

THE MAN with the EAR-RINGS

By CHARLES HAMILTON

On Margate Sands.

” BUNNY !”

Jack Hare did not immediately answer. It would have been wiser to answer at once; for there was a sharp note in his uncle’s voice, which showed that Mr. Austin Hare was rather cross that morning.

But Jack was busy and bothered. It was one of Jack’s duties to water the garden at Wistaria Villa before breakfast, and he was having trouble with the hose. He had fixed it successfully to the tap under the kitchen Window, but for some reason the water would not come on.

With a waterless hose in his grasp, surrounded by a dry and arid garden. Jack had forgotten breakfast.

Mr. Hare stood in the doorway of the breakfast-room and called. Mr. Hare was the soul of punctuality. Every morning he left Wistaria Villa at 8.40 to the second, to catch the 9:10 at Margate Station for London and business. Breakfast was at 8.15; and there was trouble at 8.16 if the Hare family were not all present.

His nephew, Jack, was not punctual. He ought to have been. His uncle had often told him so. His aunt had told him so still oftener. Mr. Hare had explained to him that punctuality is the politeness of princes. Mrs. Hare had impressed upon him that ‘procrastination is the thief of time’.

But proverbial wisdom seemed lost on Bunny. Perhaps he inherited a certain carelessness of character from his father—a rather irrepressible young man who had disappeared some years ago and was seldom mentioned in the family.

Bunny gave too much thought to the big world that lay outside the garden walls of Wistaria villa; beyond the sands of Margate; beyond the North

Foreland.

He never saw a fishing ketch put out into the sea of the Thames without following it with his thoughts to the deep sea, and when a great shape passed in view, far out at sea, Jack's eyes followed it longingly till it vanished in the blue.

For Bunny was only fourteen, and at fourteen the world was a wonderful place. And just beyond the horizon there were great marvels and thrilling adventures.

Which was probably the reason why Jack was having trouble with the hose. For in the distance a deep blue sky, flecked with white clouds, met a deeper blue sea, and against the blue glanced white and brown sails. Bunny's thoughts had fixed more on those glancing sails, than on his uncle's tulip beds.

"Bunny!" Even his uncle called him Bunny. His name being Jack Hare, facetious fellows had, of course, turned it into Jack Rabbit, from which transition to "Bunny" was easy. And "Bunny" seemed to suit Jack somehow. For although he is the hero of this story, it may as well be confessed at once that he was not one of those brilliant, efficient fellows who do everything in exactly the right way at the right time.

His uncle and aunt regarded him as the fool of the family. His cousin, Gilbert, expressed it more forcibly as the fathead of the family. People are said to learn by making mistakes. If that was the case, Jack Hare must have learned a lot, for his mistakes were many.

"Bunny!" hooted Mr. Hare.

"Yes, uncle! Just coming!" called back Bunny, wrestling despairingly with the hose, which was still as dry as the Sahara desert or a lecture from his uncle.

Mr. Hare stepped out at the door. He gave a severe glance round the arid garden, and a still more severe glance at his nephew.

"You have not watered the Guardian, John!" he said accusingly.

Bunny groaned. When his uncle called, him "John," it meant that the atmosphere was growing very electric.

"The water won't come on, uncle!" he said weakly,

"Nonsense!" said Mr. Hare.

"I've tried and tried—"

"Nonsense!"

"Really and truly, uncle—"

Mr. Hare took the hose from his nephew. Not a trickle of water came from it. He frowned more deeply.

"It's turned on," said Jack eagerly. "You can see it's turned on, uncle. But

the water won't come."

"I can see it is turned on at this end," said Mr. Hare in a deep voice, "but have you turned it on at the other end, at the garden tap?"

Bunny started.

"I—I—I think so!" he stammered.

"You think so?" said Mr. Austin Hare in a withering voice. "You do not know—you only think so! Still, I am pleased to hear that you think at all. It is news to me—and very gratifying news."

Bunny wriggled. His uncle had a gift of sarcasm, often exercised at poor Bunny's expense.

"Gratifying as it is to me to learn that you are capable of thought," continued Mr. Hare, "I should still like to know whether the garden tap is turned on or not."

"I—I think—"

"It has not occurred to you to ascertain?" inquired Mr. Hare, still pungently sarcastic. "Your intellect, has stirred, but not so far as that? You do not think it worth while to walk across to the tap and ascertain whether you have been idiot enough 'to leave it turned off?"

"I—I'll go at once, uncle—"

"Don't hurry!" said the sarcastic Hare. "I can easily miss my breakfast; or, alternatively, I can miss my train. Business considerations are matters of very little moment, compared with staring at ships over the garden wall."

Bunny waited for no more sarcasm. He flew across the garden to the kitchen wall to look at the tap. It was true that he had been thinking of ships and bronzed sailors and foreign lands and palm trees, and strange tongues when he fixed the hose to the tap. It was quite possible that he had forgotten to turn it on.

And he had! The mystery of the hose was explained at once when Jack reached the garden tap. It was still off!

Mr. Hare was holding the hose. He was holding it with the nozzle in his hand, pointing upwards at his chin, while he watched his nephew with a sarcastic eye and waited for news. He expected Bunny to call out.

But money, having wasted so much time already, remembered that punctuality was the politeness of prince's, and that procrastination was the thief of time. He rectified his omission at once, turning on the garden tap immediately he reached it.

There was a gurgle of water in the hose. Swish!

"It's coming, uncle—"

It had come!

From the nozzle of the hose shot a spurt of water, which caught Mr. Hare

just under the chin.

The yell that broke from Mr. Hare walk every echo of Wistiria Villa and must have been heard as far as Margate sands and the bandstand.

Mr. Hare dropped the hose as if it had suddenly become red-hot. He staggered back, drenched with water. But it was really not judicious to a drop a hose now in full play. The stream of water played on Mr. Hare's right leg—and as he hopped it caught his left. It was still less judicious for a gentleman, in such circumstances, to lose his temper completely and kick the hose away. But that was what troubled Mr. Hare did, and the wretched thing twisted over and shot a stream of water into his waistcoat.

“Yow-owoooooop !“ roared Mr. Hare.

“Oh crumbs !“ ejaculated Bunny.

He rushed to retrieve the hose. He grasped it, and swung it away from his uncle. His only thought—and a very right and proper thought --_was merely to save his relative from further drenching. He grabbed the hose and swung the nozzle round. It was sheer ill fortune that brought Mrs. Hare and Gilbert Hare to the door of the breakfast-room at the same moment to look into the garden to see what the matter was.

What the matter was they learned immediately, as Jack swung the hose round it played on them instead of Mr. Hare. There was a shriek from Mrs. Hare, and she faded out of the picture instantly. There was a roar from Jack's cousin.

“You young fathead! Turn that thing off !” roared Gilbert.

“Oh dear !” gasped poor Bunny. He swung the hose away at once. No fellow could do more. Jack was not to blame because Mr. Hare, rushing towards the house, came immediately into the line of fire again as the hose swung. This time the stream caught him in the right ear.

“You dangerous young idiot!” yelled Gilbert. He rushed across to Bunny.

“Look here !”

Jack looked, as bidden. Naturally, as ho turned, the hose turned with him. Gilbert got the benefit of it. The rush of water swept him fairly off his feet. He sat down in a pool of water, spluttering.

“Oooooogn! Oooooch! Wooooh !“ sputtercd Gilbert.

“Bring me my stick !“ Mr. Hare was bawling. “Jane! Gilbert! Bunny ! Bring me my stick! Bring me my stick immediately !”

Bunny, as already stated, was not one of those brilliant fellows. But without being as bright as polished steel, Bunny could guess what the chubby stick was wanted for. It was borne in on Bunny's mind that a prompt retreat was indicated. He dropped the hose and negotiated the garden wall. It was only common sense to give Gilbert time to cool down and Mr Hare time

to catch his train to the City. Bunny headed for Margate sands. Only a minute elapsed before Mr. Hare had his stick in his hand. But by that time Bunny had elapsed also.

From Foreign Parts

The foreign-looking sailor man was lying on the sands, his shoulders propped against a jutting chalk rock, staring idly it out to sea, smoking a thin brown cigarette that had a scent as pungent as a cigar. Bunny could not help looking at him as he came along.

Bunny had been in a rather worried frame of mind when he quitted Wistaria Villa for parts unknown. But Bunny had a cheerful disposition, and worries never troubled him long.

He was walking along the sunny stretch of beach from Margate to Kingsate, under the chalk cliffs.

The tide was out, the sands shone in the summer sun shine, and there was a healthy smell of seaweed. That beach was probably one of the healthiest spots in the wide world. And Bunny could not help feeling merry and bright as he tramped the shining sands and drew in deep breaths of the keen ozone-laden sea breeze. He was forgetting his troubles, and he forgot them still more completely when he sighted the foreign-looking man on the beach.

Bunny came to a stop and looked at the man. The mere sight of him awakened all Bunny's dreams of far lands and four and skies. He had a swarthy complexion, black eyes under jet-black lashes, and wore gold ear-rings in his ears. Bunny had never seen ear-rings in a man's ears before, and they quite fascinated him. And the man wore a red handkerchief twisted round his head in place of a hat.

He looked remarkably like one of the pirates of whom Bunny had read in books of adventure. But Bunny realised that he could hardly be a pirate. Pirates existed no longer, except in print. And Margate had never been a resort for pirates.

But the man evidently belonged to four and parts. And Bunny, as he looked at him, thought of blue seas, bluer than the waters that rolled off the North Foreland, of sunny skies, sunnier than the sky of Thanet, of enchanting coral isles set in glittering reefs, of birds of paradise and many-coloured parrots, and coconuts bunched on tall, slanting palm-trees.

The man, as he rolled a fresh cigarette, looked round suddenly, and Bunny blushed deeply—realising that he had been staring at the stranger for many minutes. The black eyes, keen as a hawk's, ran over Bunny, and the foreign-

looking man smiled. Perhaps something in Bunnies chubby face made him smile, Bunny was about to pass on, when the man called to him.

“Ahoy, shipmate !” Foreign as he looked, he spoke English, though with a soft lisping accent that was music to Bunny’s ears.

Bunny came towards him. To be hailed as “shipmate” by a foreign- . looking sailorman was sheer joy to the romantic Bunny. This was the sort of thing that happened in the adventure books that Bunny devour to in great quantities. He would not have been surprised to discover that the man had the chart of a treasure island tattooed on his brawny chest.

Bunny really had no time to waste and if he was going to walk along the sands as far as Kingsgate. For the tide had turned and was coming in. And when the tide was in, the waves

Washed right up to the chalk cliffs at most points along the shore. And the cliffs were mostly as steep as the wall of a house. Here and there were gullies by which one could clamber up. But they were few and far between and it really was not safe to risk being caught by the tide.

But Bunny was not thinking of that now.

“Yes?” he said ‘Did you call me?’

‘Si senior! Answered the sailor man.

Bunny was enchanted. He knew that ‘Si senior!’ was Spanish, and that it meant “ Yes, sir !”. But it was the first time that such delightful words had ever fallen on Bunny’s ears. Nobody had ever said ‘Si’ in’ Margate. They said ‘Yes’ and sometimes ‘ yus’. And Bunny had heard American visitors say ‘ Yep’. Bunny felt that he was entering the realms of romance !

“ What’s the time, sir”, continued the man with the earrings. Bunny would have preferred to hear the question in Spanish; though there would have been the drawback that he would not have understood it.

He took out his watch. Bunny had a very handsome gold watch, a present long ago from his father. His father had never been able to afford expensive presents; but it was a characteristic of Eustace Hare that he had generally bought things that he could not afford. Perhaps that was one of the reasons why Bunny’s father had departed for unknown spaces leaving behind him many people who were anxious to discover his address ! The black eyes of the foreign sailor man snapped at the sight of the gold watch.

“Just eleven,” said Bunny.

“ Gracias !” said the man with the ear-rings, which Bunny guessed to mean ‘Thanks’.

He yawned, rose to his feet, and lighted another cigarette which he rolled the first inning his brown hands. The pungent scent of that cigarette to cold Bunny’s nose delightfully. Bunny, of course, did not smoke, and he did not

care for the scent of the cigarettes that were common enough on Margate beach. But there was something strange and delightful in a cigarette that smelt like a strong cigar. Bunny would have been glad of a talk with the man with the ear-rings, and to hear from him tales of the strange far lands whence he came. It seemed as if the sailorman read his thoughts.

“Now I must hurry or I shall miss my ship !” he said ‘ It is possible— yes?— to walk along this beach to reach Broadstairs?’”

” The tide will be in,” said Bunny. But you can walk a good distance and I can show you a way up the cliffs, if you like.”

“You go—yes?— the way I go?” asked the sailorman. “Yes. I’m walking as far as Kingsgate,” answered Bunny

“Muy ‘bien !” said the man with the ear-rings.

And he started along the sands with Bunny. It was not the “season‘ at Margate and there were few people on the sands at a distance from the town. At a farther distance there were none; and Bunny and his new friend had the beach to themselves.

The foreign looking sailor man talked as they went in a lisping English with an occasional phrase in Spanish. He told Bunny that his name was Ruy Pinto—that he came from Cadiz— and he talked of voyages in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. But he did not mention how he happened to be on and the beach of Thanet or anything about his present ship.

Bunny talked, too, of his humdrum life at Wistaria Villa; of his longing to travel in strange lands and across strange seas; of his firm intention to go roaming and some day and see the world And he confided to Ruy Pinto that he had accumulated a little store from his pocket-money for that very purpose and had changed it into a five pound note which he kept tucked away safely in an inner pocket.

Ruy Pinto seemed quite interested and in Bunny s talk especially when he mentioned the five pound note and in the course of half an hour he had drawn Bunny’s whole history from him.

All the time his keen black eyes were either watching Bunny or scanning the sea, the beach, or the cliffs. But Bunny was too interested in his talk, and in his own talk, to notice how extremely watchful Ruy Pinto was. The foreign sailorman came to a halt at last. They were well over a mile from Margate, and Kingsgate was still some distance ahead. On their left lay the wide sea, rolling in to the land. And behind them the water had already reached the cliffs, cutting off any of possible return.

They stood in an embayment of the cliffs, which shut them in like walls. But ahead a narrow passage was still left, by which one could walk on.

But farther ahead, as Bunny knew, a chalk headland jutted out into the sea,

which the tide must be already washing. And at that point further progress was impossible.

They were, in fact, shut into the hollow of the cliffs, as Bunny knew if his companion did not, and there was no gully by which the cliffs could be climbed. Bunny was not alarmed, however, for he knew that beach like a book. And he knew one spot where the cliff could be climbed, a spot known to few, and not visible to the eye of a stranger.

Coming to a halt, the man with the ear-rings looked back at the tide dashing against the white chalk. He looked ahead, where, apparently at least, the way was still open. He looked up at the cliffs, towering seventy feet without a sign of any visible means of ascent.

And he smiled—a very unpleasant smile. ‘ .

“And now, little senor, we must part,” he remarked in his soft voice.

Bunny blinked at him.

“But before we part,” continued Ruy Pinto, “you will have the excessive goodness to hand me your gold watch—”

‘Eh’ gasped Bunny.

“I many need to know the time again,” said Pinto blandly. “Or possibly I many find other uses for the watch. You will be kind enough to hand me also the banknote you have spoken of, and ne loose change that you may have m your pockets. You understand me?”

Bunny understood slowly. His face flushed. A gleam came into his eyes.

Jack Hare might be a good deal of an ass in some respects, but he had plenty of pluck. And now that p understood that this rascal had led him to a secluded spot to rob him, he was not frightened but angry and defiant.

“You awful rogue !” he gasped.

Pinto grinned.

“ In return for your gold watch and your bank note, little senor, I will give you a worth of advice,” he said.

“Do not make friends so easily with strangers, and do not tell them too much. This advice will be useful to you if by some chance you escape the tide and continue to live. But now the tide is coming in, and I am pressed for time.”

“Do you think I’m going to let you rob me?” roared Bunny.

“Si, senor.”

“Then you’re jolly well mistaken !”

Bunny jumped back, clenched his fists, and his eyes blazed at the swarthy face.

“Hands off, you rotter, or I’ll jolly well hit out!”

Ruy Pinto stooped, and from the leg of his sea boot drew a long knife with a

wicked-looking curved blade. The bright steel flashed in the sun-shine. "I think you will hand me your watch and your banknote, little senor," he said softly. Bunny's heart pounded. He gave wild glance round, but only the sea and the cliffs minute his gaze. There was no help at hand. Far out at sea was the brown sail of a fishing-ketch from Broadstairs; too far off for the fishermen to see what was going on on the beach under the shadow of the cliffs.

"I wait, seniorito !" said Ruy Pinto, with a threatening glitter in his black eyes. "I wait !"

The flashing steel made a movement. There was no help for it! Bunny, in deep silence, handed over the watch and the banknote and two half-crowns that formed the total of his worldly wealth. Pinto slipped the plunder into a pocket and re-stored the knife to the leg of his boot.

"Gracias, seniorito !" he said. But the musical Spanish no longer had a charm for Bunny's disillusioned ears,

"You are very good! Adios! I regret leave you, especially as it appears to me that you will probably be drowned. If you follow me, I shall knock you on the head. It would be uncomfortable if you should walk into the town after me. Remain here, and perhaps the tide may spare you. I truly hope so. Adios, little senor !"

And the man with the ear-rings walked on and disappeared from Bunny's staring eyes beyond the cliffs.

—

Turning the Tables.

Bunny stood rooted to the sand, staring after the swarthy sailorman till the bulging cliffs hid him from sight.

"Oh crumbs !" ejaculated Bunny.

There was an expression of deep discouragement on Bunny's chubby, usually cheerful, visage. He could not help feeling that his adventure with the foreign seaman, which had begun so agreeably and ended so disagreeably, would, had his relatives known of it, have confirmed them in their belief that he was the fool of the family

He had been robbed of all he was asked of value in the world, and he had fairly asked for it. And his people would know what an ass he had been, for he would have to account for the loss of his watch. His Cousin Gilbert would notice that it was gone, even if his uncle and aunts did not.

"Oh dear !" said Bunny dolefully. The Spanish seaman had left him, he believed, to drown when the tide washed up to the cliffs. The man was evidently a desperado of the first water, an absolute villain, whom some

strange chance had stranded on the quiet and prosaic coast of Thanet. A fugitive from the police as likely as not, and at the end of his resources, looking out for a chance to rob and plunder when Bunny had so obligingly asked for it. But Bunny's situation was not so serious as the rascal had believed; for in that embayment of the cliffs was the unknown path which was invisible to the eye of a passer-by, but which Bunny had discovered long ago. It was by that path that he had intended to guide Pinto to the upland, had the rascal not shown himself in his true colours just then. Slowly a grin dawned on Bunny's face. He knew his way up the cliff. It was not an easy climb, but he had made it several times already, and could make it again. He was in no danger whatever from the tide, now roaring in with great boisterousness.

But the case was different with Pinto. He had gone on, round the corner of the cliff, where the way was still open, obviously in the belief that it was open all time way ahead. But where the shore curved back beyond that point of chalk there was a jutting headland, as Bunny very well knew that barred the way. In a few minutes Ruy Pinto would make the discovery that he was caught by the tide.

The tide was coming in rapidly now. Already water was swishing round Bunny's shoes. He moved off towards the cliff, swishes of water following him. He reached the perpendicular chalk and clambered on the rough buttresses at the foot of the cliff. At a height of ten feet further climbing looked impossible. But Bunny knew of a jutting ledge along which a fellow could create till he reached a gully above. Bunny lumbered on the ledge and moved actively along it, holding on to the rough surface of the cliff with his hands. It slanted precipitously, was barely a foot wide, and was overhung here and there by bulging chalk. But Bunny was active, and he negotiated the difficult path with ease. There was a sudden sound of running footsteps on the sand below, and a splashing of sea boots in water.

Bunny looked down. Round the point of rock where the Spanish sailor had disappeared the man appeared, running fast and splashing through the water spreading all along the foot of the cliffs. His swarthy face was set, his black eyes shining. Evidently he had discovered that there was no way along the shore.

Bunny grinned. The man came splashing and panting back into the hollow of the cliffs, where there was still a narrow space, close in, that the tide had not yet reached. This spot was almost directly below Bunny, now twenty feet up the face of the cliff.

"Dios!" he heard the man with ear-rings exclaim in a panting voice. "Por Bias!"

The man stood close back to the precipitous chalk, staring about him. The waves washed at his feet and receded, to wash in again, up to his knees. On either side the tide hemmed him in, and in a few minutes more it would be deep.

The rascal was trapped by the tide!

He looked up—not in expectation of seeing Bunny, but in a desperate hope of discerning some lodgment on the cliff out of reach of the sea.

He started violently as he saw Bunny looking down at him from twenty feet above. His eyes brightened.

“Nino !” he called out “There is a path? Yes?” He clambered up the rough, chalk, and a rushing wave coming in after him drenched him from head to foot as he clambered.

Bunny hurried on his way. The slanting ledge ended suddenly. But five feet above the spot where it ended was a cavity in the face of the cliff which widened higher up into a gully.

Bunny reached up to the cavity and drew himself into it. There he stopped; He waited there for the Spanish sailor

On his own the man would never have found the ledge in the chalk. But he knew which way Bunny must have climbed, and he sought for the ledge and found it. Below him the tide was roaring. Great waves dashed against the cliff and splashed high, drenching Pinto with water as he clambered swiftly and actively along off the ledge.

He reached the end where, from the opening in the cliff five feet higher, Bunny watched him coolly. And there was a large jagged chunk of chalk in Bunny’s hand now.

Pinto reached up and grasped the edge of the opening. The next moment he withdrew his hands with a howl of pain as the chunk of chalk came smashing down on his dusky fingers

“Carambo !” he yelled.

Bunny grinned at him cheerily

“My turn now !” he said. “Shove your paws this way again if you want another rap, Mr Pinto !”

The man with the ear-rings glared up at him. His black eyes blazed and scintillated with fury. But Bunny was a master of the situation now. The ruffian could not reach him, and his hip could not clamber into the opening so long as Bunny stood on guard there with the chunk of chalk in his hand.

Indeed, had Bunny chosen to hurl the chalk, it would have knocked the Spaniard off the ledge into the water that was seething below. The man with the ear-rings panted with rage.

“Let me come !” he hissed, “Let me pass! The tide—”

“The tide won’t reach you there,” said Bunny. “It never covers that ledge. You’re safe as houses. But you’ll get wet !” A great wave washed in and covered the ledge with water reaching up the shoulders of the Spaniard as he clung to the cliff. He held on desperately, and the wave receded, leaving the ledge bare. The ledge at its top was well above high-water; but every in coming wave flooded it before receding.

“Boy !” gasped Pinto. “Per Dios !

Let me pass! I cannot hold on here— the waves will wash me away—’

Bunny nodded cheerily. “Very likely !” he agreed.

“Carambo! Do you wish to see me washed away to death before your eyes?” howled Pinto.

“Why not?” said Bunny coolly.

“That was what you thought you were leaving me to, wasn’t it?” The tide washed up again, flooding the ledge and the man who clung to the face of the cliff. Pinto held on to the juts of the rock till the water receded. His face was set and desperate now. He clutched at the chalk to draw himself up into the gully. Bunny raised his weapon in both hands, and the Spaniard jerked back to the ledge.

“ Just in time !” said Bunny. “If you get this rock on your napper, Pinto, it will be the very, last thing that will happen to you !”

. ‘Pinto stooped, and straightened up again with his knife in his dusky hand. He could not reach Bunny with the steel; but his hand was thrown back to hurl the knife. Bunny was watching him, and he dodged the flashing steel as it flew. The knife glanced on the chalk.

“ Try again !” said Bunny. He picked up the knife and flung it far into the sea. On the ledge below him the desperate man ground his teeth with rage.

“And now” said Bunny cheerfully, “you can hand over my watch and the Bank note, Mr. Pinto And two half-crowns if you please. After you’ve done that, I’ll let you climb out,”

Up came the washing waves again up to the neck of the desperate man, and receded once more, leaving him streaming with water. He gasped and spluttered and choked.

“Say when you’ve had enough, old bean !” said Bunny.

The man with the ear-rings groped in his pocket. The watch, the bank- the note, and the two half-crowns were tossed up into the cavity beside Bunny, who picked them up and slipped them into his pocket The man below eyed him like a wolf.

“Now let me come !” he gasped.

“No hurry !” said Bunny cheerfully. “I’m not trusting myself in your reach, Mr. Pinto, even without your knife. It will take me five minutes to climb out

of this gully, Keep where you are till I'm gone. I warn you that if you climb up I'll drop this rock on your head !“

“Hasten !“ panted the man with the ear-rings. “Pronto !”

“Keep your wool on!” Bunny backed out of his sight, and proceeded to clamber up the steep gully. The next minute he looked back. The head and shoulders of the Spaniard were in view as he came up

Bunny's face set hard. He had no doubt whatever that if the desperate ruffian reached him he would be tossed into the sea. Bunny was not taking that chance. He had warned the rascal; and now he kept his word. The chalk rock left his hand and went thundering down

But Pinto was watchful as a cat. He dropped back on the ledge again, and the rock rolled over his head and plunged into the sea. After which he was careful to keep out of sight for the stipulated five minutes. Bunny clambered out of the gully to the green expanse on the top of the cliffs. He did not pause there. The little town of Kingsgate was in sight across the fields, and Bunny cut across the fields at top speed; By the time the drenched and desperate Pinto came clambering out of the gully; his eyes burning with rage and vengeance, Bunny was far away.

Sitting in the Broadstairs motor bus on his way back to Margate, Bunny could hardly believe that that wild adventure had really happened.

He had been in great danger, as he very well knew; and he had turned the tables on a dangerous and desperate ruffian in a way that Bunny felt was very creditable.

He wondered what Gilbert would say if he knew— whether Gilbert would still persist that Bunny was the fathead of the family. Gilbert, he was sure, would never have handled the man with the ear-rings as he, Bunny had done. Still, it was no use telling Gilbert about it. His cousin would only think that he was romancing.

But Bunny did not want to tell anybody. His own knowledge of that exciting episode was enough for him. It thrilled him to think of it, and he enjoyed the retrospect all the way home to Margate. He was still thinking of it when he walked down the Northdown Road on his way to Wistaria Villa and lunch.

Indeed, he was so deep in happy thoughts that as he crossed the Northdown Road he very nearly walked under a taxicab. Somebody grasped him by the arm and jerked him on to the pavement. ‘

“You silly fathead !“ said a familiar voice.

It was his cousin Gilbert.

“Trying to commit suicide?” asked Gilbert.

“Nunno !” gasped Bunny, “I’ve a jolly good mind,’ said Gilbert, “to give you such a thundering licking for drenching me with the hose this morning thnt you wouldn’t be able to crawl home on your hands and knees. You made father lose his train—you’ve given the mother a cold —and you’ve ruined my grey suit.

What makes you such a benighted idiot, Bunny?”

“Look here—” ejaculated Bunny.

“I suppose you can’t help it,” said Gilbert. “If I thought you could l it, Bunny. I’d give you such a wallop that you wouldn’t know your owii face afterwards! But you can’t help being the fathead of the family!”

“Look here—”

“Oh, buzz off !” ‘said Gilbert, and went on his way.

Bunny drifted homeward; He was still, in Gilbert’s opinion, the fathead of the family. Yet he was sure he had handled the man with the ear-rings in a much more masterly manner than Gilbert could have done. He drew comfort from that reflection, and it was a cheery and happy Bunny that arrived at Wisteria Villa—still in a glow, of satisfaction from his first adventure !

THE END



