bored.

Near him stood a tall pier-glass, and whenever Wibley glanced at his reflection in it he grinned.

Wibley's nearest and dearest relation would never have recognised that reflection as William Wibley's.

The glass reflected a silver-haired, silver-bearded man of about sixty-five, with a gold-rimmed eyeglass stuck in one eye.

But it was Wibley's reflection, all the same—though any member of the numerous household staff at Eastcliff Lodge would have said that the glass reflected Sir William Bird, the lord of the manor.

Only Jermyn, the baronet's man, of all the staff, knew that the schoolboy actor was playing the part of the little old baronet.

Harry Wharton & Co. had no suspicion of it.

Wibley glanced at Jermyn's smooth, sleek face and gave a little start.

"Had an accident, Jermyn?" he asked.

Jermyn passed a smooth hand across his nose. That nose, which was well-shaped in its normal state, looked rather damaged. It was red, almost flaming—it was a little swollen, and had evidently been bleeding recently.

"A slight accident, sir!" said Jermyn apologetically. "I slipped on the stair coming up, Sir William, and unfortunately knocked my nose."

"That's the second time you've taken a tumble on the stairs," said Wibley. "You landed yourself with a crooked leg first time—now you've crooked your boko. It doesn't improve your beauty, Jermyn."

"I fear not, sir!" murmured Jermyn.

"You rang, Sir William?" he said. "Yes! What's up, Jermyn?" asked Wibley.

"Up, sir?" repeated Jermyn. "I do not quite follow, sir."

Wibley made a gesture towards the window.

"Take a squint out!" he said. "My Greyfriars pals have been scudding about like a lot of rabbits! They seem to be looking for something or somebody. Know what it is?"

"No, sir; I had not observed them," said Jermyn. He did not approach the window. "I have, in fact, been attending to the damage to my nose for some little time since I fell on the stairs—"

"Well, cut down and ask them what they're hunting for."

Jermyn coughed.

"If you will excuse me, Sir William, I would rather not let the
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young gentlemen see me in this disfigured state," he murmured.

"What the dickens does that matter?" asked Wibley, staring at him. "You're fearfully particular, Jermyn. You kept your room for about a week when you crooked your leg—do you want to keep it for another week, now you've banged your beezers?"

"Oh! No, sir! But—"

"My friends haven't seen you yet," said Wibley. "You've been playing the shy violet ever since they've been here."

"The young gentlemen, sir, would hardly notice whether they have seen your valet or not!" said Jermyn. "If you will allow me, sir, I will ring for John and send him to inquire—"

"Just as you like!" yawned Wibley. "But never mind—I think I'll go down. I'm getting a bit bored, Jermyn."

"Indeed, sir."

"It's no end of a lark, really, taking Sir William's place here," said the schoolboy actor of Greyfriars. "And it's useful to him, too—and he's such a jolly good old bean, that I'm glad to oblige him. But—" Wibley yawned again. "It isn't all lavender, playing the part of a venerable old bean. I have to take a nap in the afternoon, because Sir William did! I've got to keep up his jolly old customs. So I squat here and read—but I'd rather have gone down on the beach with my pals."

"I am afraid, sir, that too much activity on your part may lead to some suspicion—" murmured Jermyn.

"Yes—I've got to be careful!" yawned Wibley. "I've astonished the chaps more than once by cutting about as if I was a fellow no older than themselves. Really, I might as well tell them the secret—Bunter knows already! Only Sir William made me promise not to let a single soul into it—he never knew that that fat ass had nosed it out, of course. And a promise is a promise."

"Quite, sir!" murmured Jermyn. "And as Sir William has gone on a dangerous mission in connection with the Secret Service, the secret cannot be too carefully kept. There can be no doubt that this place is watched, and if they discovered that Sir William was gone—"

"They won't!" said Wibley. "Trust me for that! I'm keeping up this game till I hear from the old Bird! The place is watched all right—that man who called himself Brown, whom we rooted out in the chalk cave the other day, is a spy on the watch to see whether Sir William stays or goes—I've not the slightest doubt about that."

"In the circumstances, sir, it would surely be safer not to have your school friends on the spot—"

Wibley raised his hand.

"Cut that out, Jermyn," he said. "We've been through all that before. I want my friends here."

"Quite so, sir; but when it is a question, perhaps, of Sir William's personal safety on his mission—"

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"Sir William asked them here for me—and he knows his own business best," answered Wibley. "Even if my pals spotted anything, they'd keep it dark—even that fat ass Bunter has sense enough to keep it dark. And nobody in the house, from Blump down to the between-maids, has the faintest idea that I'm not the genuine old Bird!"

Wibley glanced again at the silver-haired reflection in the glass, with complacent satisfaction.

"It's a bit of a bore at times, keeping it up," he went on, "but it would surprise the whole household rather too much if Sir William took to cliff-climbing stunts, and so on, at his venerable age! The fellows rather opened their eyes when they saw how the old bean could sprint, and how he could keep it up at tennis," Wibley chuckled. "Well, I think I'll go down now, Jermyn—and you can go and nurse that boko of yours. I'm rather curious to see what those chaps are up to."

"Very good, sir!" murmured Jermyn.

Wibley stood before the glass, taking a careful survey of his get-up, as he always did before appearing in public. Wibley played the part of old Sir William Bird almost as if he had actually been Sir William himself, and he gave careful attention to every detail of his disguise.

Jermyn went back to his own doorway, with his soft tread. He had just reached it when there was a tap at Sir William's door on the passage.

"Come in!" called out Wibley.

Jermyn stepped swiftly into the valet's room and closed the door—and it had hardly closed when Sir William's door opened and Harry Wharton stepped into the baronet's room.

THE MAN IN THE GAS-MASK!

"TRICKLE in!" said Wibley. But he remembered the next moment that he was not in the Remove passage at Greyfriars. "Come in, my young friend!" he went on hastily. "I trust you have had a pleasant afternoon on the beach."

"Fine, thanks!" said Harry.

"We've been climbing the cliff—" "Happy youth!" sighed Wibley. "There was a time, my young friend, when I should have enjoyed climbing the cliffs down there myself!"

Wibley did not add that the time was no longer ago than that very afternoon.

"I hope I have not disturbed you, sir."

"Not at all, Wharton—not at all! I had finished my—hem—afternoon repose, and was about to come down," said Sir William. "In fact, I have been looking from the window, and I noticed that you and your friends seemed rather busy. Anything up—I mean, has there been any occurrence of an unusual nature?"

"We've been hunting for Soames, Sir William," said Harry.

"Soames?"

"You remember we told you about him—the man who was valet once to a Greyfriars fellow's father and

turned out a desperate rascal," said the captain of the Remove. "We caught him in this house one night—"

"Quite so—quite so," said Sir William. "I cannot imagine why he entered the house—nothing, certainly, was missing afterwards. Do you mean that you have now seen him again?"

Harry Wharton explained hastily what had happened on the shore.

Wibley suppressed a whistle as he listened.

He knew more about Soames than Wharton supposed, for, though he had never seen Mr. Vernon-Smith's valet at the time that the Famous Five had known the man, he had heard a good deal about their adventures on a South Sea cruise, as all the Remove fellows had. All the Remove knew how Smithy's father's valet had turned out to be a rogue.

But why Soames was hanging about the vicinity of Eastcliff Lodge, and why he had actually entered the building on one or two occasions, Wibley knew no more than Harry Wharton & Co. did.

"This had better be reported to the police, my young friend," said Sir William. "Whether the rascal intended to carry out his threat on the cliff or not, he is a dangerous character, and must be looked for. I will get the police station at Broadstairs on the telephone."

"We're certain he dodged into the grounds here," said Harry, "and I think your man Jermyn may have seen him, Sir William!"

"Jermyn. He is in his room!" said Wibley.

"Blump told us he had come in," explained Harry, "and he must have been somewhere about the spot when Soames was dodging round the house to get away. We found trace of Soames on the path to the servants' door. Jermyn wouldn't know him by sight, of course, but if he saw anyone in the grounds it might help. There's plenty of cover, and he may be in hiding waiting for a chance to dodge away, and if Jermyn happened to see him, and the way he went—"

"I'll ask Jermyn at once!"

Wibley touched the bell.

It was only a few minutes since Jermyn had gone back to his room, so there was no doubt that he was there, and that he heard the bell. But the communicating-door did not open so promptly as was usual when Sir William rang for his valet.

"How long ago is it since Blump told you that Jermyn came in?" asked Sir William.

"About a quarter of an hour, sir."

"Then there's a chance yet! He could only just have got in when I rang for him a little while ago. If he saw the man—Jermyn!" called out Sir William.

The silver-haired little baronet stepped to the communicating-door, as it did not open, and turned the handle.

He opened the door and called into the valet's room.

"Jermyn! Didn't you hear the bell? What—"

"Pray excuse me, sir," came

muffled voice. "I am having a little difficulty with this gas-mask—"

"Oh, my only hat and umbrella!" ejaculated Wibley, forgetting for a moment that he was Sir William Bird, as he stared at the valet. "What the thump are you putting a gas-mask on for now?"

Jermyn was standing in the room, a gas-mask obliterating his face. His hands were fumbling with the fastenings. His voice came muffled and partly indistinct as he answered.

"I make it a rule, sir, to practise gas-mask drill daily! One cannot be too careful, sir, in view—"

"Well, take it off now and come here—one of my young friends wishes to ask you something," said Sir William.

"Unfortunately, sir, the strings seem to have become entangled and knotted, and I cannot remove it for the moment," mumbled the voice from the interior of the gas-mask.

"Oh, my summer sunshade! You seem to be rather a clumsy ass, Jermyn—tumbling about staircases, and getting yourself tied up in a gas-mask. Come as you are—it doesn't matter!"

"Very good, Sir William!"

Harry Wharton looked at the valet as he came in. Neither he nor his friends had seen Jermyn, so far, though they had been more than a week at Eastcliff Lodge. And he did not see him now, so far as his face went. He smiled faintly at the sight of the gas-masked manservant.

"Here's Jermyn," said Sir William. "Jermyn, this is Master Wharton! Carry on, old thing—hem—my young friend!"

"I'm sorry to bother you, Jermyn, when you're tangled up like that," said Harry, smiling, "but I heard from the butler that you'd come in at the time when a man we're looking for must have been dodging very near the door you came in by. Did you see any stranger in the grounds while you were out?"

The gas-masked head was shaken.

"No, sir!" came the muffled voice. "I do not remember having seen anyone in the grounds, Master Wharton."

"You're sure?" asked Harry. "From what Blump said, you must have been on the spot at the very time Soames was dodging round the house! You're quite sure you saw no one at all?"

"I am sorry, sir—quite!"

"Oh, all right, then!"

Harry turned back to the door, but his eyes lingered a little on Jermyn as he did so. He could not make out the man's face, screened by the absurd-looking mask; but he had a feeling of something familiar about the man.

"That does it!" said Wibley. "Hem! I mean, it is rather unfortunate that Jermyn saw nothing of him. Let's go and have a look for the blighter—I'll trot round with you, old bean—hem!—my young friend."

Sir William departed with Harry Wharton—with a very brisk step for an old bean of his venerable age. Wibley was very keen to join in the hunt for Soames.

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Jermyn was left alone, breathing hard under the gas-mask.

He went back into his own room and shut the door. Then he removed the gas-mask from his face, apparently finding no difficulty, after all, with the fastenings.

His sleek face, with its swollen red nose, was hard and set as it was revealed, and there was a glitter in his eyes. He breathed hard and deep, and wiped a spot of perspiration from his forehead.

"This cannot go on!" he muttered between his closed lips. "The danger is too great—suspicion must arise—only the gas-mask saved me—and on another occasion—" Jermyn gritted his teeth. "What confounded luck, that they should come here—here, of all places! They must go—and yet, I shall never have such a chance again—"

Sir William's valet paced his room, with set lips and glinting eyes. He had a problem to think out—and not an easy one. Had Harry Wharton seen Jermyn then, after the gas-mask was off, he would have known that he had not very far to look for Soames!

MR. BROWN AGAIN!

"FOR me, I expect!" said Billy Bunter.

"One of your titled relations wiring you tons of money?" asked Bob Cherry.

And the Co. grinned.

"Yah!" snorted Bunter.

It was a couple of days since the adventure on the cliffs.

Harry Wharton & Co., that golden April afternoon, were not thinking about Soames. They had started out to walk to the North Foreland, and have a look at the lighthouse.

Bunter had rolled out with them.

That was why they were now taking a rest.

The length of the avenue at Eastcliff Lodge was really enough for Bunter when he went on a walk. So, when they were a couple of hundred yards from the gate, Bunter had had more than enough.

So Bunter proposed a rest, and settled the matter by sitting down on a grassy bank by the roadside, under the shade of a clump of trees. Nobody was in a hurry, so the Famous Five sat down also, to let the fat Owl of the Remove have his rest—Johnny Bull stating, in emphatic tones, however, that in ten minutes he was going on, Bunter or no Bunter.

Sitting in a row on the grassy bank in the shade, the schoolboys noticed a boy on a bike who came along from the direction of the little village of Eastcliff.

They knew the boy from the local post office by sight; and as he was evidently heading for Eastcliff Lodge, and as he had, moreover, a buff envelope in one hand, they easily deduced that he was taking a telegram to Sir William's mansion.

"I expect it's for me!" said Bunter. "Better call out to him when he comes up! I asked Mauly to wire."

"Mauly!" repeated Bob.

"I've written to Lord Mauleverer!" said Bunter, with dignity "I'm not so jolly keen on stopping here, with that beast Soames hanging about. I've told Mauly that I can let him have a week in the hols, and to wire if it's all right! So I expect that's from Mauly."

At which the Famous Five chuckled.

At Greyfriars, before breaking-up, Lord Mauleverer of the Remove had had several narrow escapes of getting Bunter for the holidays. Indeed, he might not have escaped at all, had not the fat Owl succeeded in planting himself out at Eastcliff Lodge for the vacation.

But, as he had escaped, the Famous Five did not think it likely that he had wired Bunter to come along to Mauleverer Towers! Bunter seemed to think it probable, but to the Co. it seemed highly improbable.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" grunted Bunter. "I expect Mauly will be glad to have me! 'Tain't as if I was a bore like you, Wharton—"

"Thanks!"

"Or a hippopotamus barging about the place like you, Cherry—"

"Thanks!"

"Or a blinking nigger like you, Inky—"

"The thankfulness is terrific."

"Or a grunting grampus like you, Bull—"

"You fat owl!"

"Or a moony milksop like you, Nugent—"

"Go it!" said Frank.

"I mean to say, I'm the sort of chap that makes a party a success!" said Bunter. "I'm in my element at a show like Mauleverer Towers. I mean, I'm accustomed to things on a big scale—at Bunter Court, you know. It stands to reason that Mauly will like to let people know he's got a friend like me at school! It does him credit, you know, with his own people. Fellows always like to take home a creditable sort of pal from school—it gives them a leg-up with the servants, and that sort of thing. See?"

"Oh crikey!"

"You'll see," said Bunter. "That kid will be along here in a minute or two, and I'll call to him to stop. Bet you that telegram's for me, from Mauly! If it is, I shall cut it short here! You'll have to get on the best you can without me, that's all!"

"Oh! How shall we manage that?" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"The howfulness is preposterous."

"Well, if that telegram's from Mauly, as I'm sure it is, I'm not sticking on here—you can't expect it!" declared Bunter. "I think—"

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

He fairly bounded up from the grassy bank.

"Great pip!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

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

But nobody heeded Bunter. The Famous Five were staring up the road, towards the approaching

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cyclist. He was within thirty yards of the spot, when a figure suddenly leaped from the ledge, rushed at him, and grabbed his bicycle.

The machine rocked, and the post office boy tumbled off the saddle, barely contriving to land on his feet.

Harry Wharton & Co. stared blankly at that sudden and startling scene! Then, as Wharton glimpsed the face of the man who had rushed out of the hedge, he gave a shout:

"Brown!"

It was a man of stocky build, with a stubby nose, thick, blond eyebrows, and light blue eyes. It was the man the juniors had caught in the chalk cave a week ago who had given his name as Brown—though on his looks they had a suspicion that it ought to have been spelt "Braun."

"By gum—that blighter!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

What the man's object was in rushing suddenly on the post office boy and upsetting his bicycle, the juniors could not guess—for a moment. But the next moment they saw him grasp the astonished lad, and wrench the buff envelope from his hand.

Evidently that was what he was after, and he had waylaid the post office lad in that lonely spot for the purpose. Probably he had seen him start from the village post office, and cut across the fields to wait in the road for him when he came along on the bicycle. But for the chance that the Greyfriars fellows had stopped on the grassy bank, at a little distance, no eyes would have fallen on him—it was a lonely road by the sea.

But the juniors had seen him, and they were already running for the spot.

Billy Bunter heaved himself to his feet, and blinked after them through his big spectacles.

"I say, you fellows!" he howled.

They tore on unheeding.

The post office boy, astonished as he was by the sudden attack, made a rush at the man who had grabbed the telegram, and caught him by the sleeve.

The blonde-browed man turned on him with a snarl.

He wrenched at his arm, but the boy clung on; and the juniors, as they ran, saw the man deal a savage blow that caught the lad on the chest and sent him spinning.

Then Mr. Brown—as he had called himself—turned, to cut back to the hedge from which he had so suddenly appeared.

Not till then did he see the Greyfriars juniors, his attention having been concentrated on the post office boy and the telegram.

Bob Cherry had almost reached him; running like the wind, ahead of his comrades.

"Ach!" gasped the stubby-nosed man—an exclamation which certainly indicated that his name was more likely Braun than Brown.

He jumped away as Bob rushed at him, but he did not jump fast enough! Bob reached him, and hit out as he reached him; and it was

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Mr. Brown's turn to spin over under a thump on the chest.

He went rolling in the chalky dust of the road, with a loud yell.

Bob pounced on him as he sprawled, and tore the buff envelope from his hand.

Mr. Brown bounded to his feet.

His light blue eyes blazed fury, and he made a spring towards Bob. But the other four fellows were almost on him by then, and he changed his mind, backed away, and leaped through the hedge.

Bob waved the telegram in triumph.

"Got it!" he exclaimed. "O.K.! I've got it!"

Harry Wharton ran to the gap in the hedge, through which Mr. Brown had disappeared. He had a glimpse of a bowler hat vanishing across the field, but only for a second! Mr. Brown was hitting the open spaces like a deer.

The captain of the Remove turned back to his friends.

Frank Nugent was giving the dizzy post office boy a hand up, while Johnny Bull picked up the bicycle.

"Ooooooh!" gasped the boy from the village. "Oooooh! You got the telegram, sir?"

"Here it is, kid!"

Bob handed it back to the boy.

"Thank you, sir! Fancy him having the cheek to pinch a telegram for Sir William!"

"You're going to Eastcliff Lodge?" asked Harry.

"Yessir. Telegram for Sir William Bird."

"We'll walk with you as far as the gate, then," said the captain of the Remove. "That sweep might turn up again when we're gone."

"Thank you kindly, sir."

The post office boy, with the telegram in one hand, wheeled on his bike with the other, the Famous Five walking with him.

Mr. Brown had disappeared over the landscape; but it was clearly judicious to see the messenger safe as far as Sir William's residence with that telegram. The man who was watching Eastcliff Lodge was no doubt deeply interested in any telegrams that Sir William Bird might receive; and as the juniors knew that the old baronet was in the Secret Service, it was quite possible that that telegram might be official and important.

"I say, you fellows," squeaked Bunter, as they came up to the spot where the fat Owl had been left. "I say, that's for me! Give me my telegram, will you?"

"It's for the old bean, fathead!" said Bob.

"Rot! It's for me from Mauly—I was expecting it, as I told you! Look here, ain't that wire for me?" demanded Bunter.

The boy from the village grinned.

"Not unless you're Sir William Bird, sir!" he answered. "This 'ere is for Sir William at the Lodge, sir."

Snort from Bunter! Mauly, it seemed, had failed, after all, to send that wire!

"Forgetful ass!" grunted Bunter. "Just like Mauly to forget! Silly

idiot! I shall have to write to him again, I suppose. I don't see what you fellows are cackling at."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Yah!" snorted Bunter. "I'd better look at it and make sure!"

The village lad obligingly held up the buff envelope, and Bunter blinked at it through his spectacles.

But any number of blinks could not change the name on the envelope to "W. G. Bunter." The fat Owl grunted again.

"Well, that's for the old Bird, I suppose! I say, you fellows, if it's for the old Bird, think Wibley can open it?"

"Wibley?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. He had nearly done it again. "I—I mean—that is, I don't mean—I mean I don't mean—"

"Have you got Wibley on the brain again?" asked Bob, staring at the fat owl.

"Yes—I mean, no! I—I mean—"

But the post office boy and the Famous Five walked on, without lingering to learn what Billy Bunter meant—if he meant anything.

The boy with the telegram was seen safely to the gate, and then the juniors returned to Bunter, and the walk to the North Foreland was resumed. On the way, the Famous Five kept their eyes open for a man with a stubby nose and blonde eyebrows—but they saw no more of Mr. Brown.

UNEXPECTED!

"OH! My only hat and umbrella!"

Blump almost jumped.

The portly butler of Eastcliff Lodge had entered the library with his discreet, though ponderous tread, a silver salver in his plump hands, and on the salver a telegram for Sir William Bird.

The silver-haired little gentleman in the armchair by the fire took the telegram, and Blump waited respectfully while he opened it, to ascertain whether an answer was required.

Wibley—in his part as Sir William Bird—was entitled to open letters and telegrams addressed to the lord of Eastcliff Lodge. It was part of the arrangement that the genuine Sir William, if he had occasion to communicate with his substitute, would address him under that name.

Wib, when he saw the telegram, had no doubt that it was from Sir William. He slit the envelope and took out the telegram and glanced at it—and its contents seemed to startle him. His involuntary ejaculation startled Blump in his turn.

Sir William—in his former state—had never been given to such ejaculations as that.

"What the jolly old dickens—" went on Wibley.

Then he cut off and coughed as he caught the surprised gaze of the butler. His pink face became a little pinker.

"No answer, Blump!" he rapped.

"Very good, Sir William!"

Blump conveyed himself and his

silver salver out of the library. The door closed behind both.

Then Wibley stared at the telegram again. His bushy, silvery eyebrows—which all the household believed grew where they were gummed—knitted.

Wibley was not pleased. He was surprised, and disconcerted, and distinctly displeased.

The telegram ran:

"Jermyn has instructions. Please see them carried out to the very letter.—Avis."

Wibley frowned. That telegram was from Sir William Bird—it did not cross Wibley's mind to doubt that.

"Avis"—the Latin for "Bird"—was the agreed signature on any communication from Sir William, who could not, of course, use his own name on a telegram addressed to himself at his own residence.

Only Sir William, Jermyn, and Wibley knew that little secret. No one else could have signed a telegram "Avis."

Wibley, therefore, did not doubt for a moment that that telegram was from Sir William Bird, as it bore the agreed code signature.

But he was far from pleased.

Jermyn was in his master's confidence. He knew the whole game, and was helping Wibley keep up his part. He was a useful and deferential valet, and Wibley had no fault to find with him. But Wib did not want to receive instructions from Jermyn—he did not relish being placed under the valet's orders!

Wib was playing his part well, if not to perfection. Except for an occasional little slip, which, after all, did not excite suspicion, he was Sir William Bird to the life.

If Eastcliff Lodge was watched by Mr. Brown or his associates, the spies were satisfied that Sir William was still at home, and thrown completely off the real track. It was all rather a lark to the schoolboy actor; but there was no doubt that he was doing the old baronet a very real service, engaged as Sir William was on a secret and perilous mission.

This looked like finding fault.

Jermyn had been absent from Eastcliff Lodge the previous day. He had left early, before anyone else was up; he had returned late, after everyone else had gone to bed. He had told Wibley that he had seen Sir William in London.

That rather surprised Wibley—for he had understood that the old baronet had already gone abroad on a secret mission in connection with the war. But it seemed after all that he had not yet left London.

That, of course, was no concern of Wibley's. But if Sir William Bird had given Jermyn instructions, and placed him under the direction of the valet, that did concern him. He did not like it.

Wibley could not help feeling sore.

However, after a little disgruntled reflection on the subject, he touched a bell and sent John to call Jermyn.

In a few minutes the silent-footed valet entered the library, closing the

door carefully after him. He crossed to where Sir William sat, with his soft tread.

"Look at that, Jermyn!" grunted Wibley.

He tossed the telegram to the valet.

Jermyn gave his little respectful cough, took the telegram, and read it.

Wibley eyed him.

"Did you expect that?" grunted Wibley.

Jermyn coughed again.

"Sir William referred to something of the kind, sir, when I saw him in town yesterday!" he answered.

"Well, I don't see it!" grunted Wibley. "The old bean could write to me direct, if he had anything to say."

"There is always a possibility, sir, of letters being intercepted, and it is an undoubted fact that the house is watched!" murmured Jermyn. "No doubt my master considered it safer to put nothing into writing."

"Well, I dare say that's so!" admitted Wibley. "But I don't see what these jolly old instructions are going to be. If the old bean isn't satisfied with me, I'm ready to chuck it up."

"Sir William expressed himself as highly satisfied, sir, and very greatly impressed by your really marvellous skill in keeping up such an impersonation," said Jermyn smoothly.

Wibley's brow cleared. Wib had never needed to ask, like the man in the old story, to be given a good conceit of himself! He had that! Remove fellows at Greyfriars admired Wibley's weird skill in theatrical stunts—but not so much as Wib himself did!

He nodded complacently.

"Well, I fancy I'm putting it over pretty well, Jermyn!" he remarked.

"Inimitably, sir!" said Jermyn.

"Well, let's get down to these old instructions!" said Wibley. "If the old bean is satisfied, I'm blessed if I see what it all means. Carry on!"

Jermyn coughed again.

"Sir William's instructions, sir, refer to the Greyfriars boys who are now staying here!" he murmured.

"How do you mean?"

"On reflection, sir, Sir William realises that the presence of schoolfellows of yours, who are so very closely acquainted with you, is an element of danger," explained Jermyn. "He would feel much more easy in his mind, sir, if they left Eastcliff Lodge."

Wibley sat upright in his chair.

"Rot!" he snapped. "The fellows have been asked here for Easter! Sir William approved; in fact, he asked them himself by letter. They've fixed up the holidays here! Does he think I can possibly let them down now?"

"No doubt, sir, they will easily find other hospitality," murmured Jermyn. "I have not seen the young gentlemen, sir, but I understand that they are very estimable and agreeable lads, and have many friends—"

"That's neither here nor there!" snapped Wibley angrily. "They've been asked here—they're here—and they're staying here so long as I do!

I can't understand a decent old bean like Sir William going back on his own word in that style. How the thump can I tell fellows I don't want them after they've been asked for the hols?"

"A polite hint, sir—"

"Rot!" snorted Wibley. "Catch me giving fellows a polite hint to clear off, after asking them for the hols! Besides, I want them here—a fellow wants a bit of company of his own age, even if he's got up as a jolly old Methuselah. Do you think I asked them because I didn't want them?"

"Hem! No, sir! But—"

"They'd cut off like a shot at the merest hint!" growled Wibley. "But that fat ass Bunter wouldn't! He landed himself here because he knew all about it—I never asked him. But I'd rather keep him under my eye, as he knows!"

Wibley rose from the armchair and paced to and fro for some minutes, angrily. Then he halted, and fixed his eyes on Jermyn.

"Look here, did you stick this into the old bean's head?" he demanded.

"I, sir?" murmured Jermyn.

"Oh, I'm no fool!" snapped Wibley. "You don't like these fellows here. Dashed if I know why, as you have nothing to do with them, and have never even seen them, so far. But you've been harping on this string all the time, trying to get me to clear them off. I've had to tell you to shut it!"

"Only from my concern for Sir William's safety, sir," murmured Jermyn. "The presence of the boys is, of course, a matter of complete indifference to me, from any other point of view."

Wibley eyed him a little suspiciously.

"I suppose you've got nothing against them!" he snapped.

"My dear sir! How could I have—"

"Well, I don't see how you could have, but it's a bit queer, the way you've kept out of their way," grunted Wibley. "And now this! You've never met any of them, and had any trouble with them?"

Jermyn breathed hard for a moment.

"Your schoolfellows, sir, are naturally complete strangers to me," he said. "Neither, I am sure, can you suppose that Sir William is a man to be influenced by his valet's opinion."

"No—that's so!" admitted Wibley. "Still, it's dashed odd the old bean changing his mind like this! I can't do it, of course. I've asked the fellows here, and here they stay."

"I trust, sir, that you will not think of disregarding Sir William's wishes?"

"You heard what I said!" grunted Wibley.

Jermyn's face hardened.

"Then, sir," said the valet, "I must draw your attention to what Sir William says in this telegram. It is not merely a matter of expressing his wishes—it is a definite order. You are directed to carry out the instructions given. You will hardly

take it upon yourself to disobey Sir William's direct command!"

Wibley breathed hard.

"I'll think it over," he said at last. "I'd never have taken this on if I'd known I was to be placed in such a position. I shall have to think it over! I think I'll take a trot out towards the North Foreland and meet the fellows coming back! Stick that telegram in the fire!"

"Very good, sir!"

Wibley, greatly disturbed and perturbed, stamped out of the library.

Jermyn dropped the telegram in the fire. Then he stood looking at the door that had closed on the schoolboy actor, a faint smile on his smooth, sleek face.

IN SOAMES' GRIP!

"I SAY, Wibley! Yaroooh!" roared Billy Bunter. Smack!

The library at Eastcliff Lodge opened on the hall.

Wibley, as he left the library, encountered Billy Bunter, who had just rolled in from the terrace.

Bunter had not gone very far on that walk to the North Foreland. Billy Bunter's idea of a walk was to punctuate it with frequent—very frequent rests—long intervals of resting between short spells of walking. Which was not exactly the Famous Five's idea of a walk!

At Bunter's second rest the Co. had walked on, heedless of indignant squeaks, and Bunter had been left on his solitary own. So the fat Owl rolled back to the house—not in a good temper. Coming on the silver-haired schoolboy actor in the hall, Bunter addressed him as "Wibley," and was promptly interrupted by Wibley's palm establishing sudden contact with a fat ear.

Bunter roared.

"Look here, you cheeky beast!" he howled. "If you think——"

"Shut up!" hissed Wibley.

Bunter rubbed his fat ear, and glared at Wibley through his big spectacles, with a devastating glare.

"Beast!" he hooted. "Look here, Wibley——"

Bunter was interrupted again. He dodged just in time to elude a second smack.

Sir William glared at him.

"Say, 'Wibley' again and I'll boot you right across the hall!" he hissed.

Billy Bunter glared defiance. He was already in a bad temper. A smack on a fat ear had not improved it.

"Wibley!" howled Bunter defiantly. "Wibley! Yah, Wibley! See! I'll say what I jolly well like, and I'll jolly well keep on saying—Yaroooh! Yarooop! Oh crikey! Wow!"

Wibley's boot landed twice as Bunter fled.

The fat Owl hurled open the library door, rushed in, and slammed it after him. He jammed his foot against the door to keep it shut if Wibley pursued—not for the moment observing that there was anyone in the apartment.

But Wibley did not pursue the fat Owl. He took his hat and went out. Wibley had a problem to think over, and he was going to worry it out while he walked to the North Foreland to meet Harry Wharton & Co.

In the library, with his foot jammed against the door, Billy Bunter gasped for breath. But the door handle did not turn.

"Beast!" breathed Bunter. "Cheeky beast! That's the sort of gratitude I get for backing him up and keeping his secret for him, blow him! I've a jolly good mind to—— Wow! Yow! Leggo!"

A sudden grasp fastening on the back of Bunter's fat neck was his first intimation that there was someone in the library.

He gave a howl of surprise and wrath, and squirmed round in the sudden grasp, blinking at the man who had grasped him.

Then he uttered a squeak of utter terror, as he stared at a smooth, sleek face, the nose still red and a little swollen from the bang it had received two or three days ago on the cliffs.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Sus-sus-us-Soames!"

His eyes almost bulged through his spectacles at Soames.

Bunter was uneasy about Soames—he dreaded to see the desperado pop up at any time, in any spot. But he had certainly never dreamed of seeing him in the library at Eastcliff Lodge in the middle of the afternoon.

But there he was, his eyes glinting at Bunter as he grasped the fat junior by the back of the neck.

"Silence!" whispered Soames.

Bunter made a grab at the door handle. Wibley's boot in the hall was better than the iron grasp of Soames in the library.

Soames jerked him out of reach of the door handle. Then, with his left hand, the sea-lawyer turned the key in the lock.

"If you utter a single cry, Master Bunter, it will be your last!" breathed Soames, in a low tone of savage menace.

"Oh crikey!" moaned Bunter.

"Come!" snarled Soames.

He marched Bunter away from the door.

The fat Owl tottered by his side, his podgy knees knocking together.

Soames pitched him into the armchair in which Sir William had been sitting only a few minutes ago.

"Not a sound!" he hissed.

Bunter collapsed in the armchair. He gazed at Soames in terror.

He was not likely to utter a cry for help—with Soames standing over him, and a locked door between him and aid.

Soames stood with his head bent a little, listening intently. Evidently, he was in fear of someone coming to the library. But there was no sound of footsteps approaching the door from the hall.

He glanced round towards the tall french windows, which opened on the garden. The windows stood open, letting in the April sunlight. In the distance a gardener could be seen, with a hoe in his hand.

Soames stepped to a Chinese screen and moved it, to shut off the view from the window.

Then he turned to Bunter again. The glint in his eyes almost froze the fat Owl's blood.

"You fat fool!" Soames' voice came low. "You must always butt in where you are not wanted. Did you know I was here?"

Bunter's look was eloquent.

"Oh crikey! Think I'd have come in if I had?" he gasped.

"Why did you come in?"

"That beast was after me—Wibley—I—I mean—Sir William——" stammered Bunter. "I—I—I'll go now, Soames, if—if you don't mind. I—I've got some letters to write——"

"Silence, you fat fool!"

Bunter blinked at him in terrified silence.

How Soames was there, why he was there, was a mystery to the fat Owl. He could only suppose that Soames had come in by the french windows, after Sir William had left the library—why, he could not imagine.

"Fool! Fool!" repeated Soames. His look at the fat Owl was sheer evil. "You went out with the others—I saw you—they will not return for hours—why have you returned, you troublesome, meddlesome fool?"

"The beasts walked too fast!"

"Fool!"

Soames was silent again. Bunter was terrified; but Soames seemed almost as uneasy as Bunter. It was plain that he was utterly disconcerted by the sudden entrance of the fat Owl.

He was keeping him silent, so far—but Blump, or one of the servants, might come to the library, and would certainly want to know why the door was locked. The man from the South Seas was in rather a precarious position.

But he was quick to decide.

He tore a cover from a cushion, ripped it into strips, and proceeded to bind the fat Owl to the armchair.

Billy Bunter did not dream of resistance. He had no doubt that Soames had an automatic about him, and he did not want to see that article produced.

In a couple of minutes Bunter was tied fast to the chair. Then Soames stuffed a wad of the cushion-cover into his mouth, and fastened it there with several strips, knotted round Bunter's fat head.

Bunter could neither move nor speak now. He could only blink at Soames in horrified dread.

The sea-lawyer bent over him.

"Listen, fool!" He hissed into a fat ear. "You are not wanted here—it does not suit me to have you prying and spying about. You leave Eastcliff Lodge in the morning. Do you understand?"

Bunter could not speak; but he could nod! He nodded.

"If you remain longer," went on Soames, "the result will be on your own foolish head! I shall be watching—and if I see you again within a mile of this building, you will not live to go back to your school next term. Do you understand that, fool?"

Bunter nodded again.

Soames left him, and tiptoed to the door on the hall, silently unlocking it. Then swiftly, he cut across to the french windows.

Bunter's terrified eyes followed him.

It was a relief to him at least to see the man pass through the french

wait with whatever patience he had.

The fat Owl mumbled dismally behind the gag. A walk to the North Foreland—even without a single rest—would have been better than this. But there was no help for it—and the helpless fat Owl wriggled and mumbled—and waited.

thing out at sea!" said Harry Wharton.

The silver-haired dapper figure was standing motionless in the road, looking seaward.

Sir William's eyeglass had dropped to the end of its cord, as his intent gaze was concentrated seaward. Possibly he could see better without its assistance. The juniors had already noted that that monocle was rather an ornamental than a useful article to the little old baronet.

As the juniors looked at him, Sir William left the road and scrambled up on a higher point of the chalk cliffs, nearer to the sea.

"Active old bird, what?" grinned Bob Cherry.

The juniors smiled as they watched.

Nobody would have supposed that Sir William was sixty-five, from the agile way he clambered up that rugged hummock of chalk. His nerve, too, was very steady, for his venerable years, for at the top of the hummock he was very close to the edge of the cliff, dropping sheer to the beach a hundred feet below.

Heedless of that, the lord of East-cliff Lodge stood staring out across the sea, rolling bright and blue in the April sunshine.

"He can jolly well see something!" said Johnny Bull. "Let's get a squint!"

The Famous Five broke into a run, and arrived at the spot where Sir William stood high over the road.

The little man glanced round at the sound of footsteps. He gave the juniors a nod, and they capped him with the politeness due to his venerable years.

"Anything going on there, sir?" called up Bob.

"I think so! I'm not sure!" answered Sir William. "Come up and take a squint, old beans!"

Bob winked at his chums, and they grinned. Generally, Sir William spoke with the sedate gravity that became his years; but every now and then he dropped into expressions that smacked rather of sixteen than of sixty-five. There was no doubt that, in some ways, Sir William was very young for his age.

The juniors clambered up and joined him on the summit of the high hummock of chalk, jutting up from the cliffs. There they had a wide view of land and sea.

Out at sea, small in the distance, was a trawler, no doubt engaged on hunting for mines strewn by the iniquitous Hun. Nothing else was to be seen on the wide expanse of blue water. But far away, a dark spot showed in the blue of the sky, and Sir William drew the attention of the juniors to it.

"What's that?" he asked.

"Seagull!" answered Johnny Bull.

"I'm not sure."

"Plenty of planes about, up and down this coast," said Bob. "Might be one of the coastal patrol—can't see at this distance."

"Looks as if it's heading for that trawler!" said Wibley. "I wonder if—"

"Oh!" said the Famous Five, all together.



"Oh, look!" gasped Nugent. The German plane turned over and went hurtling downwards, bursting into flames as it fell. "Got him!" breathed Johnny Bull.

windows and disappear into the garden.

Soames was gone.

Bunter was left—tied in Sir William's armchair. He wriggled—he chewed at the gag in his mouth. But he wriggled and chewed in vain.

He could only wait till someone came to the library, to be released. A servant might come to the room for something or other—but it was more likely that no one would come till Sir William returned. Bunter had to

THE FIGHT IN THE CLOUDS!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! There's the jolly old bean!"

Harry Wharton & Co. were coming back from the North Foreland, when they spotted a dapper figure on the road over the cliffs, with a gleam of silver hair under the brim of the hat.

"Coming to meet us, perhaps!" remarked Nugent.

"He seems to have spotted some-

gether. Their hearts beat faster, at the thought of spotting a German raider.

Plenty of people along the east and south-east coasts had seen Messerschmitts in action, but the Greyfriars fellows had not, so far, seen anything of enemy raiders.

A drift of cloud hid the spot in the sky from view. The juniors watched, but it did not reappear.

"Gone!" said Bob.

Sir William nodded, and ceased to watch the sky. Now that he had met the Famous Five, his problem—still unsolved—recurred to his mind. He replaced the eyeglass in his eye, and gave them a rather uneasy look.

"Had a nice afternoon, you fellows?" he asked.

"Topping!" answered Bob cheerily. "We're having a jolly good time here, sir—it was ripping of you to ask us!"

"The ripfulness was terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Wibley felt an uncomfortable twinge. This was not a good opening for what he had to say.

"We're thinking of running the boat out to-morrow," went on Bob Cherry. "The weather's tip-top for a pull along to Broadstairs or Ramsgate."

"Oh!" said Wibley. "Yes! Quite! But—" He coughed.

"Better tell Sir William that we've seen Brown again!" said Nugent.

"Brown?" repeated Wibley.

"You remember the blighter who tried to pinch a document from you once—the man we found in the chalk cave the other day?" said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, yes! You've seen him again?"

The juniors described the episode of the telegram. They did not guess what discomfort that telegram had caused to the silver-haired little gentleman who was listening to them. Sir William would not have been so worried at the present moment had the mysterious Mr. Brown succeeded in getting away with that telegram.

"I—I am much obliged to you, my dear boys!" said Sir William. "I have had the telegram—I never knew what a narrow escape it had had! I—I wonder a little whether I am justified in letting you boys remain here with that desperate character at large."

Bob Cherry laughed.

"We're not afraid of Brown, sir!" he answered. "Jolly glad to see him again, and lay him by the heels."

"Yes, rather!" agreed Nugent.

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

"What-ho!" said Johnny Bull emphatically.

Harry Wharton did not speak. His eyes were fixed rather curiously on the pink old face with its silvery beard. Wharton was, perhaps, a little more observant than his comrades—perhaps a little more touchy. It seemed to him that he could glimpse something behind the old baronet's words that his comrades did not think of detecting.

His lips compressed a little.

He had been, like his friends, a little surprised by the old baronet's urgent invitation to the Co. to spend

their Easter holidays at Eastcliff Lodge. It was rather unusual for a man of Sir William's years to want a party of exuberant schoolboys about the place. It was quite possible that a venerable old bean had tired of such incompatible company. Certainly, if he had, it was up to him to conceal the fact and carry on without a sign. But it seemed to Wharton that he could detect a sign.

"Oh, yes, quite!" said Sir William.

"But—"

"But what, sir?" asked Bob, in surprise, as the old bean paused.

Harry Wharton's face began to look grim.

Crack-ack-ack-ack-ack!

A sudden rattle of sound from seaward interrupted. Immediately all eyes turned to the sea, and everything else was forgotten. The juniors knew the clatter of machine-guns.

"Oh!" gasped Bob. "Look!"

From the clouds the black dot had shot—nearer now and larger. It was a plane—swooping down on the trawler. And as it swooped, the stuttering clatter of a machine-gun thudded through the air.

"A Hun!" breathed Harry Wharton.

It was a German raider.

They saw the trawler twist and turn, like a hunted animal. The German plane roared over it, rattling out machine-gun bullets, and roared on. The juniors watched breathlessly, their hearts thumping.

"Oh, if a fellow could get at the rotters!" breathed Johnny Bull, clenching his hands.

Crack-ack-ack-ack-ack!

It came again, the enemy plane sweeping over the trawler, flying low, and raining shot.

Then suddenly Bob gave a whoop of joy.

"Look!"

He pointed.

Out of the blue shot another plane—a Spitfire.

The juniors, in wild excitement, waved their caps.

"Hurrah!" gasped Johnny Bull. "The Hun doesn't want any—look!"

The enemy plane evidently had sighted the patrol plane shooting out to the rescue of the mine-sweeper. The rattle of fire died out, and the German plane began to climb.

"He'll get him!" breathed Bob.

"Oh! Just to see him get him!"

The Hun was climbing fast. But the Spitfire was swooping at him, and now the fighter's guns were roaring. Distant as they were, the air round the schoolboys on the cliffs rocked with sound.

"Look!" yelled Bob.

"Oh look!" gasped Nugent.

The German had climbed too late! It seemed about to disappear into the clouds when suddenly the juniors saw it turn over, and the next instant it was hurtling downward. It burst into flames as it fell—and what looked like a trail of fireworks swept down to the sea.

"Got him!" breathed Johnny Bull.

The Spitfire sailed alone in the blue. It was climbing—climbing fast!

The juniors, for a moment, wondered why. Then they saw two shapes that

shot out of the clouds to the east—and a third!

The raider had not been alone! Three Messerschmitts were rushing out of the clouds at the lone Spitfire—and the Spitfire climbed and climbed, till it was a speck in the blue, and vanished in clouds. The Messerschmitts climbed and vanished; the clouds hid all that was passing; but dully, from beyond the cloud curtain, came the echo of spitting fire.

The firing died away over the sea. The schoolboys watched till their eyes ached—but they saw no more. The fight—if it was still going on—was above the clouds, and far out to sea. For half an hour they hardly stirred—but nothing more was seen, and silence followed the sound of the guns.

"Three to one," said Bob, at last. "Well, one British pilot's as good as three Huns!"

"By gum!" said Wibley. "By gum! If a fellow was a bit older—"

Wibley had forgotten, for the moment, his ambition to be an actor. Just then he wanted to be in the Air Force.

"If—if what—" ejaculated Bob.

"I—I— Oh, I—I mean, if a man was a bit younger!" stammered Sir William. "Who wouldn't be an airman?"

"Yes, rather!" agreed Bob.

Sir William and the Famous Five walked back to Eastcliff Lodge—rather silent, and with many glances at the sea—thinking of the lone Spitfire, high over the clouds. And, as it was nearly six o'clock when they got in, they went direct to the library, to turn on the radio and learn whether there was any news.

ENOUGH FOR BUNTER!

"MUM-mum-mum-mmm!" That peculiar sound, faint but audible, made Harry Wharton & Co. glance round, in surprise, in the library at Eastcliff Lodge.

Coming into the room with Sir William, they had fancied that it was empty! That sound indicated that it was not.

"What the dickens—" began Bob.

"Mum-mum-mmmmm!"

"Some animal's got into the room, what—what?" ejaculated Sir William. "But what the dooce—"

"Mum-mum-mmmmm!" came the mysterious mumble.

This time, Bob Cherry spotted the direction from which it came—from a big armchair by the fireplace. The high back of the chair hid its occupant, and Bob walked round it, to look.

The next moment he bounded.

"Bunter!" he yelled.

"Bunter!" repeated Harry Wharton. "Is that the animal that's got in?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look!" gasped Bob.

A fat face, red and perspiring from the effort of incessant wriggling, looked at the astonished juniors, from the big armchair. A pair of

little round eyes glimmered like those of an expiring codfish, behind a pair of big round spectacles! Bunter mumbled and mumbled and mumbled.

"My only hat and sunshade!" ejaculated Sir William blankly. "What the jolly old thump—I—I mean, good gad!"

"Bunter, you ass!" gasped Nugent.

"Mum-mum-mmmmm!" mumbled the hapless Owl.

"He's gagged!" exclaimed Bob. He pounced on Bunter, and jerked away the gag, and the fat Owl spluttered for breath.

"Who on earth did this?" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in amazement.

It was an amazing discovery to the Greyfriars juniors.

The ghost of a fat Owl could hardly have amazed them more than the sight of the fat junior bound and gagged in Sir William's armchair in the library of Eastcliff Lodge.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "I say, you fellows—grooogh! I say, I've been nearly suffocated! Oooogh! Why didn't you come in before, you beasts? Woogh!"

"Who did this?" demanded Sir William.

"Beast!"

"Wha-a-t?"

"It was all your fault, you beast!" hooted Bunter. "I dodged in here to get away from you, you beast! You know I did!"

The Famous Five stared at him and at Sir William.

They could hardly make head or tail of this. They had observed that Sir William did not seem to be fearfully pleased by Bunter having joined the Easter party, and had rather wondered why he had let him do it. But it was rather surprising to hear that the fat guest had been dodging away from his host.

"What the thump—" began Johnny Bull.

"Grooogh! Untie me, you silly idiots!" howled Bunter. "Get a move on! How long are you going to leave me here, you blithering cuckoos?"

Bob Cherry opened his pocket-knife to saw at the fat Owl's bonds.

"But who—" exclaimed Wharton.

"It was all Wibley's fault!" howled Bunter.

"Wibley!"

"Yes—no—I mean—"

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! Nothing! I—I mean, that beast was in this room when I came in—"

"Wibley was?" gasped Nugent.

"No, you idiot—Soames!"

"Soames!" yelled the Famous Five.

"That beast Soames!" gasped Bunter. "He got me from behind! I'd have knocked him spinning, but for that—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Cackle!" howled Bunter indignantly. "I've been tied up here like a turkey for hours, and hours, and hours, and hours—"

"It's not much more than an hour since I went out!" remarked Sir William. "But who—"

"Beast!"

"Shut up, you fat ass!" murmured Bob.

Bunter had cause to feel annoyed; but, really, he could not address a venerable baronet in such a manner.

"It was Soames—he was here!" gasped Bunter. "That villain Soames! Are you going to get me loose, Bob Cherry, or ain't you going to get me loose?"

"I'm getting you loose as fast as I can, fathead!"

"Beast!"

"How on earth could Soames get in here?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "And why the thump should he?"

"Where did he go, Bunter?" asked Nugent.

"He went out by the french windows—hours ago. I suppose he came in that way!" groaned Bunter. "Anyhow, he was here, and he grabbed me!"

The juniors stared at him. But for the fact that somebody, obviously, had seized Bunter and bound him in the armchair, they could not have believed that Soames had been there—in broad daylight, in a room that anyone might have entered. But Bunter's state showed that somebody, at all events, had been there.

Bob cut the last of the bonds, and Bunter staggered out of the armchair.

He rubbed his fat wrists. Soames had knotted the bonds with an unsparing hand, and the unfortunate Owl was feeling stiff and sore.

"Well, this beats it!" said Sir William. "You've told me a lot about Soames—and this is the third time he's butted in. What the dooce does he want here? Nothing's even missing."

"It's a giddy mystery!" said Bob. "We know he's up to something in this district, but why he butts into this house beats me hollow."

"I can't make this out," said Sir William. "I left Jermyn in this room—and Bunter ran in a few minutes after I left. Wasn't Jermyn here when you came in, Bunter?"

"No. Soames was."

"I suppose Jermyn must have gone out by the french windows, and Soames stepped in immediately afterwards!" said Sir William, puzzled. "It's odd if Jermyn saw nothing of him, in that case. I must ask Jermyn. But what the dooce did the man want here?"

That was an utter mystery to the Greyfriars fellows. Three times, so far as they knew, Soames had entered Eastcliff Lodge; but what his object could possibly have been they could not begin to guess.

"I say, you fellows, I ain't staying here!" gurgled Billy Bunter. "I'm leaving to-morrow. I'm going to get Mauly on the phone, and fix it up with him, as the silly ass forgot to send me a wire. I've had enough of Soames! Mind, I ain't afraid of the fellow!"

"Not?" grinned Bob.

"No!" roared Bunter. "I ain't funky, like some fellows I could name. I'd knock Soames down as soon as look at him! But—"

"Is the butfulness terrific?" asked Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"But I ain't staying here, all the same. I'm going to fix it up with Mauly, and as soon as I've fixed it up, I'm jolly well going! And if you fellows don't like it, you can jolly well lump it, so yah!"

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

They were quite prepared to lump Billy Bunter's departure—if they did not like it. It was barely possible that they might like it, and that there would be no need to lump it. But if that departure depended upon Lord Mauleverer urging the fat Owl to come along to the Towers for the rest of the hols, they could not help feeling that that departure was a little uncertain.

"You can cackle!" snorted Bunter. "But I jolly well mean it! I'm going to get Mauly on the phone now."

And Bunter rolled away, to get Mauly on the phone.

Whether Billy Bunter was, or was not, afraid of Soames, it was certain that he had had enough of the ubiquitous sea-lawyer, and was very anxious to shake the dust of Eastcliff Lodge from his feet—if only something else turned up! The question was, whether something else would!

The Famous Five were not surprised to hear, a little later, that Bunter had failed to get Mauly on the phone! They had a strong suspicion that his lordship at Mauleverer Towers was not taking any!

BUNTER, TOO!

ROT!" Billy Bunter delivered that opinion after breakfast the next morning.

It was a bright, sunny, April morning; but the fat visage of the Owl of the Remove was not so bright and sunny as the April morn.

Bunter was peeved.

He had not had a good night. Generally, Bunter was a good sleeper—it was one of those things he could do really well. But Soames had haunted his dreams, and he had awakened, several times, thinking of the sea-lawyer and his threats, and shivering as he thought of them.

After breakfast, the Famous Five were preparing for the morning's excursion—a trip on the briny, as Bob called it.

Four faces were merry and bright, Harry Wharton's a trifle thoughtful. The other fellows had noticed nothing; but at the breakfast-table, it had seemed to Wharton that he detected a spot of constraint in the manner of his host. He was certain that, two or three times, Sir William had been going to say something, but had checked himself and left it unsaid.

Wharton had a rather uncomfortable feeling that something was amiss. He little guessed what was on Sir William's mind.

After breakfast, Sir William had gone up to his room, and the juniors had not seen him since. Certainly

they were not likely to guess that he was engaged in something like an argument with his man Jermyn, on the subject of certain instructions which Wibley felt that it was impossible to carry out. And they would have been quite surprised had they known that that argument ended by the little old baronet saying to Jermyn: "Oh, shut up and get out!"

Wibley, in fact, did not quite know what to do. Jermyn, as bidden, shut up and got out—with a glinting gleam in his eyes; but that did not solve Sir William's problem. It was no wonder that the lord of Eastcliff Lodge had been a little constrained at breakfast.

Billy Bunter, as well as Sir William, had a problem on his mind. Bunter was not, after all, thinking of catching a train that morning! Thrice he had failed to get Mauly on the phone; and he seemed to realise that it would not be much use trying a fourth time.

The fat Owl's choice seemed to be between Eastcliff Lodge and Bunter Court—and the latter magnificent residence failed, as usual, to attract Bunter.

Of the two, he seemed to prefer Eastcliff Lodge, even with the menacing face of Soames lurking in the offing.

So Bunter was annoyed by those preparations for a sea trip. He pronounced the idea rot.

Bunter did not want a trip on the briny. Still less did he want the Famous Five to clear off for the whole morning and leave him on his own—with Soames liable to pop up like a jack-in-the-box any minute!

"Rot!" repeated Bunter, with a blink of deep indignation at the cheery five. "What the thump do you want to go out in the boat for? I should think that, after what happened yesterday, you'd stick to a fellow—especially a fellow who's done so much for you. I really think that!"

"Like us to sit round you all day, watching for Soames?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Yes!"

"Oh, my hat! I can see us doing it!"

"Come out in the boat, lazybones, if you're afraid of Soames butting in again!" said Bob Cherry.

"Who's afraid?" hooted Bunter.

"Oh! Aren't you?"

"No, you beast! Look here—suppose two of you stay with me?" suggested Bunter. "I've decided not to catch my train this morning—I'm staying on here for the present. Two of you—"

"Fathead! Sit it out with Sir William while we're gone!" suggested Bob. "He's a good old bean—he'll stand you all right."

"Fat lot of good Wibley would be if Soames turned up—"

"Wibley?"

"I—I mean— Don't jaw! You keep on jawing! Look here, you fellows, chuck up this silly trip and stick to a fellow—think of me!" said Bunter, with dignity.

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"I'd rather think of something nice!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

"You silly ass!" exclaimed Johnny Bull. "Get a move on, and come out in the boat with us! You won't be wanted to row, or even to steer—you can sit in the stern and scoff grub from a basket. What more do you want?"

"Well, suppose we run into a German raider—"

"Oh crikey! If we do, we'll lay him aboard and run him into Ramsgate as a prize!" said Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly ass!" howled Bunter. "Talk sense! Suppose we run into a U-boat—"

"We're just as likely to run into a yew-tree!"

"You silly chump! I won't come, so there!" hooted Bunter. "If you like to stay in, I'll do some of my ventriloquism for you—"

"That does it!" said Bob. "Come on, you fellows—hook it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five started, Bob Cherry swinging a well-packed lunch-basket in his hand.

Billy Bunter blinked after them with a sour blink. Then he rolled after them. After all, if he was not wanted to row, or even to steer, it would not be so bad—and it was a lovely morning, and the lunch-basket looked attractive. And, really, U-boats were unlikely to be met with in a pull along the shore to Ramsgate. And Soames, who had turned up so unexpectedly in the library, might turn up again; really, he was much more likely to turn up than a German raider.

So Billy Bunter made up his fat mind, and rolled out after the Famous Five.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Coming, after all?" exclaimed Bob.

"Well, you fellows may be going into danger, for all you know," answered Bunter. "If you are, you'll need me."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Fat lot we should see of Bunter if there was any danger about!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter rolled down the avenue with the Famous Five. They descended into the gully that led down to the beach.

In a recess in the chalky wall of the gully, above high-water mark, was the boathouse. The tide was in, washing the lower end of the gully; but the boat had to be carried some distance down to the water.

Many hands made light work, and the juniors soon had the boat out, bumping it down the rugged slant to the water that lapped below.

Billy Bunter looked on, while the boat was got down to the water and launched. When anything like work was going on, the fat Owl preferred to be a spectator. When the boat was rocking in the lapping sea, the fat junior approached it rather gingerly.

"Hold that boat safe Cherry!" he yapped.

"I'm holding it safe, fathead! Tumble in!"

"I think you fellows had better

lift me in!" suggested Bunter. "I don't want to get my feet wet!"

"Anybody got a steam crane in his pocket?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, I'm not going to get my feet wet!" roared Bunter. "Who's going to give me a lift in?"

"I'm going to," said Johnny Bull, drawing back his right foot. "Stand steady!"

Billy Bunter did not stand steady. He made one bound into the boat—just in time! He rolled over a thwart, bumped in the bottom of the boat, and roared.

"Wow!"

"Bravo!" exclaimed Bob. "Do that again, Bunter!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Wow! I've banged my head!" roared Bunter.

"Anything in it to damage?"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter crawled into the stern. He squatted there and glared through his spectacles.

The Famous Five followed him in and pushed off. The boat rocked out of the gully to the open sunny sea.

Four fellows sat to the oars and pulled. And, taking a wide sweep out from the cliffs, the Greyfriars fellows rowed for distant Ramsgate.

PERIL OF THE SEA!

CRACK!

"What the thump!" gasped Bob Cherry.

From a distance across the curling blue waters, the report of a firearm was borne on the wind. Something struck the Greyfriars boat, chipping the timber near the rudder.

The boat was hardly more than a quarter of a mile out. Between it and the long line of cliffs a small sail danced in the sun. A little sailing-dinghy had run out from the shore, with one man in it—hidden for the most part by the canvas. The juniors had not given that craft any special heed, supposing it to be some holiday boat out from Ramsgate or Margate or Broadstairs.

Now they stared towards it, amazed.

"That was a shot!" exclaimed Nugent. He was sitting beside Bunter in the stern, steering.

"What the dickens—" exclaimed Harry Wharton blankly.

Yell from Bunter!

"Oh, you silly idiots! It's a German raider! Pull back! Quick! We shall all be blown up! We shall all be sunk! We—"

"Shut up!" roared Bob.

"I'm not going to be jolly well blown to bits to please you, you beast!" roared back Bunter. "Get me ashore—quick!"

"You thumping chump!" howled Johnny Bull. "If you don't ring off, I'll biff you with my oar!"

"It's a German—" shrieked Bunter. "It's a Hun! I tell you it's a Herman—I mean a Jun—that is, a Hunnun—I mean—"

"Shut up, owl!"

"The shot came from that boat!" said Bob. "I suppose the silly ass

is potting at seagulls. There are blithering idiots who can find nothing better to do on a holiday than trying to kill something. But it came jolly near us."

Ping!

There was another knock on the boat, just under the gunwale, and the report across the water followed.

"That's not an accident!" said Harry Wharton. "The man yonder is firing at this boat! Pull clear!"

"Is he mad?" gasped Nugent.

"Must be, I should think! Pull clear of the silly idiot!"

Crack! came floating over the sea again.

This time a bullet whizzed over the Greyfriars boat, passing over the heads of the crew.

"Soames!" yelled Bob.

"Wha-a-t?"

"It's Soames!"

"Oh!" gasped Harry.

Bob had caught sight of the man in the dinghy.

The sailing-craft was standing out from the shore, to run closer, as the juniors pulled hard to get away. As the sail shifted, they could see the man in it—and he was near enough for them to make out the cool, clear-cut, smooth face—the face they knew so well—the face of the man who had once been Mr. Vernon-Smith's valet, who had been a mutineer and free-booter in the Pacific—who had been many things in his strange and lawless life.

"Sus - sus - sus - Soames!" moaned Bunter. "Oh crikey! He's after us! I—I say, you fellows, keep round me, will you?"

"Soames!" Harry Wharton's eyes glinted at the sailing-boat. "That villain!"

Soames was lying back in the stern of his little craft, his left arm over the tiller, his left hand handling the sheet, and a firearm in his right. His eyes were on the Greyfriars boat.

He was handling his little craft in a seaman-like way. The juniors remembered his skill of old—Soames was at home on the blue water. And they knew his deadly skill with firearms. Every fellow in the Greyfriars boat was at his mercy.

From that knowledge, however, some comfort was to be drawn. Three shots had been fired—none had hit the Greyfriars crew! Every bullet would have hit, had Soames chosen. So far, at least, the sea-lawyer did not choose to do so.

"The hound!" hissed Johnny Bull. "He's trying to scare us! That's his game."

"I say, you fellows, pull back!" howled Bunter. "Get me out of this! Do you hear? Oh crikey!"

The Famous Five looked at one another. They could not make out what Soames' intentions were—but they knew that they were in his hands.

"Keeping on, or going back?" asked Bob.

"Go back!" yelled Bunter.

"Goodness knows what the villain means—but the sooner we get out of this the better, I think!" said Harry. "We can do nothing—he can do as he likes, with that gun."

The captain of the Remove stared

round over the sea. No other craft was to be seen, save for a blur of smoke from a steamer far out. The two boats were too distant from the beach for anyone on shore to observe what was going on. There was no help.

"Can we get back?" muttered Bob. "That depends on Soames! He can stop us, if he likes!"

"Try it on, anyhow!"

The boat's nose swung round for the shore. Wharton and Bob, Johnny Bull and Hurrec Singh, tugged at the oars.

The change of course brought them closer to the enemy, who was between them and the shore. That made little difference, as they were in any case within easy range of Soames' automatic, and the sailing-dinghy was much faster than the rowing-boat. But their hearts beat faster as they watched the sea-lawyer grow nearer and clearer.

Billy Bunter plumped down, unheeded, in the bottom of the boat. He quaked as far as he could get below the level of the gunwale.

Soames sat up in his seat and waved the hand that held the pistol at the Greyfriars crew. His voice came across the intervening water.

"Lay in your oars!"

Unheeding, the juniors pulled on.

Crack!

The bullet pitched into the boat, ricocheting from the timber and glancing Bob's shoulder. He gave a little jump at the touch and set his teeth.

"Lay to!" came Soames' sharp snap. "The next will hit!"

The ricocheting bullet had very nearly hit, as it was. With deep feelings, the Greyfriars crew laid in their oars, and the boat rocked on the sea as Soames glided nearer.

"If he comes in reach——" breathed Bob. "We've a chance with the oars, if only he does——"

"He won't give us that chance!" said Harry quietly.

Soames, as he came on, watched them—a faint sardonic grin on his smooth face. His voice came coolly and clearly on the wind.

"Your lives are in my hands! I suppose you have sense enough to see that! A few days ago you turned the tables on me on the cliffs. I bear no malice—which is just as well for you. I would gladly spare you—on the conditions I named then! What do you say now?"

"Go and eat coke!" answered Bob.

"Your promise to leave Eastcliff Lodge to-day, and never to come again within ten miles of it! Yes or no?"

"No!" said Harry Wharton, between his teeth.

"Yes!" howled Bunter, from the bottom of the boat.

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Beast!"

Soames raised the automatic. Over it, his eyes glinted at the crew of the Greyfriars boat. Their hearts beat almost to suffocation; yet they could not believe that the man would fire. Desperate as he was, ruthless as he was, such a deed was unbelievable.

And they were right! For a long

moment, the weapon remained at a level—then it was lowered again.

Soames smiled faintly.

"You have nerve!" he said. "I remember it well—from the days of our cruise together in southern waters. But I am in earnest—though I shall not fire on you, unless you force me to do so. Turn that boat round and pull for the open sea."

"And why?" asked Wharton, between his teeth.

"Because it is my order!" answered Soames coolly. "Because unless you pull seaward at once I shall open fire, and what follows will be on your own heads."

"Pull for the shore!" growled Johnny Bull.

Crack!

"Oh!" gasped Johnny, as the cap spun on his head. He felt the graze of the bullet through his hair.

Soames' eyes glittered.

"Enough!" he snarled. "Pull for the sea, or take the consequences. Do you want me to lay one of you in the boat, as a warning to the rest?"

"Ow!" came a yell from Bunter. "Why don't you pull, you beasts? Oh crikey!"

There was no help for it. The sea-lawyer was unwilling to use his deadly weapon, that was clear. But his look showed plainly enough that he would use it, if his order was not obeyed: and the schoolboys were without defence. In savage silence, they swung the boat round and pulled for the open sea.

LOST AT SEA!

A STERN of the rowing-boat, the brown patched sail of Soames' dinghy danced in the sun.

Sprawling in the stern again, steering and handling the sheet with his left, the automatic in his right, Soames followed the Greyfriars boat at a little distance.

Had he ventured near enough, the Greyfriars crew were ready to take the chance of tackling him with oars and boathook. But the sea-lawyer was too wary for that. He kept his distance—though near enough for the automatic to sweep the boat with bullets if he chose.

Looking back as they pulled, the Greyfriars crew watched him—and watched the long line of cliffs sinking, and growing dimmer, as they drew farther and farther out to sea.

The cliffs, at last, were a dim blur in the far distance; and still they were pulling. If they rested on the oars for a moment, the automatic was raised as a hint that they were not to pause.

Round them rolled the waste of waters—mile on mile of crested waves rolling in the sunshine. It was grimly reminiscent of the days of the South Sea cruise, when the wide waters of the Pacific had rolled round them, and Soames, as now, had been in the offing, automatic in hand. It was like a leaf from the past. But it was the shore of England that was fading from their sight, as the sea-lawyer drove them farther and farther out to sea.

The desperado's plan was growing clear to them now.

The man had been through many a dark deed, and there was many a crime on his conscience—but he shrank from the shedding of blood. But he was implacably determined to drive them away from the spot where they were a peril to him—where, as he had told them, a fortune was at stake. This was his method—now that their boating trip had given him the opportunity. He was driving them out on the waste of waters—to abandon them there! Life or death would be a matter of chance when he had done with them.

They were tiring with the long, hard pull. Whether they could make the shore when Soames at last left them to their own devices—whether they might be picked up, in a mince-strewn sea where vessels had to follow regular lanes—was problematic. If they survived, no doubt the sea-lawyer calculated that the lesson would be enough for them.

But there was no help.

The man was adamant. To swing the boat round again and head for the shore was to face a hail of bullets! It was futile to make matters worse.

They pulled and pulled.

The cliffs sunk out of sight at last. One or two sails that had danced by the cliffs disappeared under the sea-rim.

Save for their pursuer, the Greyfriars crew were alone in a world of water. Far away—too far for hope—a trail of smoke lay against the blue. High overhead, like a wheeling gull, an aeroplane sailed and vanished in clouds. They pulled on wearily.

Suddenly, with a twist of his tiller, Soames shot away. The sail danced on the sea, gliding away swiftly.

Bob Cherry gave a gasp.

"The rotter! He's going!"

Aching arms rested on the oars. The boat surged slowly through the heaving waves.

"He's done with us now!" said Harry Wharton bitterly. "How many miles out at sea are we?"

"Goodness knows!" Bob laid in his oar. "We've got to have a rest before we try to get back! My arms are nearly falling off."

"Same here!" mumbled Johnny Bull.

"The samefulness is terrific!" groaned Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "But thank the esteemed goodness that that terrific rascal is gone!"

Billy Bunter sat up.

"I say, you fellows, is he gone?"

"Yes, he's gone!"

"Oh, good! Now get back!" said Bunter. He blinked anxiously round over the gunwales. "I say, where are the cliffs?"

"Out of sight long ago, fathead!"

"Oh crikey! I—I—I say, how will you know the way back, then?"

"Follow Soames, I suppose!" said Bob, rather doubtfully.

"I say, I—I don't want to go near him again!"

"We shan't have much chance, ass. I don't suppose he wants to guide us home, fathead!" grunted Johnny Bull.

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"Well, the sooner we get back, the better," said Bunter. "Thank goodness he's gone! I say, ain't it jolly lucky we brought some grub with us? It's past lunch-time. I say, where's that basket?"

The fat Owl evidently did not realise the seriousness of the situation. But the other fellows were not anxious to enlighten him. It was past lunch-time, and Bunter—now that Soames was gone—was thinking of lunch. He rolled back into the stern seat and opened the basket.

The sailing-dinghy, running fast, disappeared over the sea-rim. Whether Soames was making directly for the shore or not, the juniors could not tell; anyhow, he was very quickly out of sight, and they were left without such guidance, if it had been of any use.

Five faces in the boat were very grave. Overhead, the sunshine streamed down on the blue sea through fleecy drifting clouds. The trackless waters rolled round the drifting boat. Billy Bunter, no doubt, would have suggested turning the boat round and pulling back the way they had come—an easy thing to say, but not so easy to do. The merest glimpse of the distant cliffs would have been enough—but the cliffs were far below the sea-rim. They were abandoned on the wilderness of waters without a guide.

"Better peck a bit, I suppose," said Bob, after a long pause. "I'm jolly hungry! We've got to rest, anyhow!"

"You fellows can rest, and Bunter and I can pull," said Frank Nugent. "We're fresh!"

Yell from Bunter.

"Why, you beast! I'm jolly well not going to pull! You jolly well said that I wasn't going to row, or steer, either—and I jolly well ain't!"

"Do you want to stay here for good?" asked Harry.

"You fellows can pull back after we've had a spot of grub!" said Bunter. "I say, this cold chicken is good! Have some!"

Harry Wharton reached over and jerked the lunch-basket away from the fat Owl's knees. Another yell from Bunter!

"I say——"

"We've got to be careful with this, as it's all we have, fathead!" said the captain of the Remove.

"We've got to go on rations!"

"Rations!" howled Bunter. "There ain't anything in that basket that's rationed—you know that—not a thing!"

"Ass!"

"Look here, gimme that grub!" yelled Bunter. "Think you're going to keep me hungry, or what?"

"Better tell the fat fool how the matter stands!" said Johnny Bull.

"Wharror you mean, you beast?" yapped Bunter.

"I mean this, you fat chump!" said Harry Wharton quietly. "There's no telling how long we may be in this boat. We're almost as likely to pull away from the shore as towards it when we get going!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. His eyes

bulged through his spectacles. "Oh lor'! Mean to say you don't know the way back?"

"They've entirely forgotten to put up signposts on the North Sea, old fat man!" said Bob Cherry, with grim humour. "We're somewhere between England and Holland, and about as likely to hit one as the other!"

"Oh lor'!"

All the crew were hungry after that long and weary pull in the keen sea air. But the lunch in the basket was very carefully portioned out.

Even Billy Bunter seemed to realise that that was necessary now, and did not claim a whole chicken. It was quite an ample lunch in the basket for six fellows, but it would have been cleared out to the last crumb had circumstances permitted. As it was, one quarter of the provisions had to suffice for the meal, and the remainder was carefully shut up in the basket again.

The juniors were still hungry after that lunch, especially Bunter. But there was no help for that.

The meal over, the Greyfriars crew scanned the sea and made what calculations they could.

Bunter blinked at them dolorously.

"I say, you fellows, can't you steer by the sun?" he asked. "I've heard of shipwrecked crews steering by the sun."

"Take the lines, then, and steer by the sun!" grunted Johnny Bull.

Billy Bunter blinked at the sky. Certainly he had heard of shipwrecked seamen steering by the sun. But he did not quite know how they did it.

"The sun rises in the east, you know," said Bunter.

"Not really?" asked Bob.

"Yes, and sets in the west—I know that!"

"By gum!" said Bob. "A chap who knows all that ought to be an admiral of the Fleet! Bunter's wasted on land!"

"Beast! Hasn't anybody got a compass?" moaned Bunter. "You could steer by a compass, if—if you had one!"

"Come to think of it, a fellow ought never to go for a trip on the sea without a pocket compass!" remarked Bob. "It would come in jolly useful now!"

"We can get a tip from the sun when it goes lower," said Harry.

"But—we're up against it, no mistake about that! But it's no good grousing, or waiting for a sail to turn up. We've got to pull—and relieve one another at the oars—and hope that we're getting west!"

"Oh lor'!" moaned Bunter.

"Take an oar, fathead, and dry up!"

Billy Bunter took an oar. In the perilous circumstances, even the lazy fat Owl was willing to do his bit.

But it was not a big bit. Bunter and Nugent pulled—the fat Owl catching a series of crabs and uttering a deep groan after every pull. In five minutes he dropped his oar.

"I'm tired!" he announced. "Exhausted! I've got a crick in the neck, and an ache in the back, and



“Soames!” moaned Bunter, from the stern of the boat. “Oh crikey! He’s after us! I say, you fellows, keep round me, will you?”

a sprain in the arms, and a pain in the tummy! How many miles have I done?”

“About a dozen yards!”

“Yah! I’m tired, anyhow—you take a turn, Bob!”

Bob Cherry took an oar and Bunter crawled back to the stern—with a hungry eye on the lunch-basket. Bunter gasped for breath and mopped perspiration from a fat brow. For once in his fat career, the Owl of the Remove resembled the village blacksmith—his brow was wet with honest sweat! He gasped, and gasped, and gasped.

The Famous Five, relieving one another by turns, pulled four oars. They hoped, but could not be sure, that they were heading homeward. The sun, as it sank lower in the sky, was some sort of a guide—all they had. But when the dusk of the spring night shadowed the sea, they had not been gladdened by the sight of the white cliffs of Albion. Darkness shut down, and they knew that they were lost on the sea.

THE CASTAWAY!

BUMP!

“Blow!” grunted Bob Cherry.

The boat shivered as it bumped in the dark on some unseen mass of floating wreckage.

It was late.

High over the rolling, shimmering sea the stars glittered and gleamed in a vault of deepest blue. The boat was moving—drifting on the

current of the trackless sea. It was useless to row in the dark; for all they knew, they might be rowing directly away from the land. Nothing was to be seen when they scanned the sea but the endless rolling of the heaving billows.

At a late hour they ate their supper—a frugal supper. Hunger was keen on the salt water—but they had to spare the limited supply of food. Billy Bunter groaned over his portion, wrapped himself in a boat-cloak, and went to sleep. His snore mingled with the murmur of the waves. Nobody else was disposed to sleep.

“That villain Soames!” said Johnny Bull, for the umpteenth time.

The juniors had known from the beginning that their situation was serious. But only after the darkness fell did they realise how terribly serious it was.

There was no lantern in the boat—they had never dreamed of being out after dark. They could show no light. In the daylight there was a chance of being seen and picked up; in the night, none. They nourished a faint hope that the tide might wash them to the land—but it was equally likely that an ocean current was carrying them out to sea.

It was cold—and they had no overcoats. Bunter had the only rug. They were hungry. But present discomforts weighed little against the dismal prospect of what was to come. If they were not in sight of land when morning dawned, the position would be desperate.

What food they had left would hardly last another day. They were glad that Bunter could sleep. They could keep up their courage somehow—but they could not keep up Bunter’s.

“That terrific villain!” murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

They thought of Soames with bitterness. With cool, implacable deliberation, he had driven them into this—to leave him free to carry on his rascally game, whatever it was, which their presence at Eastcliff Lodge endangered.

“While there’s jolly old life, there’s jolly old hope!” said Bob Cherry. “We’ll beat that blighter yet! But—”

Bob was interrupted by the bump of the boat. It was a hard and heavy bump, and it nearly pitched him over.

“Look out!” exclaimed Harry.

Some mass of wreckage floating on the sea had collided with the drifting boat, rocking it from stem to stern. Dimly, in the darkness, the shadowy mass loomed from the sea.

Bob grasped the boathook and leaned on the gunwale.

“Better steer clear of that,” he said. “We should be in Queer Street if the boat got a rib stove in!”

“Oh, my hat! Shove it clear!”

So far as they could see it in the dim glimmer of starlight, it was a broken mast, with a mass of rigging and several spars tangled on it—some relic of a vessel, probably, that had struck a Hun mine.

Bob reached out at it with the boathook to push it clear.

The next moment he almost dropped the boathook in amazement.

"Hark!" he gasped.

From the silent sea came a cry—the sound of a human voice. It startled and thrilled the Greyfriars crew.

"Help!"

The call was faint—the voice of a man in the last stage of exhaustion. But they heard it in utter wonder. That any living being was within miles of them on the dark sea, they had never dreamed.

"Oh!" gasped Wharton. "There's somebody on that wreckage! Hold on to it, Bob—hold on to it, for goodness' sake!"

Bob was already hooking at the tangled ropes. The mass floated beside the boat, held by the hook.

The Greyfriars crew forgot their own perils for the moment. Some hapless castaway was in the deep waters, clinging to that mass of driftwood—unseen in the dark.

He must have heard their voices—he could not have seen the boat. Only one thought was in all their minds—to save him from the water.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" Bob shouted into the shadows.

"Help!" came back the faint cry.

"Hold on! We'll pick you up as soon as we can see you!" shouted back Bob. "I've got hold!"

He dragged the floating mass closer till it bumped on the boat again. Then a pale glimmer from the dark waters caught his eyes; it was a glimpse of a face, under some close-fitting headgear—a face chalky white.

"Lend a hand here, Harry!" panted Bob. "You others squat on the other side, or we shall capsize!"

The wreckage floated on the port side. Nugent, Hurree Singh, and Johnny Bull threw their weight on the starboard side to keep the boat level, while Bob and Harry Wharton leaned over to port.

The boathook hooked on a leather jacket, and the man clinging to the wreckage was pulled alongside. Then Wharton and Bob Cherry grasped him and, with combined efforts, dragged him into the boat. He made some effort to help himself; but it was clear that his strength was at its last ebb.

Bunter was pushed aside and the castaway landed in the stern seat.

There was a sleepy grunt from the fat Owl as he was shifted.

"Groogh! I say, you fellows—oggh!"

Then Bunter snored again.

"By gum!" said Bob. "R.A.F.!"

The man in the boat was in heavy flying kit, drenched and soaked with salt water. The juniors remembered what they had seen from the cliffs the previous afternoon, and the thought was in all their minds that perhaps this was the man in the lone Spitfire. Whoever he was, he was an R.A.F. man who had fallen in the sea; and at that moment they could have thanked Soames for what he had done.

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They propped him up as well as they could with the boat cushions. The water ran down the airman in streams. He was conscious—but seemed unable to speak. It was a face like wax that they peered at in the gloom.

"Nobody with you on that flot-sam?" asked Bob.

The man shook his head.

Bob reached out with the boathook again and drove the wreckage clear. It drifted away into the darkness.

"By gum!" said Johnny Bull. "What luck that we ran into it!"

"The luckfulness was terrific."

A faint, gasping voice came; the airman was pulling himself together a little.

"Who are you? What's this boat? I thought I was dreaming when I heard voices!"

"Jolly lucky you did!" said Bob.

"We never saw you. We're a school-boy party—lost at sea. Jolly glad we were lost, too, as it turns out! Have you been long in the water?"

"Since yesterday afternoon!"

"Oh crumbs! Were you in the Spitfire, the plane that went up after the Huns?" exclaimed Bob. "We saw one of the blighters go down from the cliffs."

"I'm the pilot. Have you any food on this boat?"

Bob grabbed the lunch-basket and jerked it open.

It was no time for the Greyfriars crew to think of the morrow's rations. The airman had been in the water for over thirty hours, and they could guess that he was famished. What was left was his to the last crumb.

They helped him, and he ate ravenously. Of drink, there was only what remained of a bottle of currant wine. But they could see how welcome it was to the man whose lips were crusted with salt from the sea-spray. He ate and drank in silence, a trace of colour flushing back into his waxen face.

"That's the lot," said Bob at last. "Sorry!"

The pilot grinned.

"Have I cleared you out?" he asked. "You've saved my life! Gum! This is a change for the better!"

He leaned back on the cushions.

Bob Cherry jerked the boat-cloak off Bunter and wrapped it round him.

HOMeward BOUND!

BILLY BUNTER sat up with a yelp.

He jammed his spectacles straight on his fat little nose and blinked round him, almost speechless with indignation.

"I'm cold!" he roared—not quite speechless, after all. "Wharrer you mean by grabbing that rug off me? Mean to say you want it? Of all the selfish beasts—"

"Shut up, you fat ass!"

"Shan't!" roared Bunter. "Didn't you hear me say I was cold? I'm jolly well going to have that rug, see? I— Oh!" Bunter jumped, as his eyes fell on the stranger in the boat.

He blinked at him. He goggled at him. This was Bunter's first intimation that there was an addition to the crew.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "Who's that?"

"Neptune!" said Bob. "Just come on board for a rest!"

There was a chuckle from the airman. For a man who had been adrift in the salt water for thirty hours, he seemed to be recovering at a good rate.

"N-n-n-Neptune!" stammered Bunter. "Oh, don't be a silly ass, you know! I say, who's that chap and how did he get here?"

"Dropped from the sky, old fat man!"

"You silly idiot!"

"It's the pilot of the Spitfire we saw yesterday, fathead! We've just picked him up," said Harry.

"Oh! Was he in the water?" asked Bunter, blinking at the rescued man. "Why did he fall in the sea?"

"Oh, my hat! Just for a change, most likely!" said Johnny Bull, with deep sarcasm. "Just for the sake of variety, I expect!"

"Oh, really, Bull—" Bunter blinked, and blinked, at that unexpected passenger, who grinned. "I say, you fellows, I expect he's hungry. What about whacking out what's left of the grub?"

"Oh, my only sainted Aunt Jemima!" ejaculated Bob. "Bunter's improving! Are you really willing to whack out the grub, old fat man?"

"Yes, I jolly well am!" declared Bunter. "Let him have the lot—except—except my whack, you know. Let him have all the rest!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter warmly. "I hope you fellows ain't going to be selfish. I expect he's fearfully hungry! I know I am! Famished!"

Billy Bunter cast a surreptitious eye at the lunch-basket. Then he reached out in a casual sort of way and pulled it towards him.

As no one intervened, the fat Owl lifted it to his knees and opened the lid Bunter was, as he had said, famished, and a snack from the basket seemed to him a good deal more urgent than rations for the morrow.

The Famous Five grinned. The hungry Owl was welcome to all the snacks he could extract from that lunch-basket.

A fat hand groped in it—in vain! Then a pair of big spectacles blinked into it! Then, as Billy Bunter realised the dreadful truth, he groaned. Words could not have done justice to his feelings! He simply groaned.

The R.A.F. man gave him rather a curious look. Then he glanced at the grinning faces of the Famous Five.

"I've cleared you out of grub!" he said.

"That's all right!" said Bob cheerily. "Welcome as the flowers in May. Glad of a chance to do our little bit."

"Didn't you say you were lost at sea?"

"That's so! We started for Rams-gate this morning—we may hit Holland or Belgium to-morrow if we have any luck! I suppose you haven't the remotest idea where we are, or where Great Britain may happen to be?" asked Bob.

"You young asses!" said the pilot. "You're lost at sea—you don't know where you are—and you've handed me every crumb you had in the boat!"

"Yes; wish there'd been more!" said Bob.

The airman sat silent for a minute or two, looking at them. Then he leaned back and fixed his eyes on the starry sky.

"I say, you fellows!" moaned Bunter. "There isn't any more grub! What are we going to do?"

"Without!" said Bob.

Groan!

Doing without did not seem to strike Bunter as a happy solution of the problem.

The airman's eyes remained fixed on the sky, where almost innumerable stars gleamed and glittered from the deep dark blue. The juniors glanced up also, wondering whether he had sighted a plane. They could hear no sound of engines.

"Well," said the pilot, at last, "they say that a good deed is never wasted, and you boys have done better for yourselves than you fancy in pulling me out of the water. You'll miss your supper, but I think you'll get your breakfast."

Harry Wharton caught his breath.

"Do you mean——" he began.

"Do you know which way you are drifting now?" asked the airman.

"Haven't the foggiest!" answered Bob. "We sort of hope that we're heading for England, home, and beauty, that's all."

"You're heading for Holland—though you'd have precious little prospect of ever reaching it!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"'Bout ship!" said the pilot, smiling.

"You mean that you can set a course by the stars?" asked Harry.

"Just that! You've got a long and a hard pull before you—I'd lend you a hand if I could! But you look sturdy lads—you can do it if you put your beef into it. I can give you your course, at any rate."

"Hurrah!" chirruped Bob Cherry.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Billy Bunter. He blinked at the man in flying kit. "I say, do you really know the way?"

"Sort of!" grinned the pilot.

"Blessed if I see how! I don't!" said Bunter.

At which the airman grinned, and the Famous Five chuckled.

Glad to get into action again, four of the juniors took the oars, while Frank Nugent sat at the lines to steer under the pilot's direction. They pulled with a will—a long pull and a strong pull, and a pull all together! The boat which had been drifting towards distant Continental shores glided through the dark water, heading for home.

In picking up the lost airman, the schoolboys had only thought of helping a man in a deadly scrape. That act, as it had turned out, had been

their salvation. But for that, the boat, at dawn, would have been far out of the sight of all land; hopelessly lost on the wide waste of waters. The chance remained of being picked up at sea—but it was a faint chance! In saving the life of the lost pilot, they had perhaps saved their own.

The man lay wrapped in the boat-cloak—even Billy Bunter did not think of reclaiming it. There was a cold wind on the sea, but the fat Owl found comfort in the prospect of breakfast to follow that weary night.

But the night seemed endless—the distance immeasurable. Nugent relieved the rowers in turn, but all arms were aching before the first gleam of dawn appeared in the sky. Tired, sleepy, hungry, but indomitable, the Famous Five pulled and pulled, and mile after mile of weary sea passed by the gliding boat.

Billy Bunter, fortunately, was able to nod off to sleep. Every now and then he awakened, to remark that he was hungry. Then he went to sleep again. The fat Owl was snoring when, in the bright sunshine of the April dawn, the loom of white cliffs gladdened the eyes of the Greyfriars crew, across the rolling water.

"Land-ho!" chirruped Bob Cherry.

And he gave Billy Bunter a friendly lunge with his boot, to awaken him to the glad sight of the white cliffs of old England!

LAND AT LAST!

"Y AROOOOOH!" roared Billy Bunter.

Bunter sat up. He set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose and glared.

"Wharrer you kicking me for, you beast?" he demanded.

"Land in sight, old fat man!" said Bob.

"Well, there's no need to stick your silly hoofs in a fellow's ribs!" grunted Bunter. "Where is it? I can't see it." The fat Owl blinked round over the open sea. "I can't see any land."

"You won't, in that direction!" agreed Bob. "Holland's too far off, even for your specs, old porpoise!"

"Look, ass!" said Nugent, pointing towards the cliffs, that gleamed white in the early sunshine.

"Oh! Is that land?" asked Bunter, blinking at it. "Sure it ain't a scagull?"

"Oh crikey!"

"Well, if it's land, buck up!" said Bunter. "I'm fearfully hungry—frightfully. You fellows seem awfully slow! Call that rowing?"

"We're getting a bit tired!" said Bob mildly.

"Well, I shouldn't slack!" said Bunter. "No good giving in, if you feel a little fagged! Put some beef into it, you know! Make an effort! I've told you I'm fearfully hungry!"

"I suppose we mustn't chuck him overboard?" remarked Johnny Bull thoughtfully. "But he's asking for it!"

"Oh, really, Bull! I think you fellows might pull a little harder, when you know how hungry I am! I'm used to selfishness, but I think there's a limit! I really think that!"

The R.A.F. man gazed at Billy Bunter with quite an extraordinary expression on his face. Bunter did not heed him. He sat with his spectacles fixed on the distant cliffs, which grew larger and clearer, satisfying the fat Owl at last that they were not a scagull!

"I say, you fellows, it's really land!" said Bunter. "I say, if you could get a move on, we might be in time for brekker! Every minute you lose means a minute later for brekker! Think of that!"

The tired crew pulled on, not needing encouragement from Bunter. They were able to guide their own course now, by the North Foreland lighthouse.

Not swiftly, but steadily, the boat pulled in to the land, and the beach came into view, and the gully that led up to Eastcliff Lodge.

"The old bean must be fearfully anxious about us!" remarked Bob Cherry. "Jolly glad to get in and relieve his mind."

"Yes, rather!" said Harry.

"I expect Wibley thinks we're all drowned, or something!" remarked Bunter.

"What the thump could Wibley know about it, ass?"

"Eh? Oh, no! Of course he couldn't! He, he, he! I say, you fellows, do put a bit more beef into it, I'm famished!"

The last lap seemed the longest; the boat's crew was tired out. But they pulled manfully on, and at last, long last, the boat bumped on the sand.

The Famous Five scrambled ashore and dragged the boat from the water, and then helped the rescued airman ashore.

Billy Bunter, for once, was able to get out of a boat without squeaking for a helping hand. In fact, he bounded out, and started at once at a run across the beach for the gully. Breakfast was ahead—and it drew Bunter like a magnet! His little fat legs fairly twinkled as he flew.

Harry Wharton & Co. followed more slowly, with helping hands for the man they had saved from the sea. Bunter disappeared into the gully while they were crossing the beach.

But it was a case of more haste and less speed with Bunter. As they entered the gully they heard a loud bump and a louder howl ahead.

"What-ho he bumps!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The fat Owl, scrambling hurriedly up the gully, had slipped on the chalk. He landed on a podgy back; and was still reclining thereon, gasping like a fish out of water, when the rest of the party overtook him.

"I say, you fellows, lend a fellow a hand!" spluttered Bunter, as they marched past. "I say, do you think you could carry me to the top?"

"The thoughtfulness is not terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter!" chuckled the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Well, look here, two of you give me a hand each——"

"We'll give you a foot each!" said Johnny Bull. "Roll this way!"

"Beast!"

Bunter did not seem to want the assistance of a foot. He scrambled up, and puffed and blew in the rear of the party.

"O.K.!" said the airman, when they reached the top of the gully. "I can manage now. Can I get a telephone anywhere?"

"This way," said Bob. "You're coming in for a change, and brekker. Sir William Bird will lend you his car to get back to your drome. He's a jolly old bean, and will be jolly glad to see you."

They entered at the gate and tramped up the long avenue to the house.

Billy Bunter rolled wearily in the rear.

The door was wide open when they arrived, and in the doorway stood the portly figure of Blump.

"Goodness gracious!" ejaculated Blump. "So you have returned, young gentlemen! Sir William has been very anxious."

"Here we are, here we are, here we are again!" said Bob Cherry eagerly. "We've had a night at sea, Blump—a life on the ocean wave, a home on the rolling deep!"

"But who—what——" Blump blinked at the R.A.F. man.

"This chap wants a telephone first, then a change, then brekker!" said Bob. "Take him in hand, Blump! Where's Sir William?"

"In the library, sir! Jermyn is with him. He has been constantly on the telephone——"

"Better go in and see him at once," said Harry. "The old chap must have been fearfully worried. Come on, you fellows!"

Bunter rolled in, gasping.

"I say, you fellows, I ain't coming! I'm going to have some brekker! Blump! Brekker! Quick! I'm starving! Brekker! Blump! Quick! I'm famished! How long are you going to be, Blump? Brekker! Do you hear? Deaf? Brekker!"

Blump seemed deaf. He had taken charge of the R.A.F. man whom, for some reason unknown to Bunter, he seemed to regard as more important than the fat Owl of Greyfriars. With a want of proper feeling that Bunter could only regard as absolutely heartless, Blump devoted himself to that airman, passing by William George Bunter like the idle wind which he regarded not.

Bunter rolled into the dining-room. He was fearfully grubby—he was seriously in need of a wash. But he was not thinking of any such trifles. He was thinking of brekker. He rang the bell—he banged on the table—and he squeaked and squeaked!

"Brekker! Gimme something to eat! Do you hear? Blow you! Blow the lot of you! Gimme some brekker!"

Blump remained deaf; but John, the footman, came to the rescue. Breakfast was brought in for Bunter—and Bunter nose-dived for the tray! And then there was a happy sound of munching and crunching, gurgling

and spluttering, and once more life seemed worth living to Billy Bunter.

Meanwhile, Harry Wharton & Co. went to the library. They were hungry enough, but the first thing was to assure Sir William of their safety.

As Harry Wharton opened the door, a voice was speaking within.

"I have no doubt, sir, that there will be news before long—very probably the boys have landed somewhere along the coast——"

Wharton's hand dropped from the door. He stood thunderstruck! The Co. stood as if rooted!

They knew that smooth, deferential voice!

As they stood, petrified for the moment by the sound of Soames' voice in the library of Eastcliff Lodge, another voice came:

"I am terribly worried, Jermyn! I cannot understand what can have happened to the boys——"

"It is somewhat unfortunate, sir, that you did not send them away as I advised," said the smooth voice. "Had you carried out those instructions——"

"How could I? But if I'd known that——"

Harry Wharton drew a deep, deep breath. Then, with a grim face, he threw open the door and walked into the library with his friends at his heels.

SOAMES' TRUMP CARD!

"JERMYN!" yelled Wibley.

"Here they are!"

Sir William Bird, alias Wibley of the Remove, fairly bounded as the Famous Five walked into the library.

His face registered immense relief and satisfaction.

Not so that of the valet.

Jermyn stood as if transfixed. His eyes seemed almost to pop from his smooth face at the sight of the chums of Greyfriars.

He stared at them blankly! They stared at him—with grim faces! This was the first time they had seen the baronet's man, Jermyn; and they would not have seen him now had not Soames been assured that they were far out at sea, drifting if not drowned. And they knew, now, why they had not seen him before—now that they knew he was Soames!

Sir William jumped towards them.

"Safe!" he chirruped. "You young asses, what have you given me all this worry for? Where have you been? What have you been up to? What?"

Harry Wharton raised his arm and pointed at the panting valet.

"Ask that man!" he said.

"Eh? What? What does Jermyn know about it?" asked Wibley, in astonishment.

"That's Soames!"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Soames!" said Johnny Bull, between his teeth. "Soames! So that's why we've never seen Jermyn. Soames!"

"The esteemed and execrable Soames!" murmured Hurrec Jamset Ram Singh.

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Soames, otherwise Jermyn, backed a step towards the french windows.

Bob Cherry cut past him at once and stood with his back to the window.

"No, you don't!" he said grimly. "We've got you now, you villain! You're not getting away!"

"We've got him!" said Harry Wharton. "We've got the scoundrel!"

Sir William blinked from one party to the other in bewilderment. This was the surprise of Wibley's life.

"What the thump are you driving at?" he exclaimed, quite forgetting in his amazement that he was Sir William Bird. "Off your rockers? What do you mean by calling Jermyn Soames?"

"He is Soames!" said Harry. "We guessed that the villain had a place of some sort in this neighbourhood, under a new name—but we never dreamed that he was here—that he was calling himself Jermyn, and was your valet—"

"Impossible!" gasped Wibley. "We all know him, sir!" said Nugent.

"The knowfulness is terrific."

"Oh, my only hat and sunshade!" Wibley stared at Soames. "I don't get this! This man, Jermyn, has been here over a year. He is trusted—he—he—he must have had good recommendations to be taken on here—I—I—I mean—" Wibley remembered his part. "I—I mean, I—I trusted him—"

"Others have been taken in by him before you, sir!" said Harry. "He was valet once to Mr. Vernon-Smith, a Greyfriars fellow's father. Sorry to give you such a shock, Sir William, but we've got to get that man and hand him over to the police!"

"What-ho!" said Johnny Bull emphatically.

Soames stood silent, with a faint sneer on his smooth face.

He was fairly caught and cornered, but after the first bewildering surprise of seeing the Greyfriars fellows again, he had quickly recovered himself. His look was dark and bitter, but he was perfectly cool.

"But—but—" stammered Wibley.

Of Jermyn, Wibley himself, of course, knew nothing. He had taken him on trust from the old Bird. But the old Bird had trusted him absolutely, even to the extent of admitting him to the secret of the impersonation at Eastcliff Lodge. It was clear now that the old Bird, Secret Service man as he was, had been utterly taken in by the cunning rascal.

"That man," said Harry quietly, "knows why we have been away all night, sir. He followed us out to sea yesterday—drove us out on the open sea, under an automatic, and sailed away and left us to drift. If we hadn't picked up a man who was able to steer us a course, we should be adrift in the North Sea now—that was what he left us to—to perish in an open boat."

"Not at all, sir." Soames' smooth voice spoke, for the first time. "I assure you, sir, that I had every hope that you would be picked up at sea, and that such a lesson would be suffi-

cient to persuade you to leave a spot where your presence was undesired and unwelcome. I should have been quite glad, sir, to learn that you were safe—though certainly I did not expect to hear that happy news so soon!"

Wibley blinked at him. "Do you admit you're Soames?" he exclaimed.

Soames smiled faintly. "I should not admit it, my dear sir, if there were any hope of getting by with a denial," he answered. "But in the presence of five witnesses who are perfectly acquainted with me, denial would be a useless waste of breath."

"You dashed rascal—" "I am sorry to have lost your good opinion, Sir William," said Soames. "I fear that you will have no further use for Jermyn's faithful services! I assure you, sir, that I shall leave Eastcliff Lodge with great regret."

"You will leave it with a policeman, too!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I trust not, sir," said Soames. The rascal was as cool as a cucumber. "My game is up here, I acknowledge. But let us have no harsh words—let us part in an amicable manner."

Harry Wharton's eyes gleamed. "Collar him!" he snapped.

And the Famous Five closed in round Soames. They would not have been surprised to see him reach for a weapon, and they were watching him like cats, ready for such a move. But Soames appeared to have no such idea in his mind. He stood unresisting, as the Greyfriars fellows grasped him on all sides.

"Hold him!" said Wibley. "I'll phone up the police station at once. Keep him safe!"

"One word, sir," said Soames smoothly. "One word, Sir William, before you ring up the police! Have you considered—"

"You rotter!"

"Oh, quite, sir! But it would be worth your while to consider that a certain matter connected with the Secret Service, and involving the personal safety of a gentleman you are bound to regard is known to me—and that if I go hence a prisoner I cannot be expected to keep my knowledge to myself."

"Oh!" gasped Wibley.

He had forgotten for the moment how much Jermyn knew. Now that Soames reminded him of it, he stood perplexed.

The juniors looked at him. They looked at Soames. They could see that there was some secret between the two, though they had no idea what.

"Oh!" repeated Sir William.

"Let us talk sense, sir!" said Soames smoothly. "I shall leave here, and these boys have nothing further to fear from me. What I have done, I have done to drive them away, to keep them from making the discovery they have now made. From to-day, our ways lie apart—the secret is out, and I have no further motive, and certainly no desire to harm them."

"Oh!" gasped Wibley. A sudden light dawned on him. "You sent that telegram! It was not from—"

from— You plotting rascal, you sent it to get the boys away!"

"Quite so, sir!" assented Soames. "At least, I had it sent by a friendly hand. I see no reason for keeping that secret—now!"

"You dashed rascal, you—"

"Are we not wasting time?" asked Soames, with smooth coolness. "If you will request these young gentlemen to release me, Sir William, I will pack my bag and go—and you will all see the last of me. Otherwise—"

"Look here, what does all this mean?" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "That rascal's got to be run in!"

"Hem!" Sir William Wibley coughed. "Hem! I—I cannot explain fully, old beans—I mean, my dear boys—but a certain matter, connected with the Secret Service—a man's life may be endangered if that rascal tells what he knows—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Bob.

"After all, we're done with him," said Wibley. "We know him now, and, as he says, he's got no motive for doing any further harm."

"None!" said Soames. "And believe me, young gentlemen, it was only with the greatest regret that I adopted harsh measures—"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Johnny Bull.

Soames smiled and shut up.

The juniors looked at Sir William and at one another. Then their grasp dropped from the sea-lawyer. Whatever the mysterious secret was, they could not, after what Sir William had said, carry on. And, after all, there was no more danger from Soames, now that his secret was known, and he was turned out of Eastcliff Lodge.

Sir William pointed to the door.

"Cut!" he snapped.

"I take my leave with respect and regret, sir," said Soames, "and, believe me, the secret is quite safe in my keeping."

And, with that, Soames was gone. He was gone, though whether the Easter party had seen the last of him was another matter.

THE END.

(Don't miss "BILLY BUNTER'S HAIR-RAID!" the next yarn in this exciting holiday series. If you've not already ordered your copy, fill in the Order Form below and hand it to your newsagent. It's the only way to make sure of getting your MAGNET regularly every week.—ED.)

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Until further notice, please reserve for me every week a copy of the MAGNET.

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COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS—AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the "Magnet," The Amalgamated Press, Ltd., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

YOU can ration food—but you can't ration correspondence! Every week my mail gets bigger and bigger. Gee, there's quite a stack of letters on my desk this week! When I look through my correspondence week after week and see how enthusiastic my readers are, I realise how much you fellows think of the MAGNET in general and Frank Richards' stories in particular. "I like the stories of Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, better than any other school stories," writes J. Jameson, a reader living in the Midlands. "Frank Richards is the finest author of boys' stories, bar none!" says a Welsh reader. "I hope to read the MAGNET for many years to come!" says Pat O'Reilly, an Irish reader of long standing; while Jock Mackie, of Scotland, claims the MAGNET to be "Right good stuff!" I could go on quoting similar passages from readers' letters which have reached me from our Dominions, but space will not allow. Clean, wholesome literature has been, and always will be, the hallmark of the MAGNET.

There's another grand treat in store for you next Saturday, chums. Frank Richards' yarn of Greyfriars, which is entitled:

"BILLY BUNTER'S HAIR-RAID!"

is one of the best our popular author has written us. Being pledged to keep Wibley's impersonation at Eastcliff Lodge a secret, Bunter, like the fat ass he is, lets the cat out of the bag! And then, to make matters worse, Gerald Loder butts in unexpectedly to see his uncle! As is only natural, Gerald very soon makes himself unpopular, and then there's Trouble with a capital "T"! To tell you the truth, chums, I find it hard to describe the merits of Frank Richards' yarns week by week, because he always seems to

go one better. Believe me, you're in for a real tip-top yarn next Saturday.

Now for a letter from a reader who neither gives his name nor address—he fears some of his reader chums might see his name in the MAGNET—and who tells me that he suffers from what he calls "the miserable complaint of blushing" whenever a little incident occurs concerning himself in business or otherwise. He says it is most embarrassing, and that it often makes him feel very miserable—so miserable, in fact, that he hardly knows what to do. Well, chum, blushing is a habit which usually comes from want of physical condition on the part of the victim, and can often be cured by going in for some sport. Blushing also arises from thinking too much about yourself. When you enter a room full of people, you get the mistaken idea that they must be thinking adverse things about you. The condition is very largely nervousness, brought about by the fact that one is not in the habit of mixing with strangers, and the best way to overcome it is to cultivate the society of other people. But make a point of getting physically fit. If boys will only realise how much they would gain by a regular system of physical culture, we should have every lad in the kingdom striving to keep his body in decent physical condition. As it is, they do not realise the sheer pleasure a feeling of fitness gives, nor how easy it is to acquire that feeling. If they did, as I have said before, every one of them would go in for some sport or exercise. Among sports to be recommended, boxing takes a high place. It is a capital exercise, giving one courage, and a feeling of self-confidence hardly to be obtained in any other way.

Meet you all again next week.

YOUR EDITOR.

"MAGNET" PEN PALS

A free feature which brings together readers all over the world for the purpose of exchanging views on matters of mutual interest. If you wish to reply to a notice published here you must write to the Pen Pal direct. Notices for publication should be accompanied by the coupon on this page, and posted to the MAGNET Pen Pals, Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

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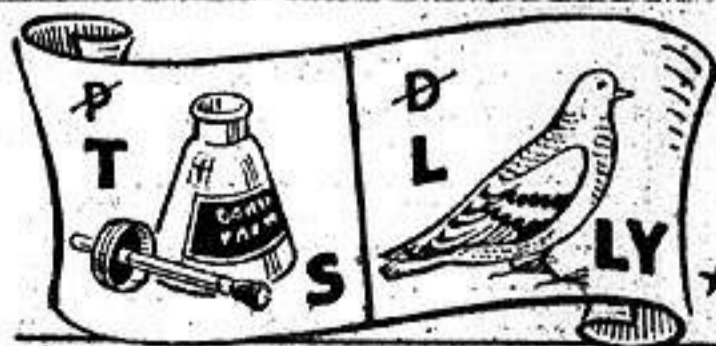
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