

Sensational Schoolboy-Adventure Yarn
featuring Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars,

“ HIS GUNMAN GUARDIAN! ”

The Magnet ^{2^d}



HIS
GUNMAN
GUARDIAN!

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By
**FRANK
RICHARDS**



THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bamboozling Bunter!

"**F**IVE shillings!"
"Right!"
Bob Cherry put his hand into his pocket.

Billy Bunter's eyes opened wide, behind his big spectacles.

It was not like Bob to expend cash quite so recklessly as this. Five shillings for a box of chocolates was rather a large sum for a junior in the Greyfriars Remove to "blow."

But Bob rattled two half-crowns on the counter of the school shop as if half-crowns were as cheap as blackberries.

"I say, old chap, is that for the train?" asked Bunter.

Greyfriars School was breaking up for Easter that day. The first bus had already started, loaded with fellows, for Courtfield Station. The second was about to start.

If Bob Cherry was laying in supplies to be consumed on the train it was a matter of deep interest to Billy Bunter. Bunter was going by the same train.

He had missed the first bus, because Harry Wharton & Co. had missed it. He was not going to miss the second—unless they did!

That morning Billy Bunter had been haunting the Famous Five of the Remove like a fat ghost. So long as they kept together his eyes and his spectacles hardly left them for a moment.

But when Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent went up to the studies, and Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh went to say good-bye to Mr. Quelch, and Bob Cherry headed for the tuckshop, Bunter was rather beaten. He could not keep them all under observation, unless he divided himself, like ancient Gaul, into three parts.

So he rolled after Bob, the tuckshop having an attraction for him at all times. He knew that they were all going together, so that was all right.

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Mrs. Mimble pushed the box of chocolates across to Bob, who picked it up.

"Keeping it for the train, old fellow?" asked Bunter. Bunter would have been glad to sample the contents of that box on the spot.

"No fear!" answered Bob. "I fancy there won't be many of these chocs left by the time we're in the train, Bunt."

He walked to the door.
Bunter rolled after him.

"I say, old chap—" gasped Bunter.

"Run away and play, old fat man!"

"I say, I'll carry that box for you, if you like."

"Will you?" asked Bob.

"Pleasure!" gasped Bunter.

Not always an obliging fellow, Bunter would have carried a box of chocolates for anybody. His load, like Aesop's in the fable, would have grown lighter and lighter, the longer he carried it.

Bob was perfectly well aware of that little failing of Bunter's. But that morning he appeared to be in a very unsuspecting mood.

"Well, look here, Bunter, if you mean it—" he said.

"Yes, rather, old chap!"

"Well, take it up to Wharton's study, will you?" asked Bob. "Wait there till we come up."

"My dear chap," gasped Bunter, "I'd do more than that for a fellow I really like! Gimme that box."

Billy Bunter could hardly believe in his good luck when Bob handed him the box and he rolled off to the House with it under a fat arm.

Bob, with a cheery grin on his face, watched him roll into the House, and then walked down to the waiting bus.

There, within a few minutes, he was joined by his four chums: Wharton and Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Janset Ram Singh. They seemed to appear suddenly from nowhere in particular. And they were all grinning cheerily as they climbed on the bus.

Billy Bunter also was grinning

cheerily as he climbed the Remove staircase.

The door of Wharton's study—No. 1 in the Remove—stood wide open. The study had a dismantled look. Fellows had been packing there.

Bunter rolled into the study.

Bob had told him to wait till the fellows came up. Bunter was quite prepared to wait idly.

Sitting in Harry Wharton's armchair he slid off the lid of the chocolate box.

As Bob had declared that there would not be many of those chocs left by the time they were in the train, the fat Owl of the Remove concluded that the Famous Five were going to dispose of them before starting.

He was more than willing to help. And his idea was to start early and avoid the crush.

A fat finger and thumb dipped into the box, and hooked out a luscious chocolate-cream. It was immediately transferred to Billy Bunter's capacious mouth.

Bunter gobbled!

Another and another and another followed.

Indeed, Billy Bunter was half-through the box before he quite realised what a gap he was making in the contents.

He paused, and listened for footsteps in the Remove passage. If the chums of the Remove were coming up to the study to whack that box of chocs before going for the train, it was high time they came. A little more delay, and that box was likely to be in the same state as Mother Hubbard's celebrated cupboard.

But they did not arrive.

Billy Bunter hesitated.

It is well said that he who hesitates is lost.

The fat finger and thumb hooked out another chocolate—and another! It was really more than flesh and blood could resist—Billy Bunter's at least!

Choc after choc followed the downward path, and vanished.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter, at length.

Only five chocolates remained in the box!

Even Bunter realised that he had rather plunged. The Famous Five were good-natured fellows, not likely to grouse at Bunter starting first on the chocs. But even very good-natured fellows might expect to have a whack in their own tuck.

Bunter had left them one each.

Manfully resisting further temptation, the fat Owl placed the box on the study table and wiped a sticky mouth with a grubby handkerchief.

He was feeling a little uneasy about what he was to say when the chums of the Remove come in to scoff those chocolates.

But they did not come in.

Footsteps were audible in the passage, and Billy Bunter stepped to the door and blinked out through his big spectacles.

But it was not one of the famous Co.

It was Herbert Vernon-Smith coming along from the stairs.

"I say, Smithy!" squeaked Bunter.

Smithy glanced at him.

"I say, are those fellows coming up?" asked Bunter.

"What fellows?"

"Wharton and his lot——"

"Oh? They're gone!"

Billy Bunter jumped almost clear of the floor.

"Gone!" he roared. "Did you say gig-gig-gig-gone?"

"I didn't say gig-gig-gig-gone—I said gone!" answered the Bounder. "They went on the second bus."

"The sus-sus-second bib-bib-bus!" stammered Bunter.

"Yes; a quarter of an hour ago."

"Oh crikey! I was going with them!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"They've sneaked off while I was up here in the studies——"

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

"Oh, the awful beast! That's why he told me to bring those choes up here, and wait till they came up!" gasped Bunter.

"You'll have to wait till next term!" chuckled Smithy, and he went up the passage laughing.

Billy Bunter did not laugh. His fat brow was corrugated in a deep frown, as he rolled hurriedly to the stairs. He had been "done"—diddled, dished, and done! Lured up to the studies by that box of choes, he had sat there, scoffing choes, while the Famous Five cleared off on the bus. Breathing wrath, the fat Owl of the Remove rolled out into the quad.

The second bus was long gone. A third and a fourth were filling. Among the crowd of Greyfriars fellows there was no sign of Harry Wharton & Co.

Evidently they were gone. By that time they were at Courtfield Station, catching the train.

"Beasts!" groaned Billy Bunter.

Billy Bunter had not quite decided whether he was going home with Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, or Frank Nugent. It was going to be one of them, but he had not settled which. That doubtful point was now settled for him. It was not going to be any of them!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Hot Chase!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. smiled as they sat down in their carriage in the train at Courtfield.

The platform swarmed with Greyfriars men, and there was a cheery buzz of voices, a trampling of feet, and a banging of luggage. Bob Cherry stood at the door, glancing along the platform. He would not have been surprised to spot at the last moment a fat figure and a pair of glimmering spectacles. Billy Bunter was a sticker, and it was not easy to make him come unstuck. But the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove was not to be seen, and Bob chuckled and sat down as a porter came along to slam the door. The packed train rolled out of Courtfield.

"It was worth a bob each," remarked Harry Wharton, referring to the box of choes that had kept Billy Bunter off the scene while the chums of the Remove got away on the bus.

"The worthfulness was terrific," chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Bunter's finished the choes by this time," remarked Johnny Bull. "The choes are done—and Bunter's done!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Just as easy to kick him, though," remarked Johnny.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Not on breaking-up day," he said. "It was worth a bob each for a consolation prize for Bunty."

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

The train rolled on towards Lantham Junction, where the Famous Five were to separate for their various homes. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, whose home was at Bhanipur, in far-off India, was going with Harry; the other members of the Co. joining him later at Wharton Lodge.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! That sportsman's in a hurry," remarked Bob Cherry, who was looking from the window.

About half-way to Lantham the road ran parallel with the railway. On the road a little green Austin car was whizzing like a bullet.

It was going in the same direction as the train and easily keeping pace.

Only the driver was in the little car, and he was bent over the wheel and little could be seen of him, save his hat and shoulders.

But it could be seen that he was a boy, apparently no older than the juniors themselves, so that it was rather surprising to see him hurling along at top speed in a car.

The Famous Five gathered at the window to watch the little car; plenty of other faces along the crowded train were looking at it.

"If a bobby blows along, that chap will get pulled up short and sharp,"

A GUNMAN TO CATCH A GUNMAN!

Putnam van Duck, son of a multi-millionaire, has been marked down as a victim by American gangsters, and his "popper" has sagely engaged a gunman for his defence!

remarked Frank Nugent. "I wonder how many he's doing?"

"Fifty at least," said Bob.

"Young ass!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Wharton. "Look!"

In a spot where winter rains had sunk deep puddles the road had been made up with stones not yet pressed down by the steam-roller. The little car hit that bad patch suddenly and fairly rocketed.

It shot across to one side of the road, then to the other, zigzagging wildly. Several times it was on only two wheels—once or twice it seemed to the breathless juniors that it was on only one.

How the boy escaped disaster seemed a miracle. But he did not even slacken pace; he shot onward, rocketing.

"Some nerve!" said Bob.

The car steadied as the bad patch was left behind. It was now almost abreast of the carriage from which the Famous Five were staring. Suddenly the youthful driver seemed to become aware of the train on the embankment above the road and lifted his head and looked up.

"Great pip!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, as he saw the face—a rather good-looking face, though it had a razor-like keenness and alertness in its expression. "Know that chap?"

"That American chap!" exclaimed Bob. "What was his name?"

"Van Duck," said Nugent.

"That's it—Putnam van Duck!"

"The esteemed Van Duck that we met on the absurd steamer!" exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Only for a second did the American

boy glance up, then he was concentrated on his driving again; he needed to concentrate, considering the speed at which he was going.

Harry Wharton & Co. gazed at him with great interest.

They remembered Putnam van Duck, the son of the Chicago millionaire, Mr. Vanderdecken van Duck.

They had met him on the steamer, coming back from a holiday trip, and had wondered more than once whether they would ever see him again.

According to what he had told them, he was threatened with kidnapping by a gang of gangsters in the United States, and his millionaire "popper" had sent him travelling in charge of a hired gunman called Poker Pike.

Not liking the strict surveillance of Mr. Pike, Putnam van Duck had dodged his gunman guardian and hit the horizon, as he expressed it, only to be rounded up again by the faithful Pike.

Harry Wharton & Co. had not been aware that he was in England. Now that they saw him they wondered whether he was "hitting the horizon" again to get away from the too-careful care of Poker Pike.

It certainly looked as if he was in a hurry to get away from somebody, to judge by the speed at which he was hurtling the Austin along.

"Look!" roared Bob.

Far back down the road a big Daimler came booming into sight. It was going all out and lapping up the road.

Looking back at the Daimler, the juniors could see the face of the driver clear in the bright April sunlight.

It was a face that looked as if cut in hickory, with slits of eyes, a gash of a mouth, and a black bowler hat clamped down on the skull as if screwed there.

"Pike!" yelled Nugent.

"The jolly old gunman!" chuckled Bob.

Evidently it was a chase.

The millionaire's son was hitting the horizon, and his gunman guardian was in hot pursuit.

Fast as the Austin flew, the big Daimler was overhauling it hand over fist. Harry Wharton & Co. watched breathlessly.

Another mile on, road and railway parted company; but, to judge by the tremendous speed of the Daimler, the chase would be over by then. Poker Pike was driving as if on the race track, and the high-powered car fairly flashed along.

Putnam van Duck evidently knew that the Daimler was coming up behind. Fast as the green Austin had been going, it flew faster. It was very fortunate for both Van Duck and his pursuer that the road was a wide country road with little traffic.

"Oh!" gasped Bob suddenly.

It was sudden disaster to the Austin. It had struck another bad patch and rocketed again, and this time it rocketed off the road on to the belt of grass that lay between the highway and the wood that bordered it on the farther side.

It seemed to the startled and horrified juniors for a few thrilling seconds that the little green Austin was whirling like a Catherine wheel; it landed on its side in the grass.

But as it landed the American boy leaped clear.

They saw him standing, unhurt, shrugging his slim shoulders. Up the road came the big Daimler, booming.

Above the buzz of the train they heard the shout of the gunman.

"Say, you, Putnam van Duck——"

As the train rushed on the juniors

leaned from the windows, staring back with breathless interest to see the last of the strange scene.

They saw the Daimler stop, and the lean, hickory-faced gunman leap down; they saw Putnam van Duck wave a slim hand at him as he did so, turn, and leap away into the shadowy greenery of the wood.

The Austin was left where it had rolled; the next moment the big Daimler was abandoned by the roadside, Piker Pike dashing into the wood in pursuit of the boy.

A few moments more and the whole scene was dropped behind as the train rushed on to Lantham.

"Well, my hat!" said Bob Cherry, as he sat down again. "Fancy seeing that kid again here! I wonder if jolly old Pike will get him?"

"We may see something of him these hols," remarked Harry Wharton. "He told us on the steamer that he would give us a look-in at Wharton Lodge if he came to this country."

"He won't find it easy to get shut of Mr Pike!" chuckled Bob. "By gum, I'd like to know how it's ended!"

But there was no guessing that. The juniors, as they ran on to Lantham, could only wonder whether Putnam van Duck was still hitting the horizon, or whether the hickory-faced gunman had rounded him up once more.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Left!

"**T**ODDY, old man!" said Billy Bunter.

Peter Todd grinned.

Having witnessed the "escape" of the Famous Five, and Billy Bunter's subsequent search for the fellows who were no longer there, he was rather amused when the fat Owl rolled up to him. It did not need a great deal of penetration on Toddy's part to guess what was coming.

"Just going, old chap?" asked Bunter.

"Just!" agreed Toddy.

"I'm getting the next train," remarked Bunter. "Travel together, what?"

"Why not, as far as Lantham!" agreed Peter.

Bunter coughed.

"The fact is, I wouldn't mind coming on," he said.

"I should!" said Peter.

"After all, we're pals here," said Bunter, unheeding. "I was only joking when I told you that I wouldn't be found dead in Bloomsbury in the hols, Peter."

"Quite!" said Peter. "You'll be found dead in Bloomsbury, old fat man, if you're found there at all! That's a tip!"

"Oh, really, Toddy—"

"Good-bye!"

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter blinked morosely after Toddy's departing form.

Matters were getting serious.

Bunter had had one slight comfort. He had finished the last of the chocs in the box in Study No. 1.

That was so much to the good!

But it was time to go; and what was going to be done—or who was going to be done?

Lord Mauleverer had disappeared early, the Famous Five were gone; most of the other fellows were gone. The Bounder was not yet gone, but was going—in a big car his father had sent to take him home. Billy Bunter blinked

at that car—but he had no more chance of getting in than the hapless Peri who looked in at the gate of Paradise.

Toddy was his last resource. His last resource had failed him. As Herbert Vernon-Smith stepped into his car the fat junior rolled over to him.

"I say, Smithy—" he squeaked.

The Bounder glanced at him.

"Fathead!" was his reply. Like Toddy, he guessed what was coming.

"I say, old chap, I've missed the bus—"

"What a treat for the fellows on it!"

"Like to give me a lift to the station?"

"I'm not going near the station!"

"Well, look here, if you drop me in London it will be all right!" said Bunter hopefully.

The Bounder chuckled.

"You want me to give you a lift, and drop you?" he asked.

"Yes, old chap!" said Bunter eagerly. Once ensconced in Smithy's car there was a chance, a very remote chance, of sticking on to Smithy. "You'll do it, old fellow?"

"Certainly!"

"Oh, good! You're a good chap, Smithy."

"None nicer!" agreed the Bounder. "I'll do it, like a shot! But I'll do it here."

"Eh?" ejaculated Bunter.

The Bounder, grinning, grasped the fat junior by the collar and swept him off his feet.

Having thus given him a lift, he dropped him.

Bump!

"Yaroooh!"

Smithy, chortling, rolled away in his car. Billy Bunter sat in the quad and blinked after him, spluttering for breath.

"Urrrgggh! Beast! Wurrrgggh!" gurgled Bunter.

Slowly and sorrowfully the Owl of the Remove picked himself up. He blinked round him through his big spectacles.

Fellows were thinning out now. There was hardly anybody to be seen. Three Fifth Form men came out of the House—Coker and Potter and Greene.

Horace Coker, with his usual efficiency, had packed early and got it done; but having left out various things he had overlooked, he had had to do it all over again at the last moment: so Coker & Co. were late in leaving. A taxi-cab had been waiting about an hour for Coker, who was fortunately in a financial position to be indifferent to the mounting charges on the "clock."

"We've lost the train," Potter was remarking as they came out.

"You've lost it, you mean!" corrected Coker.

"Have I been waiting for you, or have you been waiting for me?" inquired Potter sarcastically.

"Don't jaw!" said Coker crossly. "If you'd reminded me about those things I left out, I should have put them in. But it's always the same—you fellows forget everything."

"But you forgot—" began Greene.

"Don't jaw, Greene! You're worse than Potter!"

"Look here, Coker—" said Potter and Greene together.

"For goodness' sake," said Coker, "don't jaw! Haven't you wasted enough time, or do you want to travel by a night train? Jaw, jaw, jaw!"

Coker led the way to the waiting taxi; Potter and Greene following him, and wondering, for the umpteenth time, whether it was rather a mistake to pal with Coker.

"I say, you fellows—" Bunter came up.

Coker gave him a glare. Already irritated by the forgetfulness of Potter and Greene he was in no mood to be patient with fags.

"Get out!" he rapped.

"I say, I'm going to the station—"

"Who's stopping you?" grunted Coker.

"I mean, what about whacking out the taxi?" asked Bunter. "Halves in the fare, what?"

Coker's glare became rather like that of the fabled Gorgon.

Not knowing Bunter so well as fellows in the Remove knew him, he was not aware that, if Bunter arrived at the station in that taxi, he would then discover that there was a shortage of cash, and that his half of the fare would have to be left over to the distant and uncertain future.

But the bare idea of a fag of the Lower Fourth having the unexampled cheek to propose travelling in his taxi aroused Coker's deepest ire.

Coker rather prided himself on having a short way with fags. His way with Bunter was exceedingly short.

Not taking the trouble to answer in words, he reached out at a fat ear and pinned the same with a sinowy finger and thumb.

"Wow!" howled Bunter. "Yow!"

Coker & Co. rolled off in the taxi, leaving William George Bunter clasping a burning ear and squeaking dolorously.

Nearly everybody was gone now. Mr. Quelch, looking out of his study window, glanced at Bunter with a surprised and expressive glance. The Remove master seemed to be wondering why he was not gone. Quelch himself would be going soon.

"Oh lor!" mumbled Bunter.

He rolled up to the Remove passage, in the faint hope of finding some belated Removite there. Nobody was there—the studies were silent and deserted. Only a maid with a mop gave him a surprised look.

"Oh crikey!" said Bunter, as he negotiated the staircase again.

"Bunter!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Bunter, blinking round at his Form-master.

"Why are you not gone, Bunter?" asked Mr. Quelch.

"I—I missed the bus, sir—"

"Fortunately, it is a very fine day, and it will be quite an agreeable walk to the station," said Mr. Quelch. "Good-bye, Bunter!"

Bunter rolled out into the quad.

Evidently it was time to go! Everybody else was gone, except the two or three fellows who passed the holidays at the school. The Owl of the Remove rolled dismally down to the gates.

Gosling, the porter, gave him a look. Gosling did not expect tips from Bunter; still, on the last day of the term, you never could tell; and there was a faint glimmering of hope in Gosling's ancient eye. It was very faint, and it died out as Bunter rolled on regardless. Gosling grunted.

The fat junior stood in the gateway. He looked back into the quad. Nobody was to be seen there except Mr. Mumble, the gardener.

"Oh lor!" said Bunter. That magnificent residence, Bunter Court, was the only refuge now. Sammy Bunter, his minor in the Second Form, was long gone, joining Sister Bessie, of Cliff House, to travel home; Bunter was too late to travel with Sammy and Bessie. However, he did not miss them; he was going to see enough of Sammy and Bessie in the holidays.

He gave a last blink at the quad, and the House windows; and was about to turn away and depart when a hand tapped on his fat shoulder.

"Say, bo!" remarked a voice—a rather pleasant voice, in spite of its nasal accent.

"Eh!"

Bunter blinked round at the fellow in the road.

That fellow uttered a surprised exclamation.

"Fat Jack, by the great horned toad! Then this shobang is Greyfriars School—what?"

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Van Duck Blows In!

PUTNAM VAN DUCK gave Billy Bunter a nod and a grin. Billy Bunter gave Putnam van Duck an astonished blink through his big spectacles.

"And I don't want any cheek—see?" added Bunter.

"Say, I guess I got you right!" said Putnam. "Ain't you Fat Jack of the Boneyard?"

"No!" roared Bunter.

"Guess again!" said Van Duck. "I'll say you're the identical human balloon I met on the other side of the pond, with five guys that I sure want to see again. Are they hanging up?"

"If you mean Wharton's lot—"

"You said it!"

"They're gone!"

"Gone!" repeated Putnam. "This here show is Greyfriars, ain't it? I jumped to it that it was, seeing you loafing around."

"Yes, you ass! But we're breaking-up to-day for the Easter hols, and most of the fellows have gone."

"Sing me to sleep!" said Putnam.

"If you've come to see Wharton, you're too jolly late!" grinned Bunter.

to be kicked. And Billy Bunter would have been quite pleased to give him what he deserved.

On the other hand, he remembered that Putnam van Duck was the son of Mr. Vanderdecken van Duck, the Chicago multi-millionaire. He remembered that Putnam carried a "roll" of dazzling wealth.

Billy Bunter had in his pockets, at the moment, exactly the amount of his journey-money—that much and no more. Only that morning he had been disappointed about a postal order he was expecting. He did not even possess a single solitary copper to work an automatic machine for toffee or chocolate to comfort him on his journey home.

So Billy Bunter did not think of treating Putnam van Duck as he manifestly deserved. He rolled after him, and overtook him on his way to the House.

"I say, Van Goose!" he called out.



Before the horrified eyes of the Greyfriars juniors watching from the carriage window the Austin whirled like a catherine-wheel and then landed on its side in the grass. There were sighs of relief as Putnam van Duck jumped clear!

He remembered the keen, clear-cut face of the American boy whom he had met while on the holiday trip abroad with the Famous Five. But he was quite surprised to see the youth from Chicago turn up so suddenly, on the road by the school gates at Greyfriars. He had, in fact, forgotten Van Duck's existence till thus reminded of the same.

"Oh!" he ejaculated. "You!"

"Me!" agreed Van Duck. "I'll say I've been rubbering around to find Greyfriars, and I was jest going to ask you to put me wise, and pack me up in a Saratoga if you ain't Fat Jack, and—"

Bunter snorted.

On the steamer the young American had irritated him considerably by calling him by that peculiar name.

"Look here!" grunted Bunter. "My name's not Jack—"

"Nunk?" asked Putnam.

"And I'm not fat!" hooted Bunter.

"Search me!" ejaculated Putnam.

"They're all gone. You're not too late to see me, though."

Putnam van Duck looked at him. He did not look as if that was any great consolation.

"How did you get here?" asked Bunter.

Blinking up and down the road, he saw no sign of a vehicle.

"Hoofed it," said Putnam. "I guess I started in a car, but a guy got too fresh, and I'll say I've left that car strewn around." He glanced in at the gateway, and shrugged his slim shoulders. "Waal, if they ain't here, they ain't, and that's a cinch!"

"I'm here!" said Bunter.

"I guess that cuts no ice!"

Putnam van Duck walked in.

Billy Bunter blinked after him with a morose blink. This fellow, obviously, was a silly, cheeky ass, for he wanted to see Harry Wharton & Co., and did not want to see that much more fascinating fellow William George Bunter.

On that account the fellow deserved

Bunter remembered the American himself, but did not precisely remember his name. He knew that it was something like Van Goose.

"Eh!" Putnam spun round. "What the great horned toad are you giving me, Fat Jack?"

"Isn't your name Van Goose?" asked Bunter.

"Not so's you'd notice it!"

"I—I mean Van Drake. I knew it was something to do with a fowl of some sort," explained Bunter. "I say, Van Drake—"

"Guess again," said Putnam.

"I—I mean, Van Chicken."

"If you've got brains enough in your cabeza to mean anything you don't look it," said Van Duck.

"Oh, really, Van Turkey—"

"Search me!" said the millionaire's son. "Keep on guessing, big boy, and you'll get it right in a month of Sundays."

"The fact is, I don't quite remember your name."

"I'd guessed that one. Make it Van Duck."

"Oh, yes! I knew it was some silly name like that," agreed Bunter.

"Some what?"

"I mean, I knew it was a nice name—a really aristocratic name," said Bunter. "Some Americans have such weird names, you know. There's an American chap here named Fish. He, he! Van Duck's better than Fish, anyhow."

"We're Fish and Fowl, and you're Fresh—and plenty of it!" remarked Van Duck. "Lots of it! Heaps of it! Oodles and oodles of it—what?"

"Well, look here!" said Bunter, changing the subject. "If you want to see Wharton, Van Goose—I mean Van Fowl—that is, Van Duck—"

"I sort of want to, and I've come here to chew the rag—a piece, with that very guy," answered Van Duck.

"I've told you he's gone. But—"

"But I guess there's plenty of guys around that can tell me where to catch him. He told me on the steamer that he hangs up his hat at a place called Wharton Lodge. And I guess that's where I get off next."

"I can take you there," said Bunter.

"Oh!" said Van Duck.

"You see," explained Bunter, "I was going with Wharton for the hols to—"

"Playing golf?" asked Putnam.

"Golf!" repeated Bunter, staring.

"No! Wharrer you mean?"

"What holes are you talking about, then?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Not holes—hols! The holidays, you know!"

"I got you! Carry on!"

"I was going with Wharton for the hols, but Toddy and Smith kept me

talking. They hate to part with me, you know!"

"I don't know," contradicted Van Duck. "And I'll say that that sounds as if you're trying to string me along. How could any guy hate to part with you?"

Billy Bunter breathed hard. He was tempted to tell Putnam van Duck, on the spot, what he thought of him, of his nationality, his manners, and his customs quite a devastating opinion, if he had uttered it. But he did not give it utterance.

"Look here! I was going with Wharton for the hols, and I lost the train," he snorted. "I'm still going, and, if you like, I'll take you with me."

Putnam van Duck eyed him.

Having arrived at Greyfriars School too late to see the chums of the Remove, it had been his intention to inquire where Harry Wharton's home was to be found, and head for the same. So Billy Bunter's offer came in useful. If Bunter was going to Wharton Lodge, the stranger in the land could not want a better guide.

"Now you're talking," said Van Duck, more amicably. "I'll tell a man, you're useful, if not ornamental. Can I rope in a telephone anywhere around to catch a car?"

"Gosling will let you use the phone in his lodge."

"Who's Gosling? And where does he adorn the landscape?"

"This way!" said Bunter.

He led Van Duck to Gosling's lodge. The ancient Greyfriars porter stared at him; but when Bunter explained, willingly gave him permission to use the telephone.

"Ring up Courtfield Garage," said

Bunter. "You can get a good car there. If you'd rather go by car than train, it will save time, and we'll whack out the exes—what?"

"I guess I can scare up enough cents to pay for a car," answered Van Duck. "I'll give you a lift in it, if you like."

"Well, I'd rather pay my whack," said Bunter.

"Oh, all O.K.! Pay half if you like."

"I—I mean, if you'd rather pay for the car, I don't mind in the least," said Bunter hastily. "Leave it at that!"

"I guessed that one, too," said Van Duck.

He rang up the garage and talked for a few minutes. Having finished with the telephone, he tipped Gosling for his service, and walked out of the lodge with Bunter—leaving Gosling blinking at a pound-note in his hand!

"My eye!" said Gosling.

Gosling had collected a good many tips that day. But a whole "quid" for so small a service made him open his ancient eyes. It even made him examine the note carefully, to make sure that it was a good one!

Billy Bunter's little round eyes glimmered behind his big, round spectacles. A fellow who could afford to chuck pound-notes about was a fellow that Billy Bunter wanted to know!

"I say, old chap," he gasped, "trot along to the tuckshop while we wait for the car. It's still open—"

"I guess I ain't waiting."

"The car won't be here for a quarter of an hour!" urged Bunter. "I say, ain't you hungry? My treat, you know—"

"I'm hoofing it to meet that car."

"What's the hurry?" demanded Bunter.

"Heaps! Say, that houbro on the telephone said he was coming from Courtfield—we can meet him on the road! Which way?"

"I'd rather not walk—"

"O.K.! I'll ask that porter guy."

"I mean, I'll walk with pleasure—"

"You're some lad at changing your mind, ain't you?" said Van Duck.

"Waal, if it's going to be a pleasure to you, come on, and step out a few!"

Billy Bunter had to step out more than a "few," to keep pace with the brisk American. Putnam van Duck was slim and light, and a rapid walker. Billy Bunter was fat and heavy, and the laziest walker ever. But he was not going to let Van Duck get out of his sight. He exerted himself manfully, and puffed and blew along by the side of the American.

Van Duck glanced sharply out of the gates before starting. He glanced sharply up and down the road as he went. When they reached the road over Courtfield Common, he glanced, with equal sharpness, over the green expanse to right and left. Evidently he was on the alert—why, Bunter did not know. Neither did he care—being fully occupied in trying to breathe, while he exerted his fat limbs as they had seldom been exerted before.

"There's the car!" he ejaculated at last, in great relief, as a Rolls came whizzing from the direction of Courtfield. "I say, stop! Stop and wait for it to come up!"

Bunter stopped, and began to mop his perspiring brow. Putnam van Duck grinned, and came to a halt also—glancing sharply and suspiciously around, while the car came up. But there was no sign of Mr. Poker Fike



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"The VOICE
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on the horizon; and Putnam guessed that he had given the slip to his gunman guardian at last.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Gun-Play!

BILLY BUNTER parked himself in the car, greatly relieved to be able to sit down and rest his fat and weary limbs. Putnam van Duck stood talking to the Courtfield chauffeur before getting in.

Bunter mopped his fat brow. The April sunshine was warm, and Bunter had been carrying his extensive weight at an unusual pace; and so he was in what a poet would have called a "melting mood."

But the fat Owl of the Remove, tired and damp as he was, was feeling satisfied. He was—he hoped, at least—booked for Wharton Lodge for the Easter vacation.

On his own, even Billy Bunter would have felt a little coy hesitation at barging in. Arriving there with Van Duck made it easier.

On the steamer, Harry Wharton had asked Van Duck to visit him at Wharton Lodge, in the Easter holidays, if he was in England then. Probably he would be glad to see him—there was, Bunter reflected, no accounting for tastes.

Billy Bunter's idea was to insinuate himself into Wharton Lodge, under the wing of the American.

It was worth trying on, at all events! If a fellow went out of his way to take the trouble to guide Wharton's guest to Wharton's home, the least Wharton could do would be to ask him to stay the night—and once installed in the house Bunter was prepared to trust to his fat wits for the rest. This was no new game to Billy Bunter.

But though the fat Owl was, as usual, thinking about himself and his own important affairs, he sat up and took notice as he heard what Putnam van Duck was saying to the chauffeur.

"Keep an optic open for a guy in a blue Daimler," Van Duck was saying. "I'm telling you that that guy is after this baby, and I don't want to meet him a whole lot. You get me?"

"Yes, sir!" said the chauffeur.

"I guess you'll know him, if you spot him," went on Van Duck. "That guy's got a face like a wooden image, eyes like chips of ice, and a mouth like a rat-trap, and then some!"

"Yes, sir."

"If you raise that guy anywhere around, just let her rip!" said Van Duck.

"Yes, sir," said the chauffeur stolidly.

"How much will she do, when she means it?" asked Van Duck.

"Seventy, sir!"

"I guess that will make Poker Pike look foolish! Mind you keep tabs on a blue Daimler, and a guy with a face like a lump of hickory that's been hacked with an axe."

"Yes, sir."

Van Duck stepped in, and the car buzzed on. Whizzing round the end of the common, it took the Lantham road.

Billy Bunter blinked curiously at the American. He remembered that, on the steamer, Van Duck had been dodging the guardian his "popper" had placed with him to protect him from kid-nappers. The American boy seemed to prefer taking a chance with the kid-nappers to the too-faithful guardianship of Poker Pike!

"I say, is that man Pike after you?" asked Bunter.

"Suro!"

Putnam glanced rather anxiously along the Lantham road. It was on that very road that Poker Pike had chased him in the Daimler a few hours ago. He had dodged the bowler-hatted man in the wood, and picked up a lift on a motor-bus towards Greyfriars and walked the rest. He wondered whether Poker had got back to his car, and recommenced scouring the roads for him.

"If that guy is still rubbering around, in the timber, I guess it's O.K.," remarked Van Duck. "But that man Pike sure is some sticker!"

"All right, old chap!" said Bunter. "If he turns up, leave him to me!"

"Eh?"

"I'll handle him!" said Bunter reassuringly.

"Says you!" chuckled Putnam.

"Oh, really, Van Duck! I fancy I could handle that hooligan!" said the fat Owl. "If you'd seen me handling a big barge a week or two ago—"

"I guess I couldn't have!" grinned Van Duck.

"No; you weren't here then—"

"That cuts no ice! I guess I shouldn't have seen it if I'd been here!" chuckled Putnam. "Park it, old fat gink! Park it and sit on it!"

Billy Bunter grunted. This was rather an ungrateful reception of his generous offer of protection if the gunman turned up! Certainly, had Poker Pike turned up, Billy Bunter would have thought twice, or thrice, about handling one half of him!

The Courtfield car buzzed swiftly along in the direction of Lantham.

"Gee!" ejaculated Putnam suddenly.

The car was running past the end of a side lane, when from that lane a blue Daimler nosed out, with a hickory faced man, in a bowler hat, at the wheel.

Instantly Putnam ducked his head, dipping it low in the car, out of sight of the man in the Daimler.

So swift was his action, that he was in cover before even the keen eyes of Poker Pike sighted him.

But those eyes glittered at the fat face and glimmering spectacles of Billy Bunter!

Poker remembered Bunter as a member of Harry Wharton & Co.'s party on the holiday trip, when Putnam had dodged away from him on to the steamer in which the Greyfriars party were travelling.

Mr. Pike's icy slits of eyes glittered, and as the Rolls rushed past he turned the Daimler into instant pursuit.

He had not seen Putnam in the Rolls. But having lost Putnam, an acquaintance of Putnam's was the next best thing. He wanted a word with Bunter.

He was not likely to get that word, however, if Putnam could help it.

Putnam barked at the Courtfield chauffeur.

"Say you! Pump it! That's the guy I was telling you about, and he sure is chasing me a few! Make her hum!"

"Yes, sir," said the stolid Courtfield man.

He did not understand in the least why his passenger was chased, or what it all meant, anyhow; but he was there to do what his passenger wanted, and he did it. The Rolls was let out to a terrific burst of speed.

Fast behind came the Daimler, roaring.

Poker Pike, his brow corrugated over his slits of eyes, his gash of a mouth

clamped on his unlighted cigar, bent over the wheel and made the Daimler whiz.

His first guess, at the sight of Bunter, had been that the fat-junior might have seen something of Putnam, and might be able to put him wise. But as the Rolls roared away like a mad thing in swift flight, Poker Pike knew that it could not be Bunter who was fleeing at such a rate—and that Putnam was in the car, though he had not seen him there.

Assured of that, Poker Pike let out the Daimler in a race. Ever since losing Putnam in the wood, he had been scouring the roads—and now, by luck, he was on the trail again—and if he lost it once more, it was not going to be Poker's fault.

"I—I—I say, we—we—we're going jolly fast, you know," stammered Billy Bunter, through chattering teeth. "I—I say, is—is—is it safe?"

"Not a lot!" answered Putnam.

"Oh crikey! I say, slow down a bit, if—"

"And let that guy get a cinch on me?" grinned Putnam derisively. "Not in your lifetime, old-timer! Nope!"

"Ow!" gasped Bunter, as a jolt nearly tipped him off his seat. "Ow! I—I say— Yow-ow-ow!"

Putnam looked back. The Rolls was whizzing—but the Daimler behind was whizzing, too. So far, it was keeping pace.

"Say, you!" hooted Putnam to the chauffeur. "Can this auto move? I'm inquiring of you! Can she move, or can she not? If she can't, get out and push! You hear me? Get out and push her!"

As the Rolls was doing over fifty, the Courtfield chauffeur fancied that she was "moving" already! However, he put it on, and now the Daimler dropped a little in the chase.

"I guess we're making Poker look foolish!" grinned Putnam, as he looked back. "Yep! I'll say that Poker is feeling like a piece that the cat brought in and left lying around. Oh! Jumping James!"

"Bang!"

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Is that a tyre!"

Putnam chuckled. "If it was a tyre, big boy, while we're stopping out like this here, I guess you wouldn't be sitting there asking fool questions," he answered.

"What was it, then?" stammered Bunter.

"Gun!"

"A gun!" yelled Bunter.

"Yep! I guess Poker's fanning us a few."

"Yaroooh!"

"Bang!"

Billy Bunter rolled off the cushions and plumped in the bottom of the car. There he gasped and gurgled and palpitated, while the gangster's gun spoke!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Neck or Nothing!

PUTNAM VAN DUCK, looking back from the rear window, chuckled, his eyes gleaming with excitement.

The Courtfield chauffeur drove steadily on at a dizzy speed. The Daimler was dropping off—which was the reason why Poker Pike was handling his "gun."

Sprawling with his left hand on the wheel, a wicked-looking automatic in his right, Poker fired again and again at the fleeing Rolls.

He was not, of course, shooting at the occupants. His duty to Mr. Vanderdecken van Duck required him to recapture the wandering heir of millions of dollars; but certainly not to "shoot him up." He was "fanning" the fleeing car to puncture a tyre, if he could.

A punctured tyre, at such a burst of speed, was likely to be dangerous—certain to cause disaster. If that occurred to Mr. Pike, he did not reckon that it was going to stop him. He was going all out to rope in the millionaire's son who had been confided to his care; and that was that.

Putnam chuckled.

He was enjoying the excitement. He was fed-up to the back teeth with the watchful guardianship of the gangster; but being chased like this by the persistent Poker was quite interesting and thrilling. And he wondered what his popper, in far-off Chicago, would have thought of Poker's methods!

Chick Chew, the dreaded kidnapper, had marked out the millionaire's son as his prey; and it had been quite a brain-wave on Mr. van Duck's part to engage a gangster to guard his son and beat Mr. Chew at the game.

Poker Pike had been a gangster in the kidnapping line himself; so he knew the game, and was the man to put paid to Chick Chew, if anybody could put paid to him.

But clearly, in carrying out his duties as a guardian, Poker was rather dropping back into his old manners and customs as a kidnapping gangster!

Had Mr. Chew seen him hurtling along at fifty m.p.h., with one hand on the wheel, and loosing off bullets from an automatic with the other, Mr. Chew would certainly have reckoned that he was a rival kidnapper at work, and would hardly have guessed that he was a faithful guardian looking after his charge!

Bang, bang!

Spurts of dust kicked up round the Rolls. Horrified squeaks came from Billy Bunter!

"Keep her going!" yelled Putnam, as the car slowed.

"Level-crossing, sir!" said the Courtfield chauffeur over his shoulder.

"Aw, carry me home to die!" gasped Van Duck.

He stared ahead.

In the distance the railway crossed the road, and there was a signal-box and a level-crossing. That a train was coming was clear from the fact that the gates were beginning to move.

Putnam shut his teeth hard.

He looked back.

Poker Pike had ceased to fire. Perhaps he had spotted the obstruction ahead, and counted on the race as won.

Certainly, he had won if the Rolls was stopped on the near side of the railway. Long before the wide wooden gates reopened Putnam would be in his hands. And the gates had started to close across the road.

Putnam reached out and touched the Courtfield chauffeur's shoulder.

"Put her through!" he said.

"Sir!"

"I guess you got time!"

"But—"

"You got time if you make her hop! Make her hop, you hobo! You make her hit the high spots, pronto, or I'm telling you that I'll sure stick this byer pin in the back of your neck—"

"But—"

"Put her through!" roared Van Duck. "You going to be beat in a race? I'm telling you to put her through. Ain't you ever stamped on the gas?"

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"But—"

"Twenty pounds if you put her through! You get me?" booted Van Duck. "That's a hundred dollars! Or this here pin in the back of your neck—as far as it will go in with a big push! Now, then, feller!"

The Courtfield chauffeur did not answer again; he stamped on the gas! Twenty years before he had driven over shell-torn roads in Flanders, and he was still game. Twenty pounds was a large and attractive sum—and the pin in Putnam's slim fingers was also large, but not attractive at all! The Courtfield man went all out! It was neck or nothing now!

The car seemed almost to leave the ground as it flew!

The gates were on the move! If they closed too narrowly to allow the passage of the whizzing car, the chauffeur knew what would happen, and so did Putnam. But the signalled train was still distant, and the great gates swung slowly.

The Rolls rocked over the metals.

Was there time?

There was—just!

The car roared through—with a scrape and at the cost of a cracked mudguard! Onward, whizzing—while the gates behind closed and crashed, and locked in the face of the oncoming Daimler.

"I guess we've made the grade, old-timer!" yelled Putnam van Duck. "Keep her humming!"

The Rolls roared on.

Behind, the Daimler barely stopped in time to save a crash on the level-crossing gates. Mr. Pike said things, with emphasis!

Putnam van Duck sat down, grinning.

Billy Bunter sat up, not grinning.

"Ow!" gasped Bunter. "Grooogh! I—I say, I—I wish I hadn't come in this beastly car! Oh dear! We're going to be smashed up—ooogh! Look here, you beast—ow!"

"Aw, sit it out!" smiled Putnam.

"I'll tell you, this is the finest trip I've had in an auto for dog's ages! I guess we got Poker beat—he's sure losing a lot of time at that one-horse railway crossing way back."

"Will you stop this beastly car?" howled Bunter.

"Nope!"

"I'm not going to be shot to pieces by a mad Yankee, to please you!" yelled Bunter. "I want to get out!"

"Jump!" suggested Putnam.

"Beast!"

The car had slacked a little, but was still going very fast. To Billy Bunter's dizzy eyes the trees by the roadside seemed to merge into one continuous line. Certainly, he was not likely to jump.

But he was not staying in that car! Easter holidays at Wharton Lodge were of no use to a fellow if he did not get there alive. Bunter was keen on Easter with Harry Wharton & Co., certainly. But he cared less about his destination than about reaching it alive! On the latter point, in fact, Bunter was very particular indeed!

He heaved his weight up from the floor of the car, grabbed Putnam van Duck by the shoulder, and glared at him through his big spectacles.

"Lemme get out!" he howled. "See? I'm fed-up with you, you beast, and I want to gerrout! Stop this putrid car and let me gerrout!"

"Aw! Can it!" remonstrated Van Duck. "Ain't you hitting young Wharton's shebang along with this baby?"

"Lemme gerrout!"

Van Duck looked back. Cars were passing on the road, but none overtaking the Rolls. Far in the distance

behind was a whirling spot of dust, coming on. Putnam guessed it was the Daimler, through at last, and taking up the chase again.

"Will you let me gerrout?" raved Bunter. "I tell you I want to gerrout! Beast! Will you lemme gerrout?"

"I guess I can waste a minute on you," conceded Van Duck. "And I'll mention that it's worth it, to lose sight of you. Say, you, go slow a piece and let this guy absquatulate."

The Rolls slowed and stopped, and Billy Bunter rolled out, with deep thankfulness. He rather overlooked the fact that he was being landed innumerable miles from everywhere. At the moment, all his desires were limited to one thing—getting out of that car! He got out, and gasped with relief.

Before he had gasped twice, the Rolls shot away, and vanished. He was still gasping when a Daimler shot by, and two slits of eyes turned on him for a fleeting second. Then pursued and pursuer were gone, and Billy Bunter was left on his lonely own—still gasping.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

The Gangsters!

THE big Singer saloon stood by the road, outside the wayside inn, and Billy Bunter blinked at it as he came toddling along, hot and perspiring, in the warm April sunshine.

Bunter would have been glad of a lift in that car—or any car—even in a dust-cart! Almost, in a wheelbarrow. His fat little legs were curling up under him.

It was quite a warm spring afternoon. The road was sunny—and it was dusty. Passing cars had churned up the dust, and the wind, with a touch of the east in it, wafted dust all over Bunter. Warm, dusty, perspiring, tired, the fat Owl of Greyfriars rolled on; but he did not, like Iser in the poem, roll rapidly! He rolled slowly and wearily.

He had only a vague idea where he was.

He knew that Lantham had been left miles and miles behind, and he was in country quite strange to him. He was somewhere in Kent—he knew that. But Kent was rather a large spot to wander in.

The "garden of England" was looking quite nice in the sunshine, but Billy Bunter had no eyes for scenery.

Wearily he rolled on.

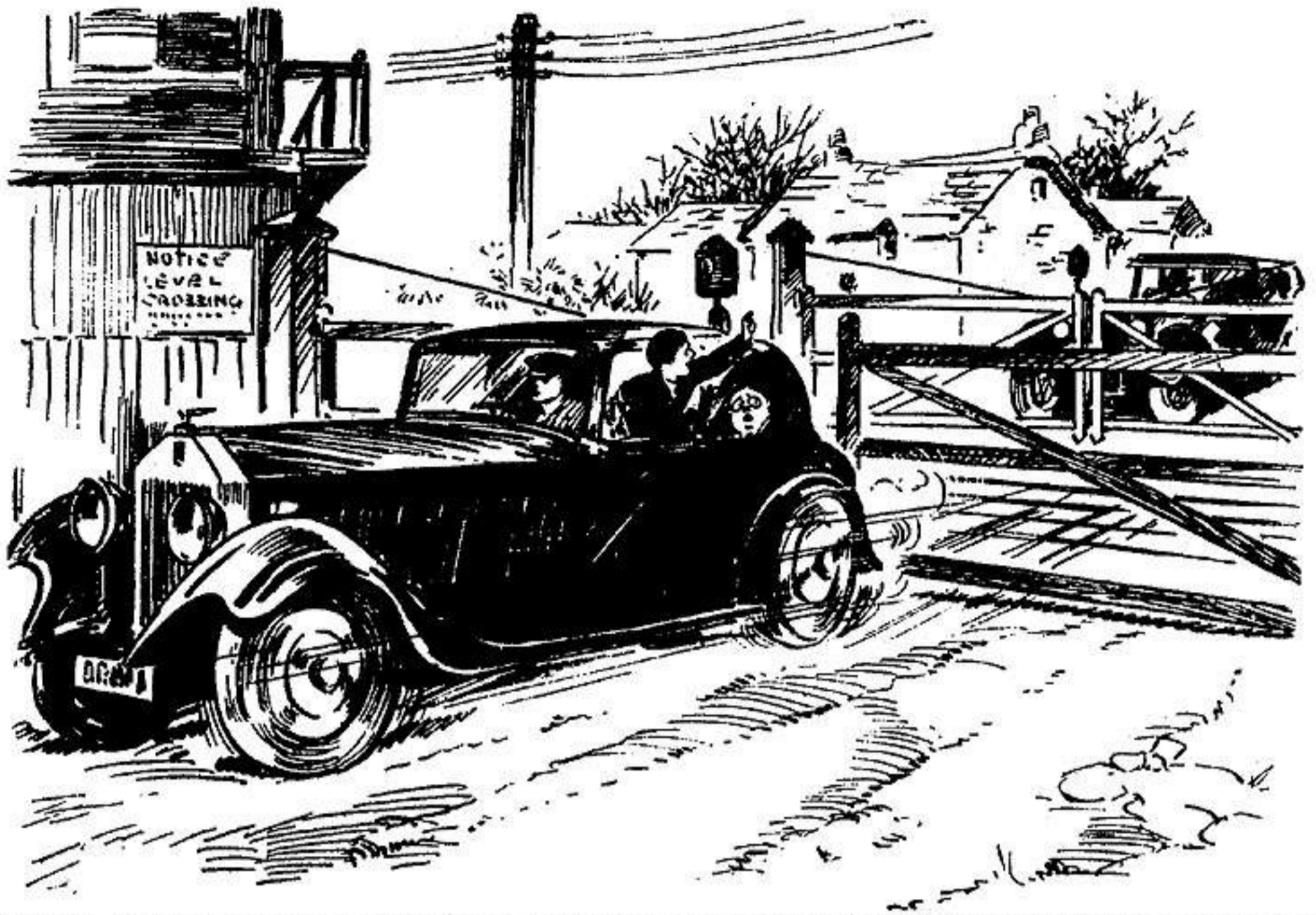
He almost regretted that he had dropped out of Putnam van Duck's car. Still, with a gunman behind, "fanning" it with bullets, that car was not really an attractive proposition. He quite regretted that he had not taken the school bus and the train at Courtfield. By this time he would have been home, at Bunter Villa, in Surrey. Truc, Bessie and Sammy were there! But any refuge would have been welcome to the tired Owl.

Stopping at the wayside inn, he blinked at it. He was in need—sore need—of refreshment, liquid and solid. Both were to be obtained there: no doubt the owner of the big Singer had stopped there for that reason. But in a hard and sordid world refreshments had to be paid for! And Bunter was in possession of his train fare, and nothing more!

He was hoping to sight a railway station. As fortune would have it, he sighted the wayside inn instead.

He blinked at the inn, and blinked at the car. If he spent his journey-money on refreshing the interior Bunter how was he to get home?

On the other hand, was there a chance



"I guess we've made the grade, old-timer!" yelled Putnam van Duck, as the Rolls reached the other side of the level-crossing in safety. "Keep her humming!" Behind, the pursuing Daimler barely stopped in time to save crashing into the level-crossing gates. "Ooooh!" gasped Bunter. "Groogh!"

of getting a lift—a less exciting life than the one Putnam van Duck had given him?

Bunter hesitated. But the aching void within settled the matter. He rolled past the Singer, rolled to a seat at a table under a tree in front of the inn, and sat down.

A ruddy-checked waiter came up.

Bunter ordered sandwiches, cake, and ginger-beer.

The die was cast!

The aching void was going to be filled. The journey afterwards had to be managed somehow.

Bunter tucked in. The waiter, who did not seem busy, was willing to talk. Bunter asked him to whom the car belonged.

"Two American gentlemen," said the ruddy-checked man. "They're in the bar now."

Bunter grunted. It seemed to be raining Americans in Kent that day! He had seen all the Americans he wanted to see, and one over!

"They've been inquiring about a car," went on the waiter. "Looking for a friend they've lost. They ain't found him."

"You don't know which way they're going when they leave?" asked Bunter.

"Don't I?" said the waiter. "They been asking about the quickest road to Surrey, at any rate."

Bunter's eyes gleamed behind his spectacles.

His home was in Surrey—at some distance from Wharton Lodge, in that county. If the two American gentlemen were heading for Surrey when they left that wayside Kentish inn they were going his way, and there was surely a chance of a lift. It was a roomy car, with room for two or three, as well as the two American gentlemen.

Hope springs eternal in the human

breast! It seemed to Bunter a hopeful prospect!

Under the influence of that hope he gave further orders, and more cakes, and eggs on toast, and a pie, and more ginger-beer, followed the first consignment.

Bunter felt better and better, more and more hopeful, as he parked the invigorating foodstuffs.

By the time he had paid his bill he was left with exactly threepence in his possession. The waiter, as he received the cash, jerked his head towards the inn.

"There's one of them!" he remarked.

Bunter blinked round.

One of the American gentlemen was looking out of the inn. Bunter hoped to see a nice, genial, good-natured sort of tourist—the kind of genial man who could be touched for a long lift.

But his fat heart sank as he saw that American gentleman.

The man did not look nice, or genial, or good-natured. He was fat in figure, and fat people, as a rule, are good-natured. But this fat man looked a striking exception to the rule.

The face, fat as it was, was hard as iron. Not in features, but in general aspect, it bore a fleeting resemblance to Poker Pike's.

Indeed, Bunter, though he had little acquaintance with American gangsters, had no doubt that this fat man was of the same kidney as Mr. Pike.

One blink was sufficient to tell him that it was no use asking this man for a lift in his car. He did not look as if he had ever given away anything in his life, or ever contemplated the remotest possibility of doing so.

"Oh lor'!" mumbled Bunter.

The waiter gave Bunter his threepence change. He lingered for a moment, but

the threepence went into Bunter's pocket.

The waiter went back into the inn.

The fat man stood at the door, scanning the road for some minutes. His sharp eyes glided over Bunter for a second, taking no further notice of him.

Then he went back into the building. "Oh lor'!" repeated Bunter.

He rose from the table under the tree. It was useless to linger; there was obviously nothing doing.

On the other hand, he had now parted with his journey-money, and he was a good ninety miles from home.

He rolled into the road, placing the Singer between him and the inn.

He had to get a lift! That car was going to Surrey. It was futile to think of asking the fat man for a lift. But there was ample room inside, and, as if to favour Bunter's design, there was an enormous rug sprawling over the interior of the car.

Bunter stopped at the door, his fat heart beating fast.

After all, if they spotted him they could only kick him out! Bunter had been kicked out of lots of places; it would be no new experience for him.

There was no eye on him. It was perfectly easy to get into the car and draw that enormous rug over him, screening him from sight.

If they got in, and drove off, without noticing him—

It was a chance, at least—and it was a case of any port in a storm. The Owl of Greyfriars made up his fat mind.

He opened the car door, slipped in, and shut the door after him. He squatted low, and bunched the big rug over him.

It was warm! It was stuffy! It was uncomfortable! But Billy Bunter was

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prepared to endure all these things, if only he got that lift to Surrey.

How long were the beasts going to be?

It seemed to the hidden Owl hours, but it was only ten or fifteen minutes before there was a sound of voices close at hand. Both of them had pronounced nasal accents, so he had no doubt that the two Americans had come back to their car.

Peering cautiously from under an edge of the rug, he had a glimpse of the fat man's massive back, standing by the wheel; and a glimpse of another man, in horn-rimmed spectacles, talking to him. And the horn-rimmed man's voice came clearly to his ears—and he barely repressed a squeak of surprise, that would have betrayed him had it been uttered.

"The jig's up, Chick! I'm telling you, Chick Chew, the jig is up! Them two guys are somewheres around, but we ain't hitting their trail any! Nix!"

Billy Bunter palpitated under the rug.

The fat man was Chick Chew!

He remembered that name!

It was the name of the Chicago gangster who was bent on kidnapping the millionaire's son. Bunter had almost forgotten what Putnam van Duck had told the chums of Greyfriars on the steamer about Chick Chew! He recalled it now.

He had no doubt as to the identity of the two "guys," to whom the horn-rimmed man referred. Obviously Putnam van Duck and Poker Pike! Chick Chew was on the track of the millionaire's son, though clearly he had lost that track for the moment.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

But he did not breathe it aloud! He palpitated under the rug. Within six feet of him stood one of the most deadly and desperate gangsters of Chicago—the kind of man who thought absolutely nothing of taking a guy "for a ride," and putting him "on the spot."

Bunter wanted to be taken for a ride—but not in the gangster sense of those words. He did not want to be "put on the spot." Very much indeed he didn't!

Under the enveloping rug he imitated that sage animal, Brer Fox—and lay low and said nuffin'.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Unseen Passenger!

"FORGET it, you Bud!"

Mr. Chew was speaking.

He snapped out the words as if he was biting off the syllables one by one. He had, as Bunter noticed, a most disagreeable voice. It had a tone in it like the filing of a saw.

"Forget it!" repeated Chick. "I'm telling you, Bud Parker, that I ain't letting up on this trail till I get a cinch on that gilt-edged bird! Jevver know Chick Chew get left? I'm inquiring of you."

"Nunk!" agreed Mr. Parker.

"You said it!" assented Mr. Chew. "First time I get left I'm throwing down the kidnapping game, and buying me a candy store. Yep! I ain't never got left yet! Not so you'd notice it, you, Bud Parker!"

"This here country ain't the States, Chick!" said Mr. Parker sadly and disapprovingly. "I'll say that a guy can't pull a gun in the street on this island without the whole block rubbering round like they was watching a circus. Now, if we was in the States we—"

"Park it!" said Mr. Chew. "Ain't that why Old Man van Duck has pushed his boy across the pond? Am I going to be beat so easy as that? I'm telling you, I'm getting a cinch on that infant, if he was packed up in Scotland Yard, with all the policemen sitting round him like fowls! Yes, sir!"

"But—"

"You sure do spill a whole bibful, Bud!" said Chick. "I reckoned we had that young geek this morning, when he lit out in that little Austin, and Poker after him in a car! We lost them—but did we hit the Austin, packed up by the road, or did we not?"

"We sure did!" said Mr. Parker. "But—"

"It looks to me," said Mr. Chew, "as if young Van Duck has had too big a helping of Poker on his plate, and fancies shaking a loose leg. If that's the how of it, Bud, it's jest pie! Poker is sure a tough guy, and I guess he would shoot us up, as soon's he'd shoot up a policeman in Chicago. But if the young geek has thrown him down, we got that young geek dead to rights, once we've put salt on his tail! You get me?"

"He sure has got into a hole, and pulled it in after him, Chick."

"I'll get him! There ain't a lot of room in this island to dodge!" said Mr. Chew. "I'll tell you, Bud, I'm nigh feared of letting out the car in this little island, fear of running over the edge! Sure!"

"Where are you looking for him?" asked Bud.

"Surrey!" answered Mr. Chew. "I'm leaving you here, Bud, to rubber around after him, while I look for him where I reckon he knows folks. Did you, or did you not, cinch a letter he wrote to Old Man van Duck?"

"I did!" said Bud.

"Did he, or did he not, mention in that letter that he had met up with some English guys, who'd asked him to meander in at a shebang called Wharton Lodge, in Surrey?"

"He did!" agreed Bud. "But I'll tell you, Chick, that that's a long step from here, and I don't see—"

"If you're going to tell me all the things you don't see, Bud Parker, I guess I shall be growing white hairs by the time you're through!" said Chick. "Pack it up! If I don't get noos of him in Surrey, I'll go over this small island with a small comb till I comb him out."

"You're the hombre to do it, Chick!" admitted Mr. Parker. "But—"

"I'll say you got billygoats in your family, with all them butts!" snorted Mr. Chew. "Park it, old-timer—park it!"

Billy Bunter heard the fat gangster squat in the driving-seat. Bud Parker stepped back.

It was a relief to the fat Owl that Mr. Parker was not coming in the car. There was little danger of discovery now.

"So-long, you Bud!" said Mr. Chew, with another snort. "Mebbe, when you see me again there'll be a passenger in this here auto, travelling under that rug!"

He started the engine. Evidently that big rug was in the car to screen a kidnapped prisoner, if Mr. Chew succeeded in getting a "cinch" on Putnam van Duck.

Equally evidently, Mr. Chew had not the remotest suspicion that there was already a passenger in the auto, travelling under that rug!

The car rolled away, leaving Mr. Parker looking after it through his horn-rimmed spectacles.

It ate up the miles.

Mr. Chew, as he drove, did not glance once into the interior of the Singer saloon. Not the faintest idea crossed his mind that a fat schoolboy, hard up for a lift, was stealing a ride there.

He drove fast.

Billy Bunter made no sound, and no movement! With every turn of the rapid wheels he was getting nearer and nearer to home. That was a comfort. But the near proximity of the Chicago gangster was terrifying. He hardly dared to wonder what would happen if Mr. Chew discovered him.

Several times the car stopped, and he heard the rasping voice of the gangster inquiring the way.

Every time it stopped, Bunter was tempted to dodge out.

But he dared not risk meeting the eyes of the gangster; especially as Mr. Chew, if he found him in the car, would guess at once that he had overheard his talk with Bud Parker, and that he was "wise" to him and his game. Terrifying visions of an automatic floated before Bunter's eyes, as he thought of that.

Moreover, he was heading for Wharton Lodge. As a destination, he preferred it vastly to Bunter Villa!

He had hoped to arrive there with Putnam van Duck, and insinuate an entrance under his wing. That had fallen through. But it was even a more promising prospect to arrive there with Chick Chew—if only Chick did not spot him in transit!

Exactly what Chick aimed to do at Wharton Lodge, Bunter could not begin to guess; but obviously he was not going to announce himself there as a gangster and kidnapper! But Bunter knew who and what he was, only too well. He would be able to tip Harry Wharton & Co. that the Chicago kidnapper was after their American friend.

After such a signal service as that, the least the beasts could do would be to ask him to stay on for Easter. Or, at all events, to refrain from booting him, if he stayed on without bothering to be asked.

It looked good to Bunter.

His first idea, in getting into the car, had been to get a lift to Surrey, within walking distance, if possible, of Bunter Villa. But, having discovered that Wharton Lodge was Mr. Chew's destination, Bunter did not take long to decide that that was going to be his destination also.

Hidden under the big rug, he rocked and jolted, while the Singer ate up the miles.

It seemed to him hours and hours and hours, if not days and days and days, before the car, after several brief stops, made a long halt.

He heard Mr. Chew alight.

Was it Wharton Lodge at last?

The gangster might have stopped somewhere to fill up with "juice." He might have stopped for lots of reasons! He might be at Wharton Lodge and gone into the house—or he might be standing by the car, his keen eyes ready to spot Bunter if he emerged!

It was a tormenting state of doubt.

Long minutes passed, and still the car remained motionless, and Billy Bunter remained as motionless as the car, hidden under the rug, afraid to stir.

But he stirred at last, as the sound of a familiar voice came to his fat ears from outside the car.

"That's a decent car, Inky!"

"Quitefully so."

Both voices were familiar—and reassuring. And Billy Bunter at long last pitched the suffocating rug aside and blinked out through his big spectacles—at the windows of Wharton Lodge, reddened by the sunset.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Chick Wants to Know!

COLONEL WHARTON, sitting by the window in the library at Wharton Lodge, glanced up from his paper as Wells, the butler, entered with a card on a salver.

He glanced at the card.

It bore a name he had never seen before:

MR. HANNIBAL CHEW.

"Hannibal Chew!" murmured the old military gentleman.

"An American gentleman, sir," murmured Wells. "He has just arrived in a car, sir, and desires to see you."

"Show him in, Wells."

"Very good, sir."

Wells retired; and a minute later ushered in a very fat gentleman, from whose fat face two keen eyes gleamed like a hawk's.

Colonel Wharton, laying down his newspaper, rose politely to bow to his unexpected visitor.

He had never heard of Mr. Chew before and never seen him, and now that he saw him did not much like his looks. But he bowed courteously.

"Mr.—er—Chew?" he asked.

"Yop!" Chick Chew bit off his answer. "Glad to meet you, sir."

"Your business with me?" hinted Colonel Wharton, without stating that he was glad to meet Mr. Chew. He wasn't!

The hawk-eyes gleamed round the lofty room for a second, taking in the whole apartment in that second. Then they fixed on the colonel.

"I guess you got my old friend Vanderdecken van Duck's boy staying here, sir!" said Mr. Chew.

"Who?" ejaculated Colonel Wharton.

"Young Putnam van Duck."

The colonel looked puzzled.

It did not occur to him that Mr. Chew had shot off this statement with the intention of surprising him into admitting that Putnam van Duck was there, if indeed there he was!

As Putnam was not there, however, the cunning Mr. Chew gained nothing by his abrupt opening.

"I think I have heard the name," said Colonel Wharton.

"Yes, I have heard my nephew mention the name. But the boy is not here, Mr.—er—Chew."

"Nope?" asked Chick, disappointed.

"My nephew is expecting some friends from school to stay with him for the Easter holidays, but I do not think that Van Duck is one of them."

"You mean he ain't coming along?"

"I am certainly not aware of it," said Colonel Wharton.

Mr. Chew's keen eyes gave him what he would have called the once-over. That piercing glance seemed almost to penetrate the colonel's old bronzed face.

Colonel Wharton was by no means so keen as Mr. Chew, who was as sharp as a razor. But he was quite keen enough to see that the unexpected visitor was scanning him, to ascertain whether he was telling the truth or not.

The bare idea of his word being regarded with the remotest doubt caused a flush to rise in the old bronzed face.

He had never met a man like Mr. Chew before. Probably Mr. Chew had never met a man like Colonel Wharton. To Mr. Chew it came quite natural to doubt any statement made to him. To Colonel Wharton it came as a painful shock to be driven to doubt any statement. It had not occurred to him to doubt Mr. Chew's statement that he was a friend of Van Duck's father.

What did occur to him was that this fat man was a particularly offensive kind of bounder.

However, one penetrating, gimlet-like glance satisfied Mr. Chew that the old military gentleman was not deceiving him.

"Then he ain't been here?" asked Chick.

"He has not!" said the colonel distantly.

"Mebbe you know the lad?"

"I do not know him," said Colonel Wharton. "If you are a friend of his father's, and have called expecting to find him here, I am sorry you are disappointed. But I see no reason—"

"Being over on this side, I reckoned I'd give old Van's boy the once-over," explained Mr. Chew. "But I don't aim to waste your time, sir. Mebbe you'll be able to put me wise where to spot that infant."

(Continued on next page.)

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"I know absolutely nothing of him, sir," said the colonel. "To be exact, all I know is that my nephew and his friends, while on a holiday abroad, met an American boy named Van Duck, with whom they made friends. My nephew asked him to pay a visit here during the school holiday at Easter, if he happened to be in this country at the time. My nephew naturally told me this, but I have heard nothing of the boy since."

"You ain't wise to it that he's this side of the pond?"

"I have said that I know nothing of him." The colonel's manner grew stiffer and stiffer.

"I guess I can put you wise to that, then," said Mr. Chew. "Young Van Duck is in England."

"Indeed!"

"Sure thing!" said Mr. Chew, with a nod. "And, missing him in London, I figured that he had moseyed off somewhere on a visit, and kind of reckoned that this was the shebang where he had hung up his hat."

"Evidently an error on your part, Mr. Chew."

Colonel Wharton's manner indicated that the interview was ended. But that cut no ice with Mr. Chew.

Frigid looks had no effect on that gentleman. He was not accustomed to retreating before anything less effective than a levelled gun!

"I'm telling you, sir," said Mr. Chew, "that I got the wind up some about my old friend Van's boy. Mebbe you've heard that a gang of kidnapers are after him."

Colonel Wharton smiled faintly.

"I believe my nephew mentioned that the boy had told him something of the sort," he answered. "If it is the case, there is no occasion for anxiety on this side of the Atlantic, Mr. Chew."

"Nunk?" asked Mr. Chew, eyeing him.

"Scarcely," said the colonel. "In this country, sir, the police are well organized, and inaccessible to bribery, and I can assure you that they would make very short work of kidnapping gangsters."

"Says you!" remarked Mr. Chew.

"I doubt," said the colonel, "whether a Chicago gangster would venture to set foot in this country at all."

"Search me!" said Mr. Chew.

"At all events, no such character would ever think of carrying on a lawless enterprise here," said Colonel Wharton. "If Mr. van Duck's son is in England, his father may be absolutely assured of his safety."

"I'll tell all Chicago!" ejaculated Mr. Chew. He gazed at the colonel. "You don't figure that if a kidnapping guy was after that young gink, he would hop over the herring-pond and give your police his name and address and then ask them to catch him if they could?"

"Scarcely!" said the colonel.

"You're telling me!" murmured Mr. Chew. "You don't sort of opine that if you had that kid here, the guy who was after him would walk into this here shebang and walk him off under your nose, sir, at the muzzle of an automatic?"

Colonel Wharton laughed.

"Pray disabuse your mind of any such idea, Mr. Chew," he said. "Nothing of that kind is possible in a law-abiding country like this."

"Pack me up in a Saratoga!" said Mr. Chew, staring at the colonel. "And sit on the lid!" he added reflectively.

Colonel Wharton politely waited for him to go. But Mr. Chew was not going.

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"I'll mention," he resumed, "that you don't seem to get the how of it, not a whole lot. I guess I feel anxious, more than a few, about that boy. But if he ain't here, and you ain't expecting him—"

"That is the case."

"Mebbe that nephew you mentioned might know a little more," suggested Mr. Chew. "Mebbe you'd call him in and ask him."

"Really, sir—"

"You get me?" urged Mr. Chew. "If my old friend Van's son has hit up against trouble, I sure want to know. Mebbe that nephew will know where he's to be found. What's the matter with asking him?"

"I quite understand your anxiety, sir, though I assure you that it is unfounded, if the boy is in this country," said Colonel Wharton. "However, I have no objection to questioning my nephew as to whether he knows anything of Van Duck's present whereabouts."

"You said it, sir!" said Mr. Chew.

"I will send for him," said the colonel.

He touched a bell.

The door opened, and Wells' plump face appeared.

"Please ask Master Harry to step here, Wells!" said Colonel Wharton.

"Very good, sir!"

"Perhaps you will be seated, sir," added Colonel Wharton, as the butler retired.

"Sure!" assented Mr. Chew.

He sat down on the arm of an arm-chair, and crossed one plump leg over the other, his eyes on the door.

His hand slid for a moment to the back of his trousers, where—little as the colonel dreamed of it—an automatic reposed in a hidden pocket. Colonel Wharton, who did not believe that a Chicago gangster would venture to set foot in England, much less carry on his lawless enterprises, would have been astonished to learn what methods Mr. Chew was prepared to employ, if needed, to extract information from his nephew!

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Startling

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Harry Wharton jumped.

So did Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

They jumped almost clear of the ground in their surprise.

Taking a stroll on the terrace at Wharton Lodge after tea, they had noticed the Singer saloon standing on the drive, where Mr. Chew had left it. It was a handsome car, and they paused to look at it, aware that there was nobody in it—or, to be more exact, unaware that there was somebody in it.

A voice, coming from an apparently empty car, made them jump—especially the familiar voice of the fat Owl of Greyfriars, which they had not expected to hear again till next term.

"What—" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Who—" stuttered the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Bunter!" howled Wharton.

He stared blankly at the stirring rug, which shifted, to reveal a fat face and a large pair of spectacles.

"The esteemed and idiotic Bunter!" exclaimed Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He heaved up from under the enveloping rug, set his spectacles straight on his fat little nose, and blinked at the two astonished juniors, gasping.

They gazed at him like fellows who

could hardly believe their eyes—as, indeed, they hardly could.

Bunter had intended to blow in at Wharton Lodge for the "hols" if he could. Though he had been safely left behind at Greyfriars, owing to Bob Cherry's "astute dodge" with the box of chocolates, Wharton would not have been exactly surprised to see him blow in. But it was a surprise to see him arrive in a stranger's car, hidden under a rug on the floor. That was very surprising indeed.

The two juniors had had a glimpse of Mr. Chew as he went in, without taking any special note of him. But they knew that he was an American, and a man they had never seen before. It was really amazing to find Billy Bunter parked out of sight in his car.

"You fat villain!" exclaimed Wharton, when he had recovered his voice. "What the thump do you think you are up to?"

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter. He blinked to the right, and then to the left. "I—I say, where is he?"

"He? Who?"

"That villain!" gasped Bunter.

"What villain, you potty porpoise?"

"That Yankee kidnapper!" gasped Bunter.

Hurree Janset Ram Singh tapped his dusky forehead significantly.

"The pottiness is terrific!" he remarked.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"What are you doing in that car, you fat chump?" demanded Harry Wharton. "Does the owner know you're there?"

"No fear!" gasped Bunter. "I shouldn't be alive if he did! I say, where is he? Is it safe?"

"Safe?" said Harry blankly.

"Yes! I say, he's Chew," gasped Bunter—"Mr. Chew—"

"Missed a chew?" repeated Wharton, misunderstanding. "Who's missed a chew? Not you, if you had anything to chew!"

"You silly ass!" howled Bunter. "Chew—Mr. Chew—Chick Chew—"

"Chick Chew!" The name seemed familiar to Wharton. "I've heard that weird name somewhere—"

Hurree Janset Ram Singh chuckled.

"It is the absurd name of the idiotic kidnapper that the ludicrous Van Duck told us about on the steamer," he remarked.

"Oh, I remember! What about Chick Chew, you fat ass?"

"It's him!" said Bunter, breathlessly and ungrammatically.

"Who's him, you blitherer?"

"That fat beast who was driving the car!" gasped Bunter. "I say, he's after Van Duck! I say, he knows he's here!"

"After Van Duck!" said Harry. "Van Duck isn't here, you owl!"

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Bunter. "I jolly well know he's here. He told me he was coming here when I saw him at Greyfriars to-day, and it's hours and hours and hours since he left me on the road near Lantham, so he must have got here, and that ruffian Pike after him, and—"

"Well, if he was coming here, he hasn't got here," answered Wharton. "Did he drop in at Greyfriars after you left?"

"Yes; and I told him where you were, and he came here—"

"He hasn't come, ass!"

"Oh!" said Bunter. "I suppose that man Pike got him, after all, then! But, I say, that man Chew thinks he's here. I heard him say so while I was in the car. He's come here after him."

"What on earth makes you think the owner of the car is the kidnapper?" demanded Wharton.



With a herculean effort, Chick Chew broke loose from Harry Wharton and Hurree Singh, and made a bound for the French window. Next moment he crashed bodily through in a shower of broken glass!

"You silly ass, I heard him tell the other man so!" howled Bunter. "I tell you, he's after young Van Duck! I—I came specially to warn you. I didn't get into this car simply to bag a lift; I was thinking of Van Duck all the time, and running fearful risks to get here in time to warn you—"

"Chuck it!" said Harry
"Oh, really, you ungrateful beast, I—"

"Is there anything in it, or is that fat chump trying to pull our leg, Inky?" asked the captain of the Remove.

Hurree Janset Rain Singh shook his dusky head.

"The knowfulness is not terrific!" he answered.

"Look here, you fat ass, if you're not gammoning, tell us how you know," said the captain of the Remove.

Bunter had crawled out of the car. He stood blinking round him uneasily through his big spectacles. It was evident that he was in a state of great uneasiness, not to say blue funk.

"Where is he?" he demanded.

"He's gone in to see my uncle. Wells showed him in a few minutes ago. If you know anything about him—"

Billy Bunter gasped out an account of his startling adventures since he had been left behind with the box of chocolates at Greyfriars.

Harry Wharton and Hurree Janset Ram Singh listened blankly. The fat Owl had finished when Wells appeared from the doorway.

"Master Harry—"

Wells broke off, with a surprised glance at Bunter.

"Yes!"

Harry looked round.

"The colonel desires you to step into the library, sir!" said Wells.

"Oh, all right! Is the man who came in this car still there, Wells?"

"Yes, sir!"

"What name did he give you?"

"The name on his card was Hannibal Chew, sir."

"Chew!" repeated Wharton. "My hat!" That piece of information bore out Billy Bunter's rambling statements. "Come on, Inky! You come in with me!"

"I say, you fellows," gasped Bunter—"I say, look out for his revolver!"

"Fathead!"

"Beast!"

The two juniors hurried into the house. Billy Bunter did not. Billy Bunter did not want to see Mr. Chew at close quarters.

"Here, Wells!" he said

"Sir!" said Wells, eyeing him.

"Show me to my room!" said Bunter.

"Your room, sir?" repeated Wells.

"Yes. Buck up!"

"Are you staying, sir?" asked Wells.

"Yes! Of course I am!" snapped Bunter. "Haven't I told you to show me to my room, you ass?"

Wells coughed.

"I have had no instructions, sir, to prepare a room," he said. "Perhaps you will wait, sir, till Master Harry informs me—"

Billy Bunter gave him a devastating blink through his spectacles.

"That's cheek, Wells," he said.

"Indeed, sir!" said Wells.

"And I don't want any of it, see?" snapped Bunter.

"Yes, sir!" said Wells. "Thank you, sir!" And he glided away, and his portly figure disappeared by the service door.

"Wells!" hooted Bunter. "Look here, Wells—"

Wells was gone.

"Cheeky beast!" grunted Bunter. "They don't know how to keep servants in order here! I'd teach 'em!"

And as Wells did not show him to his room, Billy Bunter went upstairs to look for it himself, unaided!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

"Stick 'Em Up!"

"HERE is my nephew, Mr. Chew!" said Colonel Wharton.

Harry and Hurree Singh entered the library together. Hannibal Chew—or Chick, as he was known to his friends—rose from the arm of the arm-chair.

He gave the two schoolboys a penetrating look, which they returned with interest. Certainly, but for what they had just heard from Billy Bunter, they would have had no suspicion of the fat man.

Now they had very strong suspicions indeed.

According to Bunter, Putnam van Duck had been heading for Wharton Lodge, though he had not arrived there. Had he arrived, he would have been under the same roof as the man who had planned to kidnap him, and hold him to ransom. Escaping from his too-watchful guardian, Poker Pike, he would have walked right into the presence of the gangster.

"Harry," went on the old colonel, "this is Mr. Chew, a friend of Mr. van Duck—"

"A friend, uncle?" repeated Harry. "A friend of Van Duck's father?"

(Continued on page 16.)

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HIS GUNMAN GUARDIAN!

By
FRANK
RICHARDS



(Continued from page 13.)

"Yes, and he has called under the impression that the boy was here. You remember telling me that he might visit you during these holidays—"

"I remember."

"I do not know whether you have heard anything of him since," went on the colonel. "But if you know anything of him, please tell Mr. Chew."

"Spill it!" added Chick encouragingly.

"I do know something more of him, uncle," said Harry quietly. "But I'm not sure that I had better tell Mr. Chew."

Colonel Wharton stared at his nephew.

"What do you mean, Harry? Mr. Chew is anxious about the boy, who appears to be threatened by kidnappers, as you told me. He desires to know where to find him, and if you can assist—"

"I know that Van Duck is threatened by kidnappers, uncle! And I know that the leader of the gang is named Chew!" answered Harry.

"Good gad!" ejaculated Colonel Wharton.

"The Chewfulness is terrific!" added Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh.

Chick Chew straightened up, his face hardening, his hawk-like eyes alert. He looked, for the moment, like a jungle animal scenting danger.

"Mr. Chew seems to know that we met Van Duck, and asked him here," went on Harry. "But he does not seem to know that Van Duck told us about the Chicago kidnappers who were after him."

"Nope!" said Mr. Chew. "I'll say I was not wise to that, big boy! Did he say one of the crowd was named Chew?"

"He did!" answered Harry.

"I'll mention that there's a whole heap of Chews in the Yew-nited States!" said Chick. "You ain't figuring that I'm the Chew that young Van Duck told you was on his trail?"

"I am!" answered Harry.

"Forget it, bo!" advised Mr. Chew. "Come, come, Harry," said Colonel Wharton. "What possible reason can you have for supposing—"

"Plenty of reason, uncle," said Harry. "If this Mr. Chew isn't the same Chick Chew that Van Duck spoke of—"

"Not so's you'd notice it!" interjected Hannibal.

"Then why," said Harry, "have you been hunting for Van Duck all over Kent in a car to-day?"

Chick fairly gasped. He was not easily taken aback, but this quite took the wind out of his sails. He had never seen this schoolboy before, and the boy had been here, in Surrey, while Chick was hunting in Kent. How the schoolboy knew anything of his proceedings that day was a mystery to Chick.

"Say, big boy, you dreaming?" he gasped.

"I think not," said Harry. "Why did you tell your confederate, Bud Parker, to go on hunting for him, while you came here to see whether Van Duck had turned up at Wharton Lodge?"

Mr. Chew almost fell down.

This looked like black magic to him. He had talked to Bud Parker standing by his car at the wayside inn in Kent, without, so far as he knew, any other car within hearing.

Yet this boy, nearly a hundred miles from the spot, knew what he had said to the other gangster!

His hawk eyes almost goggled at Harry Wharton. The colonel, equally amazed, stared blankly at his nephew.

"Say!" gasped Mr. Chew. "Can you beat it? I'm asking you, can you beat it?"

"And why," went on Harry, "did you tell Bud Parker that the next time he saw you, you might have a passenger hidden under that big rug in your car?"

"Fan me!" murmured the dazed Mr. Chew. "Fan me a few!"

"And why," continued the captain of the Greyfriars Remove, "did you tell Bud Parker that if you failed to find him here, you would go over the whole island with a small comb till you combed him out?"

Mr. Chew tottered.

"Afore this," he said, apparently addressing space, "I ain't never believed in them telepathic stunts! Now I'm sure getting it down! Yep!"

"If you're not after kidnapping Van Duck, why did you say all that to that bony man in the horn-rimmed spectacles?" asked Harry.

Mr. Chew moaned.

"Horn-rimmed specs and all!" he murmured. "Don't he know the whole bag of beans? He sure do! Carry me home to die!"

In his hectic career as a gangster in the great city of Chicago, Mr. Chew had doubtless encountered many surprises. But never had he been so utterly surprised as now.

If it was not telepathy or black magic, there was no accounting for what the old colonel's nephew knew of him and his proceedings that day!

He leaned a fat hand on the high back of the chair to steady himself. He gazed at Harry Wharton open-mouthed, revealing some expensive American gold-fitted dentistry.

"Say, big boy," he gurgled, "did a little bird tell you all that?"

"Harry!" gasped the colonel. "What can you possibly mean? How can you possibly know—"

Harry pointed to Mr. Chew.

"He looks as if I know!" he answered. "Uncle, that man is Chick Chew, a dangerous Chicago gangster, the man whom Mr. Vanderdecken van Duck is afraid will kidnap his son."

"Good gad!" said Colonel Wharton. "I cannot doubt it now, but—"

"Search me!" said Mr. Chew. "Search me, Charlie!"

Colonel Wharton made a stride towards him. Amazed as he was by the extraordinary fund of information in his nephew's possession, he could not doubt it. Mr. Chew's face was a confession.

The old military gentleman faced him, with knitted brows.

"So you are a kidnapper!" he exclaimed. "You are the gangster who has threatened to kidnap a boy and hold him to ransom!"

"Sort of!" gasped Mr. Chew.

"And you have dared to come here, here to my house, in search of information to help you in this dastardly rascality!" exclaimed the colonel, his voice trembling with indignation.

Mr. Chew pulled himself together.

He had been taken quite off his balance. But he was very quickly himself again.

"You said it!" he remarked, in a casual tone. "And I'll mention that that young gink has said that he knows something of Putnam. I'll trouble him to spill it."

"What!" thundered the colonel. "Do you imagine, for one moment, that my nephew will give you any help in your lawless enterprise—that I would allow him to do so?"

"Kind of!" agreed Chick.

"Scoundrel!" boomed the colonel. "So far from that, you will be detained, as you have dared to venture here, and handed over to the police. And you will find that, in this country, the police cannot be corruptly influenced into releasing a dangerous desperado."

"You sure do spill a large mouthful!" said Mr. Chew. "I'll say you're some orator, when you get going! But time's money, old-timer, and I'm advising you to park it, and let me get through. I'm telling you I'm here for information, and I sure do want to know."

Colonel Wharton breathed wrath.

"Harry," he gasped, "go at once and tell Wells to telephone for a constable from Wimford! Mr. Chew, if that is your name, I shall detain you here till the constable arrives to take you into custody, and I warn you, sir, that I shall not hesitate to use force!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Mr. Chew, greatly to the angry old soldier's surprise. "I'll pass it up to you, sir, for tickling a guy to death!"

But as Harry Wharton made a step towards the library door, Chick Chew's merriment vanished suddenly, and was replaced by a cold, hard, ferocious grimace. His hand shot to his hip, and reappeared with an ugly looking, black-muzzled automatic in the podgy fingers.

"Freeze on to that spot where you're standing, bo!" he said, snapping the words sharply through his American dentistry. "And you, sir, stick 'em up! You hear me toot? I'm whispering to you to stick 'em up!"

And the angry old colonel, making a stride towards the gangster, stopped suddenly, gasping, as the black muzzle of the automatic looked full in his bronzed old face, with the hawk eyes of Chick Chew gleaming over the barrel.

"Stick 'em up!" repeated Chick.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

A Little Liveliness!

"STICK 'em up!" Those words, familiar enough to Chick's own ears, sounded strange and startling in the quiet old library at Wharton Lodge.

Colonel Wharton stood as if transfixed.

Harry turned back from the door. Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh stood stock still.

All three were under cover of the automatic. It needed only a pressure of Chick's podgy finger to spray them with bullets.

That he could even think of doing so seemed wildly unimaginable in that quiet country house, in the quiet English countryside.

But, unimaginable as it was, evidently it was in the gangster's mind. A chunk of Chicago, as it were, had been suddenly transferred across the ocean—and there it was!

Harry's teeth set hard and his eyes glinted. The nabob's dusky face set.

As for the old colonel, he stood rooted, staring in such amazement that his mouth was open, like that of a fish out of water.

It was not fear that rooted him. A man who had been through the War, from beginning to end, was not likely to be afraid of deadly weapons. But it was perfectly plain that Chick meant to shoot if a hand was lifted against him, and it was sudden death that looked the colonel in the face without a chance; bare hands were not much use against a levelled automatic.

"I said stick 'em up, bo!" bawled Mr. Chew.

Colonel Wharton gasped. He did not "stick 'em up." Nothing would have induced him to obey the order of the gangster.

"Rascal!" he spluttered. "Impudent scoundrel!"

"Pack it up, old-timer!" said Mr. Chew. "You sit this one out! And I guess I ain't waiting long to see you reach for the roof."

Instead of raising his hands above his head, as ordered, Colonel Wharton clenched them hard. Even the grim automatic barely stopped him from hurling himself at the gangster.

"I will do nothing of the kind!" he thundered. "Do you flatter yourself for one moment that you can give orders to an Englishman in his own house—and a soldier, too, begad!"

"Just a few!" said Chick. "Put 'em up, old-timer, while you got time! Heap guys in Chicago could tell you that I'm a bad man to argue with!"

"Bah!" snorted the colonel. "You putting up them fins?" growled Chick threateningly.

"No!" roared the colonel. "Shoot if you dare, you scoundrel!"

"I'll say you got sand!" said Mr. Chew. "There ain't a lot of guys that would stand on their hind legs chewing the rag with this baby when I got a gat in my grip! Nope! I guess I ain't honing to spill your vinegar all over this hyer expensive polished floor of yours. Stand where you are, and park your chin-wag—you've said your piece!"

He glanced past the colonel, at Harry. "Now, big boy, spill it!" he said. "Where'd you last see that young galoot Putnam? Shoot!"

"I shall tell you nothing!" answered the captain of the Greyfriars Remove steadily, though his heart was beating hard.

"Guess again!" suggested Mr. Chew. "Look at that old boss—he'll sure be going off that deep end soon, and I'll have to strew him around with holes in him. You want to spill it—and spill it quick!"

"Scoundrel!" gasped the colonel. "Aw, ain't I told you to park it?" remonstrated Mr. Chew. "Ain't I tipped you that you've said your piece? Sit it out, I'm telling you!"

"Rascal!" spluttered Colonel Wharton.

He made a movement. The cold, hard, hawk-eye glinted over the automatic, and the old soldier stopped again.

"I'll say you're the guy to ask for it!" said Chick, in a tone of cold, savage menace. "You'll sure cinch it soon, if you don't behave! Now you young gink, you going to spill it?"

"You will not utter one word to that scoundrel, Harry!" thundered the colonel.

"Not a word, uncle!" said Harry quietly.

The hawk eyes glinted at them. Chick Chew, it was certain, was ready to shoot, if it came to shooting. But he had expected to gain his point by the mere terror of the levelled gun.

Chick was a reckless and unscrupulous rascal; but he was no fool, and he knew which side of the Atlantic he was on. What would have been a mere episode

in his happy native city of Chicago, would have been sufficient to set the whole country in a buzz in the old-fashioned island in which he now found himself. In Chicago, gun-play was Chick's first resource; but on the old-fashioned side of the herring-pond it was his last!

There was a pause!

The colonel stood with clenched hands. Harry Wharton, near the door, stood quite still. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, a few feet from his chum, rested his hand on a little table, where a book lay—Harry Wharton's "Holiday Annual."

The nabob's dusky fingers had closed on that volume, behind him.

His dusky face expressed nothing, but he was calculating his chances. The champion bowler of the Remove Eleven had an unerring hand. But it was a long chance to take, for nothing could have been more certain than that the gangster was ready to pull trigger on the instant if his safety was threatened.

The pause was brief.

The automatic swayed a little aside from the colonel, and Harry Wharton could almost have looked into the muzzle.

"I'm telling you, bo!" said Chick Chew, in a deadly tone. "I guess I

ain't no baby-killer, but I got to get the goods! You're going to put me wise about that young gink Putman! I give you till that there clock has ticked off jest one minute!"

Harry Wharton did not answer; but he breathed hard. That he knew what would be useful to the gangster, Chick could guess, though he did not know what.

Wharton knew, from Bunter, that Putnam van Duck was on his way to Wharton Lodge; and might, indeed, arrive at any moment. Nothing would have induced him to tell what he knew. But the perspiration started out on his forehead as he looked at the black muzzle.

Colonel Wharton made a movement. The hawk-eyes gleamed round at him.

"You asking for it?" came in a deep growl from the gangster. "By the great horned toad I guess—oooooah!"

His eyes were off Hurree Singh. In fact, he had given the dusky schoolboy hardly any attention at all.

In that moment the nabob acted swiftly! His arm jerked—the volume flew through the air as swiftly as a bullet from Chick's own automatic.

It smashed on that automatic, hurling

(Continued on next page.)

GREYFRIARS INTERVIEWS

Our clever Greyfriars Rhymester is still going strong with his series of interviews. In the following snappy verses he introduces

DICK RAKE,

a real good lad of the Remove.

(1)

Dick Rake, though his temper is certainly short,

Is a pretty good sort on the whole. He isn't outstanding at classes or sport, At cricket he knows how to bowl. If there is one thing at which Rake is a dab

It is physics, or otherwise, "stinks." He spends many hours in the chemistry lab. Where he mixes most horrible drinks.

(2)

"My new high explosive!" he told me with pride,

As he deftly adjusted the cork. "There's more than enough of this powder inside To blow the whole school to New York! In fact, it would blow up the county of Kent,

If you dropped it right here on the floor!" I thereupon felt it was time that I went And I made a swift move to the door.

(3)

"All right! I shan't drop it!" he said with a grin.

I wasn't so certain of that! However, I cautiously shuffled back in. Too cautious! I tripped on the mat. I made a wild plunge to recover my feet And I bumped into Rake with a roar, And then (with a word which I cannot repeat)

He let the bomb fall to the floor!

(2)

He'd just made a brilliant discovery when I called round to see him to-day, I found him at home in his study or den With his study-mates out of the way. He held a test-tube, and I saw with surprise, That the tube was well-corked and sealed down, 'Twas brim-full of powder, which seemed to my eyes To be coloured a kind of mud brown.



(5)

It burst! And the powder shot out in a stream!

I knew that my hair had turned grey! And yet the school buildings to me didn't seem To have shifted much farther away! The county of Kent didn't show many scars Of its horrible journey through space. It might have been blown to the outermost stars,

But to me it looked just the same place!

(6)

"Some bomb!" I remarked, with a sniff of disdain.

"It burst like a packet of salt!" Then Rake answered back. He was painfully plain

(His face has a similar fault). He answered me warmly, but let it be said That his manner was lacking in tact. To throw a large book at a visitor's head Is a most unaccountable act!



(7)

He followed the book with a bottle of ink, Which I didn't object to so much.

But to start flinging eggs by the dozen, I think

Was really the finishing touch! I wouldn't have minded as much as I did. If the eggs had been fresh, but they weren't! I wouldn't go through it again for a quid, The beastly things ought to be burnt.

(8)

I might have overlooked the sickening smell, I might have forgiven the yolk.

But when he was flinging the bomb-stuff as well

I thought it was far past a joke. I then felt obliged to take action to stop This highly uncivilised stuff. And so with the aid of a shovel and mop, I showed him that I'd had enough!



it from the gangster's hand, and the weapon clattered on the floor.

Chick, with a yell of rage, plunged after it.

As he stooped, the nabob leaped at him with the spring of a tiger of his native land. Both his fists crashed together on the top of Chick's head, and the gangster stumbled over and fell.

"Oh, good man, Inky!" panted Wharton.

He rushed forward to back up his dusky chum.

But the colonel was first. One active leap carried him to the sprawling gangster, and he grasped him as Chick scrambled furiously to his feet. The nabob's foot struck the automatic, sending it spinning across the room, far out of the gangster's reach.

Neither had Chick any time to reach for it. He was struggling in the grasp of the old colonel.

"Now, you scoundrel—" panted Colonel Wharton.

"Bag him!" panted Harry. Both the juniors grasped hold of Chick. With three pairs of hands on him, the man from Chicago stumbled and staggered and struggled.

But, fat as he was, unwieldy as he looked, Chick was an active man, full of strength and full of beans.

It looked, for a moment or two, as if he must be overcome, and secured. But he suddenly hooked the colonel's leg, and the old soldier went over, bumping on the floor, gasping for breath.

Chick, with the two juniors clinging to him like cats, scrambled away to the window. The sound of the struggle had already drawn attention; and Wells, opening the door, stared into the room with amazed eyes.

The alarm was given, and the gangster was disarmed. Chick Chew was thinking now of only one thing—escape; or making his getaway, as he would have called it.

The french windows were shut. Chick reached them, and with a herculean effort hurled the two clinging juniors off.

But quick as he was, the colonel was on his feet by that time, and was coming on again, followed by the astonished

Wells, and Harry and the nabob rallied at once. Chick had a split second.

But it was enough for the gangster, accustomed to desperate affrays and to swift action. His bulky shoulder crashed through the window, and the next moment he crashed bodily through it, in a shower of broken glass. From the smashed window startled eyes stared after him, as, running with the swiftness of a deer, he vanished into the shrubberies.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bad Luck for Bunter!

"FAT Jack!"

"Beast!"

That exchange of compliments took place the following morning.

Billy Bunter, with his big spectacles glimmering in the April sunshine, was standing in the gateway of Wharton Lodge, blinking out at the wide world.

He was still there—though the future was a little uncertain.

As he had sagely calculated, Harry Wharton had asked him whether he would like to stop the night, and Bunter had.

For some reason or other Wharton had not followed it up with a request to remain for the rest of the vacation.

That was Bunter's fixed intention, if it could be managed. But it was not settled yet.

Having come down at eleven o'clock that morning, he had found that Harry and the nabob had gone out; which was annoying, for naturally, in such an uncertain state of affairs, Bunter wanted to get the matter settled.

Now, as he blinked out of the gateway to see whether the beasts were coming back, he sighted a slim, keen-eyed youth, who sauntered up the road, and who stopped at the sight of him.

It was Putnam van Duck.

"You again!" said Putnam. "I guess this is Wharton Lodge, then! What?"

"Yes!" grunted Bunter. "Seen those beasts?"

"Eh?" asked Putnam. "Who?"

"Wharton and Inky—"

"I ain't spotted them, but I guess I want to!" said Putnam. "Ain't they at home?"

"They've gone out!" granted Bunter. "That's how they treat a guest here—clearing off before a fellow's up in the morning! I've a jolly good mind to clear off myself, before they come back. It would serve them right."

"It sure would!" agreed Putnam. "Nice for them, what?"

Snort, from Bunter.

"Look here, have you come here to stay?" he asked.

"Sort of."

"Well, you'd better not!" said Bunter. "You won't be safe here. See? That man Chew was here yesterday—"

"You're telling me!" said Putnam.

"There was a fearful row," said Bunter impressively. "He scared them all by pulling out a gun—as it happened, I wasn't in the room, or I'd have had it off him fast enough—"

"I sort of see you doing it," agreed Putnam. "I'll say you'd be a tin terror on ten wheels if you got going."

"Well, he was after you," said Bunter. "He smashed through a window and got away—as I wasn't there to stop him. He left his car behind, and the police from Wimford have been here, and taken it away. But I shouldn't wonder if he's hanging about. You can see you ain't safe here, Van Duck."

"That worries you a whole lot?" asked Putnam.

"Yes, of—of course. I jolly well don't want a gangster hauging about here while I'm here, I can jolly well tell you. The best thing you can do is to clear off at once!" suggested Bunter. "The further away you get the safer you'll be. You see that?"

Putnam chuckled.

He was a keen youth, but he did not need to be very keen to see that the safety Billy Bunter was worried about, was the safety of his own fat person.

Bunter did not like the idea of Mr. Chew in the offing. And he had no doubt that if Putnam van Duck stayed Mr. Chew would very soon be in the offing again.

He was, indeed, as anxious to lose sight of Putnam van Duck as Chick Chew was to get sight of him!

"Of course, I'm not thinking of myself at all!" Bunter explained.

"You wouldn't!" grinned Putnam.

"I never do!" said Bunter. "That's always been my fault—forgetting myself and thinking of others. I never get any gratitude, and I don't expect it. As for danger, that doesn't worry me—in fact, I like it. But as you wouldn't be safe here, Van Duck, you'd better not come in at all. I'll show you the way to the railway station, if you like."

"I guess I could find a station that I've just walked away from," said Van Duck. "But I sure ain't hitting it just now."

"Now look here," said Bunter firmly. "Don't you come barging in where you're not wanted, see?"

Van Duck looked at him.

"Ain't this baby wanted around?" he inquired.

"No! I don't want to hurt your feelings, but the fact is, that after what happened yesterday, the old fossil—"

"Who's that?"

"I mean Colonel Wharton—grumpy old stick," said Bunter. "Savage temper, you know—stiff as a ramrod—looks at a fellow as if he wasn't there. Well, after that row yesterday, the old fathead told Harry that he'd better let you know, to keep away from here—"

"He sure did?" asked Putnam.

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Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh collared Mr. Pike and sent him hurtling into the ditch. There was a terrific splash as the gunman landed on his back in two feet of water and mud. "Goooooogh!" gurgled Mr. Pike.

"Those very words!" said Bunter. "And Harry said—I hardly like to tell you what he said—"

"Oh, spill it!" urged Putnam. "I sure do want to know."

"Well, he said that of course he didn't want a pushing Yankee poking into the place—"

"Wharton said that?"

"Those very words! I hate telling you, old chap, but I can't help thinking it's better for you to know the truth," explained Bunter.

"The truth!" repeated Putnam. "Sure thing! Get on with it!"

"And Inky said—if you want to know what Inky said—"

"Shoot!" urged Putnam. "You've got me interested."

"Well, Inky said that he couldn't stand Yankees—you see, we've got one at Greyfriars, and he's a fearful tick—and he said he'd go, if you came. And Wharton said—What are you grinning at?"

A wide grin overspread Putnam van Duck's face.

It was caused by the sight of Colonel Wharton, who was coming down the drive to the gates.

As Bunter had his face to the road, he naturally had his back to the drive within, and having no eyes in the back of his fat head, he did not, of course, see the old military gentleman coming.

Putnam, facing Bunter, and looking past him, saw the old colonel, and saw, also, that he was hearing Bunter's cheery remarks.

And the expression that was gathering on the old soldier's bronzed face, revealed the effect that those remarks had on him.

"Was I grinning?" asked Putnam. "Forget it, and carry on. I'll tell a man, I like to hear you talk!"

"Well, Wharton said, that if you

showed up here he'd jolly well let you know at once where you got off!" said Bunter. "And the old ass—"

"Who?"

"I mean Colonel Wharton," said Bunter, in happy ignorance of the fact that Colonel Wharton, with a brow like thunder, was just behind him. "Colonel Wharton said—Yaroooh! Yooop! Oh crikey!"

A grip like iron on the back of his collar caused Billy Bunter to break off with that wild splutter.

Spinning round in the angry old gentleman's grip, the fat Owl gazed at him in horror, his eyes almost bulging through his spectacles.

"Oooooogh!" he gurgled. "Leggo! Oooooogh!"

"You young rascal!" thundered the colonel.

"Urrrrrrggh!"

Still gripping the wriggling Owl by the collar, Colonel Wharton glanced at the smiling face of Putnam van Duck.

"I gather, from what this untruthful young rascal was saying, that you are my nephew's American friend," he said.

"You said it, sir!" assented Putnam.

"I am Colonel Wharton—I am very glad to see you here. There is not a word of truth in what this young rascal has been telling you—"

"I guessed that one, sir."

"My nephew has gone out, at the moment, but he will be delighted to see you when he returns," said Colonel Wharton. "As for you, Bunter—"

"Urrrrggh!"

"You untruthful, prevaricating, unscrupulous—"

"Wurrgh! Leggo! Oooooogh!" gurgled Bunter. "I—I say, I—I wasn't—I mean, I never—grooogh! I didn't mean you were an old ass, sir! I—I was speaking of another old ass—"

"What?" reared the colonel.

"Not you at all, sir!" gasped Bunter. "Quit another silly old ass, sir—not you. And I say—gurrgh! Stop shook-shick-shaking me! Urrgh!"

Shake, shake, shake!

"Urrgh! Wurrgh! Gurrgh!"

"Now," said Colonel Wharton, releasing the fat Owl's collar, "I think you have a trail to catch, Bunter. I advise you to catch it at once. Please come with me, Van Duck."

"Sure!"

Putnam van Duck walked up the drive with Colonel Wharton. Billy Bunter, gurgling for breath, remained at the gateway, blinking after them in dismay through his big spectacles.

It was not uncommon for the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove to put his foot in it; but never, or hardly ever, had he put his foot in it so disastrously as now. So far as Harry Wharton was concerned, it was still unsettled whether Billy Bunter was to stay or go. But so far as Harry's uncle was concerned it was evidently settled. Even Billy Bunter did not need a stronger hint than this to take his departure.

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Punishing Poker Pike!

"PULL in, you!" Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh stopped suddenly. They were walking on the Wimford road, a mile from Wharton Lodge, when the bowler-hatted man stepped, as it seemed, from nowhere and faced them.

"Pike!" ejaculated Harry Wharton. "The esteemed and ridiculous Pike!" murmured Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

They smiled at the hard, serious, hickory face of the gunman, grim under the clamped-down black bowler. Mr. Pike did not smile. He was a serious man, and had serious business on hand.

"I guess you're wise to me!" he remarked.

"Quite!" said Harry, smiling. "We saw you yesterday, Mr. Pike, from the train, after young Van Duck on the Lantham road. Did you get him?"

Pike's slits of eyes scanned him sharply.

"I guess I never cinched that infant," he said. "But I'll mention that I'm sure cinching him soon. That kid's popper pu. me in charge of him, and I guess he ain't shaking no loose leg without orders from Old Man Van Duck. Not so's you'd notice it, bo! Where is he now?"

"I haven't the foggiest!" said Harry, laughing.

"I guess I'm asking you to talk turkey!" said Mr. Pike. "I gotta see that kid safe! I'm telling you, Chick Chew is on this side, and he's after that boy like a politician after a bribe. Surest thing you know. You ain't standing between that boy and me seeing him safe."

"Not at all," said Harry. "If Van Duck's in as much danger as his father supposes, I think he's rather a young ass to keep away from you, Mr. Pike. But it's his own business, not mine."

"I'm asking you to put me wise," said Mr. Pike. "I guess you'll know. You're the crowd he made friends with on the steamer when he levanted last time. I saw him yesterday in company with one of the crowd—that fat guy with four eyes. Yep! Now he's in this quarter, and I see you here. I guess I can put two and two on paper and add them up! Surest thing, you know! That kid was aiming to join up with your bunch."

Harry Wharton made no reply to that.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Pike was quite right. But though Wharton was aware of Putnam's intentions, he was not aware of his present whereabouts. He had seen nothing of him since that glimpse from the train on the Lantham road.

"I been chasing that young guy a few!" went on Mr. Pike. "I'll say he's led me some dance! Up and down this here island till I figured we'd be falling off! I spotted him and lost him ag'in, and spotted him ag'in and lost him, moro'n a few. Last night, I'll tell you, I lost him hereabouts. I guess he throwed down the car and took to the railroad. You get me?"

"We haven't seen him——"

"I sorted it out," went on Mr. Pike, unheeding, "that he put up for the night at a shobang down the line, and took a train in the morning. I got that froze! I been rubbering along that railroad till I got it from some guys that he was seen getting out at a little burg called Wimford. I'll mention I can see what's as plain as the dirt on a dago. You get me? That lad's moseyed along this-a-way to join up with the bunch he knowed on the steamer. You know where he is. Spill it!"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"I've told you it's Van Duck's bisney, not mine, Mr. Pike," he answered. "If I knew where he was I should not tell you; but I don't know."

"Guess again!" suggested Mr. Pike.

"If you don't believe me, you ass——"

"I've been told a lot of things since I was a small child," said Mr. Pike.

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"Mebbe I've believed some of 'em, not a whole lot."

Clearly Mr. Pike's training as a gunman had diminished his faith in the human species. He resembled Mr. Chew in that respect—as in many others. He happened at the moment to be on the right side of the law, and Mr. Chew on the other side; but in other points there really was not a lot to choose between them.

"Well, let it go at that," said Harry good-humoredly. "I know something about Van Duck's intentions, but I'm not going to tell you any more than I told Chick Chew yesterday. But I haven't seen him, and don't know where he is."

"You seen Chick?" Mr. Pike was instantly alert.

"He called at my uncle's house with a gun to ask about Van Duck," said Harry, laughing.

"Search me!" ejaculated Mr. Pike. "You telling me Chick got him?"

"No; he wasn't there. And Chick couldn't have got him, anyway. Chick was glad enough to get himself away, as it turned out."

"You're telling me!"

"The truth, Mr. Pike," said Harry, laughing again. "People do sometimes tell the truth, though it may seem rather hard to you to get that down."

"I ain't met a heap of them guys," said Mr. Pike simply. "And I'll say you ain't stringing me along so easy as you figure. Where's young Putnam?"

"Not knowing, can't say." Mr. Pike's hand slid into a pocket, which was sagging under a rather heavy weight but he withdrew it. His natural impulse to "pull a gun" had to be restrained in a land that was so hopelessly unlike his native land.

"I guess," said Mr. Pike, "that if we was in Chicago this minute I'd fan you a few for spilling them fables. But we ain't."

"Just as well to keep that in mind," said Harry dryly.

"But," went on Mr. Pike, "you got to put me wise to young Putnam. You got to spill it or else I'm going to take you by the neck and twist you a whole lot. Surest thing, you know."

And Mr. Pike, proceeding from words to actions, made a sudden movement and grasped both the juniors at once in his wiry hands.

His next proceeding would have been to "twist them a few," as he expressed it; but that intended proceeding was stalled off by the prompt proceedings of the two Greyfriars fellows.

Harry Wharton's fist came out like a bullet, landing on the jutting point of Mr. Pike's prominent jaw, and the gunman gave a startled yelp and staggered.

Before he could recover from the jolt the two juniors collared him and rushed him over.

There was a ditch beside the road, fairly well filled by the spring rains. Mr. Pike went backwards into that ditch.

There was a terrific splash as he landed on his back in two feet of water over a foot of mud.

He disappeared entirely from sight, save for his feet, which stuck up out of the ditch, wriggling wildly.

In a split second, however, he emerged, struggling upright. His bowler hat, still firmly clamped on his bullet head, streamed with mud. His hickory face was masked with mud. His eyes and nose and ears were full of it. He gasped for breath and spluttered mud.

"Gooooooogh!" gurgled the gunman. He started scrambling frantically out

of the ditch. Leaving him to it, Harry Wharton and the nabob walked on towards Wharton Lodge. Behind them there was a continuous sound of gurgling, gasping and grunting. Mr. Pike was busy with the clinging mud for quite a long time.

Looking back, a little later, the two juniors saw a muddy figure, in a muddy bowler hat, trailing along the road at a distance behind them.

They half expected Mr. Pike to follow on, for vengeance; but he did not seem to be thinking of that. And perhaps he had given up the idea of getting information by "twisting." Evidently he was shadowing them to their destination, with the idea in his mind that they would be leading him to Putnam van Duck.

The two juniors exchanged a grinning glance.

"Cut!" whispered Harry. And the nabob nodded.

They ran to a roadside stile, and vaulted over. Immediately there was a sound of running feet on the road.

Cutting across a corner of the field, they hunted cover in a bunch of drooping willows.

Peering out of the willows, they had a view of a muddy face and a muddy hat over a stile. They suppressed their chuckles as they watched.

Poker Pike seemed at a loss as he scanned the field for unseen schoolboys. Finally, he seemed to make up his mind that they had run along the footpath to the next field; for he clambered over the stile, and hurried along that footpath.

When he disappeared into the next field, the two juniors emerged from their cover, and slipped back into the road. There, with smiling faces, they resumed their walk back to Wharton Lodge—leaving the persistent Mr. Pike to search field after field for them—in vain!

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Watcher in the Wood!

"VAN DUCK!"

"The esteemed 'Transatlantic Van Duck!'"

It was a surprise for Harry Wharton and his dusky chum when they came in to lunch. Billy Dunter was not there! Putnam van Duck was!

The American grinned at them cheerfully as they shook hands.

"Guess I blew in!" he remarked. "You sort of remember asking me to give your show the once-over when we were on that steamer?"

"Quite!" said Harry. "And we're jolly glad to see you!"

"The gladfulness is terrific!" declared the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"My!" said Van Duck. "I guess I must be a sight for sore eyes, at that rate. I allow I had a long trip getting here. There was a guy wanted to tread on my tail, but I guess I dropped him along the railroad."

"We've seen Pike!" said Harry. "He doesn't know you're here—but he's not far away; looking for you."

"He sure is some sticker!" agreed Van Duck. "I guess I ain't taking any little walks out, while he's rubbering around. I'm telling you, I'm fed-up to the back teeth with that hombre, and then some. He's a good man, and I like him; but a little of him goes a long way."

"Well, I don't see how he can nose you out here," said Harry. "He's guessed that you came this way to see some of us; but he doesn't know my name, as far as I know; or my address.

either. He can't barge into every country house in Surrey looking for you."

"I wouldn't put it past him!" said Van Duck. "He sure is a sticker, and he's got pop's orders; and I'm telling you when pop says jump, a guy jumps, and jumps hard and quick."

"You're all right here," said Harry, laughing. "But I'm not so sure about Chick Chew. Have you heard?"

"Yep; Fat Jack spilled it to me. And if you'd rather unload the trouble right now, shoot, and it's me for the railroad, pronto."

"Rot!" said Harry. "You're stay-

ing. The local police are looking for Mr. Chew, if he turns up in this quarter again. He's gone."

Putnam chuckled.

"I guess your local police wouldn't worry Chick a whole lot," he said. "But Chick don't worry me so much as Poker."

(Continued on next page.)



COME INTO the OFFICE, BOYS - AND GIRLS!

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

DO I know of anything that travels quicker than light?—is a question that has been put before me on more than one occasion. At the moment of writing this chat I feel almost tempted to say: "Yes—news."

Only last week I made mention of the fact that, owing to numerous requests from readers, I was considering telling again the story of the early adventures of Harry Wharton & Co. Since then, I have been "snowed under" with letters on this subject. And to crown it all I actually received a "wire" yesterday, worded as follows: "Anxiously waiting to read about Wharton's early school-days." Can I possibly, in the face of all this, do anything else but grant such a request? As your Editor and friend for the past twenty-eight years my sole aim has been to please you fellows, and in retelling this epic story, I feel sure that I will be doing many thousands of my supporters a really good turn.

Here, then, is the Great News! I have arranged for this wonderful story to appear in our popular companion paper—"The Gem Library," commencing with next week's issue. So look out for:

"THE MAKING OF HARRY WHARTON!"

By Frank Richards,

in next week's "Gem." Not one of my MAGNET readers should miss this rare treat, and I am telling you about it in plenty of time to enable you to give a definite order to your newsagent to reserve a copy of next week's "Gem" for you. There will be a mighty rush for this issue—out on Wednesday, April 22nd—and you simply must not miss it! So pass the good news round, chums. "The Making of Harry Wharton!" starts in next week's "Gem"!

Of course, the MAGNET will "carry on as usual" with bang-up-to-the-minute long complete school stories of Harry Wharton & Co. such as the ones Frank Richards is now giving us.

IF Billy Bunter ever gets into trouble with the police, chums, he can get a bit of comfort by reflecting on a case which has just happened in America. In this particular instance, a man was

TOO FAT TO GO TO GAOL!

He was sentenced for passing bogus cheques in Chicago. When he was taken to the gaol they couldn't get him in!

Weighing 26 stone, the man was so fat that he couldn't pass through the doors. In consequence of this they had to get a special room near the prison for him. To crown it all the prison officials found that he was too large to fit any of the prison beds, and an extra-large size bed had to be made for him. I should think he'd prove a rather awkward prisoner for the authorities—just as Billy Bunter would, if he was unfortunate enough to find himself in the same position!

As I have pointed out on several occasions, some very curious things happen in this queer old world of ours. Here is a mystery which has just come to light in London. Can you imagine a man who has been

ON GUARD FOR 800 YEARS?

Takes a bit of believing—especially as he is a dead man! At a City church in Garlick-hill, the embalmed body of a man has stood to attention in a glass case just inside the door for approximately that period. Nor has he become a skeleton. There is still flesh on the body and hair on the head and eyelashes. A ghost of a smile is on the face. Who the man was no one knows, but it is claimed that he was a very important man of the twelfth century. Nowadays he is called "Jimmy Garlick." He was originally buried beneath the high altar of the church, which was subsequently destroyed by fire. One theory is that when the church was burned, chemically impregnated water was used to put out the fire, and this chemical water poured into the vault where "Jimmy" was buried, and thus embalmed him. But the actual truth will probably never be discovered, and in the meantime "Jimmy Garlick" still keeps his long vigil!

HERE is a selection of THINGS YOU'D HARDLY BELIEVE

all of which have happened in the past few weeks:

Crimson Snow and Blood-red Rain fell a little while ago near Darbhange, in the Bihar and Orissa province of India. Several acres of land were covered, to the consternation of the natives, who fear it foretells some great calamity.

Yellow and Red Snow also fell in Switzerland, at Davos, Klosters, and in the Canton of Ticino. A microscopic analysis showed the presence of sand in the snow, and it is presumed that this sand was blown in huge quantities from the Sahara—one thousand miles away!

A Man Killed by a Trout. While fishing in the river Mur, in Austria, a retired Government official hooked a 7 lb. trout—a record for the river. It was too much of a shock for the official, and he fell dead. When he was discovered, the trout was still struggling on his line!

The Man who Walked 276,000 Miles! Philip Lewis, an Australian, has just completed this record walk. He has been wandering around Australia, preaching. In doing so, he has worn out 200 pairs of boots!

The Crazy Clock of Prague. Workmen in a Prague firm have sued their employers because they allege that the hands of the firm's clock always slip back a half-an-hour at six o'clock. They are demanding overtime for all the extra half-hours which they have been forced to work because of the crazy clock!

Now for a reply to a query from Tom Harvey, of Whitstable, who asks me about

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS' DESCENDANT.

There is only one male direct descendant of Christopher Columbus, who discovered America. He is fifty-seven years of age now, and bears the same name as his illustrious ancestor. He lives in a spacious old palace in Madrid, Spain. But the curious thing is that he is not at all interested in travel. He prefers to breed cattle and horses. Also he has only once visited America. That was in 1893, when he was a boy of fifteen. He was taken then to the Chicago World Fair, and spent three months touring the United States. But he says he has no desire to return there.

NOW we come to the all-important business of next week's programme. Another bumper two-pennyworth? I'll say it is! And you'll fully agree with me when you read:

"GUN PLAY AT GREYFRIARS!"

By Frank Richards,

the second story in our grand new series featuring Putnam van Duck and his gunman guardian, Poker Pike. Wise as he is to the ways of gangsters, Poker Pike is far from wise to the playful ways of schoolboys like Harry Wharton & Co., of Greyfriars, who take a real delight in leading him up the garden! Fun as well as thrills you'll find in plenty in this first-rate yarn.

You'll enjoy, too, Geo. E. Rochester's closing chapters of "The Lost Squadron!" Particulars of the next great serial to follow I propose leaving over until next week. Rest assured, chums, it will be another winner!

Of course, our programme would not be complete without another "Greyfriars Herald" supplement, neither must we leave out our Greyfriars Rhymester who "sums up" in snappy verse Tom Redwing, of the Remove and a son of the sea. Ask your newsagent to reserve you a copy of next Saturday's MAGNET without fail.

YOUR EDITOR.

THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,471.

I surely did get peeved with that guy and his gun."

"I'm not surprised at that," agreed Harry. "But surely, Van Duck, you'd be safer with Mr. Pike at hand, if Chew—"

"Forget it!" answered Van Duck. "Don't I keep on telling you I'm fed-up with that hombre? Chick ain't got me yet—and when he blows along it will be time to sit up and howl. Besides, I got to get shut of Pike, when I go to school—"

"School?" repeated Harry.

"Sure—Greyfriars!"

"You're going to Greyfriars?" exclaimed the captain of the Remove.

"Pop's sure fixing it up with your big chief there—and when you go back, this baby goes in the same packet. And I guess I don't want Poker and his gun fooling around at Greyfriars! You figure that they'd fit into the picture?"

"Oh, my hat! Hardly!" gasped Wharton.

The idea of Poker Pike and his inseparable automatic at Greyfriars School, rather took his breath away. Quite certainly Mr. Pike did not seem to fit into the Greyfriars picture!

"Pike's got to learn where he gets off!" said Van Duck. "If I can't keep clear of Chick on my own, I'll tell Pike—but not till then! That guy has got on my whole nervous system."

It was a very cheery party at lunch—not the less so, perhaps, because William George Bunter was conspicuous by his absence.

Van Duck was in great spirits; clearly in a state of exuberant satisfaction at having, at long last, dropped the watchful Mr. Pike. To Chick Chew, he seemed to give hardly a thought. No doubt he placed full reliance upon his ability to take care of himself.

Colonel Wharton seemed to have taken a liking to the brisk, cheery American; and Aunt Amy seemed quite pleased with him. Wharton and Hurree Singh were glad to see him again; and nobody doubted that he would be quite safe at Wharton Lodge. The colonel, in fact, was expecting to hear on the telephone any minute that the gangster had been taken into custody. That expected telephone call did not, however, materialise.

After lunch, the two juniors took their visitor for a walk; but Putnam declined to go outside the precincts of

the estate. He was not thinking of Chick Chew—but of the persistent Poker!

They had a long ramble in the park; Putnam asking innumerable questions about the school he was going to join for the next term. When they were coming back towards the house in the golden sunset, the American boy stopped suddenly with knitted brows.

"I guess we're being piped!" he grunted.

"Piped!" repeated Wharton.

"I mean, there's a guy keeping tabs on us."

"I don't see—" Harry glanced round in surprise. He could see nobody.

"The seefulness is not terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

Putnam pointed to a big elm-tree farther along the path they were following through the park.

It stood black against the sunset, its shadow falling far. Beside the shadow of the trunk was another shadow—projected by an unseen figure of someone standing under the tree, concealed from the juniors by the trunk.

"Oh!" ejaculated Wharton. "Who the dickens—"

"Poker!" snorted Van Duck. "Who else?"

"Or Chick!" suggested Harry. "It's somebody, anyhow, keeping out of sight—and the silly ass hasn't noticed that his shadow's falling across the path."

They stood looking at the shadow on the path ahead. It stirred as they looked at it. They could guess that the unseen watcher had heard their voices, and knew that they had stopped.

"It's sure Pike—waiting for me to pass to grab me!" muttered Van Duck. "There ain't no stalling off that guy Pike, I'll tell a man."

The shadow stirred again.

From its motions it looked as if the unseen watcher was coming closer to the elm trunk, to peer round it at them.

Whoever he was, it was clear that he had spotted them in the park and ensconced himself in cover there to waylay them as they came along.

A hat appeared from beyond the trunk.

It was not the black bowler hat worn by Mr. Pike! It was not the soft slouched hat of Chick Chew. It was a straw hat! And the band on it was

familiar to the eyes of the juniors; it was the Greyfriars colours.

The mystery was elucidated the next moment. Following the hat came a fat head and a fat face; and a pair of large spectacles glimmered into view.

"Oh!" gasped Wharton. "Bunter!"

"The ludicrous Bunter!" ejaculated Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Fat Jack!" exclaimed Van Duck. "And me figuring it was Poker!" He chuckled.

Billy Bunter blinked at them inquiringly. Then he came rolling round the tree.

"I say, you fellows—" he squeaked.

"You howling ass!" roared Wharton. "What are you playing at hide-and-seek for, you blithering bandersnatch?"

"How was I to know the old beast wasn't with you?" demanded Bunter.

"The who?"

"I mean the old hunk! I've been looking for you a long time, and when I heard you coming I thought he might be with you—"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Van Duck. Evidently it was dread that Colonel Wharton might have been with the party that had caused the fat Owl of Greyfriars to adopt such cautious and strategic tactics.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" grunted Bunter. "Nice way to treat a fellow, hanging about all day to see you, Wharton! If that's the way you treat a guest—"

"You fat ass!" exclaimed Harry. "I thought you'd taken your train long ago. Buzz off and take it!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"The buzzfulness is the proper caper, my esteemed idiotic Bunter!" chuckled the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"What are you up to, anyhow?" demanded Harry.

"Well, look here, old chap!" gasped Bunter. "I want you to explain to the old fossil! You see, he heard me calling him an old ass, and got into a temper, though I explained that I was speaking about another old ass, and not him at all! I suppose you can set it right with the old josser, old chap?"

"If you mean my uncle—"

"Yes, old chap; the old fathead was fearfully shirty, but if you put it to him, you know—"

"You'd better do that yourself," said Harry. "I won't kick you, as I'm not seeing you again till next term—"

"Beast!"

"Is that the colonel coming?" asked Van Duck, glancing along the path.

"Oh crikey!"

That was enough for Billy Bunter. He bolted! There was a crash in the under-woods as the fat Owl departed. He did not wait to see that it was not the colonel coming!

Chuckling, the three walked on, seeing no more of Billy Bunter! Whether he had, at long last, gone for his train, or whether he was haunting Wharton Lodge like a fat ghost, nobody knew.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Kidnapped!

HARRY WHARTON stirred in his sleep, moved uneasily, and half-opened his eyes. It was a late hour, and he had been sleeping soundly. But it seemed to him, vaguely, that a light had glimmered on his face as he slept.

But when he opened his eyes and glanced round drowsily, all was dark, save for the glimmer of starlight at the window.



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With a grip on Van Duck's arm that was like a steel vice Chick Chew led his prisoner on. With hardly a sound they negotiated the passages and stairs, Chick every now and then turning on a glimmer of his flash-lamp!

He dismissed the fancy from his mind, turned his head on the pillow, and went to sleep again. In less than a minute he was as deep in slumber as before.

But it was not, if he had only known it, a fancy! In the dark shadow by the bed's head a shadowy figure stood—not stirring, till the schoolboy's regular breathing told that he was sound asleep.

Then Mr. Chick Chew, with an amazingly light step, considering his bulk, moved noiselessly to the door and passed with equal noiselessness into the passage outside, closing the door after him without a sound.

"I guess," Mr. Chew murmured to himself, "that I ain't buying that one."

Silently he moved to the next door and entered another bed-room.

Again the tiny beam of a small electric flash-lamp glimmered on the face of a sleeper. This time it was the face of Putnam van Duck.

Mr. Chew's beady eyes glimmered from rolls of fat. He had found what he wanted. He was buying this one, as he would have expressed it.

Putnam van Duck was fast asleep. But he came out of slumber, with a start and a jump, to find a cloth over his mouth, pressed there by a firm, heavy, podgy hand. A low voice whispered:

"Pack it up, big boy! You want a tap on the cabeza that will put you to sleep till sun-up, you only got to wriggle a fow."

Putnam packed it up! He was quick on the uptake, and he did not need telling in whose hands he was. He could see nothing but a bulky shadow looming over him, but he knew that it was Chick Chew.

He did not wriggle. The cloth over his mouth prevented a cry, but he would not have uttered one. He knew, better than the Greyfriars fellows, the ways of Chicago gangsters. He was well aware that Mr. Chew had a length of lead pipe ready, and that a single "tap" would stun him if he gave trouble—and that at the first hint of trouble that tap would be ruthlessly administered. A cracked head would not help him.

The gangster waited a few moments. Van Duck made no sound, and no movement, only watching the looming shadow with fascinated eyes. The gangster's voice came again, in the faintest of whispers.

"I guess you're wise to me, Putnam! Don't you imbibe any notion you're going to be hurt, if you behave like a good little man! I'll say you're too precious to be damaged. Old Man Vanderdecken, to home, is going to squeeze out a cool half-million dollars for you. But keep it parked, Putnam—keep it parked! I'd hate to crack your nut but if you give so much as a grasshopper's whisper, crack it goes, pronto!" Putnam lay still.

The cloth was removed from his mouth. It had been placed there to stifle any involuntary cry when he woke. He was wide awake now, and he knew that the lead piping was ready.

"You get me?" came the gangster's murmur. "Don't squeal, big boy! For the sake of that good-lookin' cabeza of yours, don't!"

"I ain't squealing a lot, Chick," answered Putnam, in as low a whisper as the gangster's. "I guess I'd be glad to be squinting at you over a gun, though, old-timer."

Chick chuckled softly. "You're a spry lad!" he said. "I'll say you know where you get off—which is more'n your popper does, or he wouldn't have figured that he could beat Chick Chew. First time I'm beat at this game, bo, I throw it down and buy me a candy store! I ain't been beat yet."

"How'd you get here?" "They make winders to houses, kid!" said Mr. Chew, "and I'll tell you I've given a bunch of guys the once-over before I arrove at you. Lucky for them they never woke. If they had they'd have gone to sleep again in some burry. You get out and clamp on your rags!"

Putnam van Duck breathed hard and deep.

"I guess," he said, "that when you get me, Chick, you're roping in the world's prize boob. You sure are cinch-

ing the goob from Goobsville! Figure that if I hadn't throwed down Poker he would be on hand this identical minute, filling you up with lead, and you running to tallow all over the floor."

"I sure can do some shooting myself," grinned Chick Chew. "But I'll allow I'm pleased that guy ain't on hand with his gun. You getting ready to take a little pascar with me, Putnam?"

Putnam shrugged his shoulders. "You said it!" he answered laconically.

He was perfectly cool. And he was as watchful as a cat for a chance, as he turned out of bed. But Chick Chew gave him no chance.

The bulky shadow hovered over the millionaire's son as he dressed. The short length of lead piping was ready, and any attempt at resistance, or to give the alarm, would only have meant that Mr. Chew would have had the trouble of carrying off a stunned prisoner, instead of walking him off on his feet. Putnam knew when there was a chance and when there was not, and he was like a lamb—though watchful as a cat!

He was angrier with himself than with the kidnapper. True, he had been fed up to the back teeth with Poker and his gun. But it was borne in very clearly on his mind now that Poker and his gun were exactly what he needed, if not what he wanted! He would have given a handsome slice of the Van Duck millions for a glimpse of the hickory face under the clamped-down bowler, at that moment.

But he had got rid of Poker Pike—too well! There was no help, and he was in the kidnapper's hands.

When he was dressed, Chick's fat hands groped over him and bound his arms down to his sides. Then the gangster inserted a gag into his mouth and tied it there.

"Only jest till you get clear, big boy!" the gangster whispered, almost apologetically. "I'd sure hate to tap you."

With a grip on the boy's arm that was like a steel vice Chick Chew led him to

the door. Putnam did not need to be warned to walk softly; he knew that the alternative was to be knocked senseless and carried.

With hardly a sound they negotiated the passages and the stairs, Chick every now and then turning on a glimmer of his flash-lamp, his grip on Putnam's arm never relaxing for a second.

A cool breath of the spring night air came in at the open window on the ground floor. That was the way the gangster had entered, and it was the way both of them were to leave.

Chick lifted the boy from the window and followed him out. All was silent in the shrubberies glimmering under the April stars. Not a sound came from the house. The gangster had come and gone without alarm.

"This way, bo!" murmured Mr. Chew. He led the millionaire's son away in the shadows. Five minutes later they stopped at a paling bordering the road.

Chick gave a low, cautious whistle. It was answered from outside the fence. Putnam realised that the gangster had a confederate waiting there.

Chick swung him over the paling, and he was received in other hands on the other side. The fat gangster followed, grunting for breath as he landed in the road. Putnam's eyes caught a glimmer of horn-rimmed spectacles.

"You sure cinched him, Chick!" whispered Bud Parker.

"I should smile!" answered Mr. Chew.

He stood for a long minute looking up and down the lonely, shadowy road, and listening. All was silent and still.

"I'm telling you, Bud," said Mr. Chew, "that this here game is pie, on this side. I'll say I'd never have pulled it off so easy on the other side."

"You said it!" agreed Bud.

"Jest pie!" said Mr. Chew with satisfaction. "And clam pie, at that, Bud! I guess we might have had the car here, with the engine running, and nobody'd took no notice!"

Bud grinned.

"You stick along here a few, Bud, and I'll soon have the car along," went on Mr. Chew. "You'll be ready to hop in soon's I get the auto."

"Sure!" said Bud.

The fat gangster disappeared down the road. Evidently the kidnappers had a car concealed at a little distance in some retired spot.

While Chick was gone to fetch it Bud Parker remained with Putnam in the shadow of the park fence, his grip on the kidnapped boy's arm.

And Putnam van Duck, unable to speak aloud, told himself silently that he was the world's prize boob and the goob from Goobsville for having shaken off the faithful, too-faithful Poker Pike. But, as it happened, the faithful Poker was not far away.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Poker Pike Pulls Trigger!

"Oh lor'!" groaned Billy Bunter. He groaned not once, but many times.

Bunter's luck was out. His spirits were down to zero.

The hour was late.

It was a lovely April night, stars glimmering in the blue vault of the sky, a silver edge of moon peering from fleecy clouds; but the beauty of the night was completely lost on the fat and forlorn Owl of Greyfriars.

Bunter like the Irish Emigrant in the song, was sitting on a stile. It was, in point of fact, the same stile over which Wharton and Haree Singh had vaulted that day in giving the slip to

Poker Pike. Bunter did not know that, and would not have been interested had he known; Bunter's fat thoughts were concentrated on his own woes.

And his woes were very woeful.

To a very late hour he had haunted Wharton Lodge, like a fat ghost revisiting the glimpses of the moon. Not till the last light in the last window had gone out had Bunter given up his vigil; then, at long last, had the fat Owl trailed sorrowfully away.

That unspeakable beast Harry Wharton might have placated that other still more unspeakable beast Colonel Wharton had Bunter got a word with him—but Bunter hadn't.

It took Bunter a good hour to cover a mile along the lonely, starlit road, then he spotted the stile and sat on it.

He had now been sitting on that stile a long time.

He was tired; he was lugubrious; and he knew that the last train would be gone at Wimford. All that was left for Bunter was to trail wearily into Wimford and knock up the inn.

Meanwhile, he rested his fat limbs and groaned.

Bunter had often taken chances—long chances—in making his arrangements for the school vacations. On this occasion chance would have favoured him but for the unfortunate circumstance of Colonel Wharton coming along while he was talking to Van Duck. Chance had let him down—with a bump! It had let him down more than once, but never so severely as now. He sat on the stile more sadly and sorrowfully than the Irish Emigrant and groaned.

"Oh lor'!" said Bunter, for the umpteenth time.

"Say, buddy, you sime do squeal a lot!" said a voice over his fat shoulder; and the Owl of Greyfriars nearly tumbled off the stile in his surprise.

"Oooh!" he squeaked.

He blinked round at a hickory face under a rather grubby bowler hat. Mr. Pike looked at him with his usual grin seriousness.

"I reckoned it was you, buddy," he said. "I'll say you're too wide to be forgotten. I'll tell a man I'm glad to meet up with you!"

Billy Bunter eyed him morosely. He was not glad to meet up with Mr. Pike. He did not care two straws about Mr. Pike.

"You silly ass!" he said. "You made me jump, barking in a fellow's ear like that!"

"I guess I'll make you jump a few more if you don't put me wise!" said Mr. Pike gravely. "Don't you figure on beating it; I'm mentioning that I want you. You get me?"

He put a leg over the stile and sat beside Bunter.

The fat junior blinked at him uneasily. There was a cold and quiet hostility in Mr. Pike's manner that made him apprehensive. Still, he was not thinking of "beating" it. He would not have been of much use in a foot race with the wiry gunman if he had been disposed to run—which he wasn't!

"Yesterday," went on Mr. Pike, "you was in that auto with young Van Duck. You was one of the bunch he was heading for. I got you card-indexed, the whole bunch of you. You was one of the crows on the steamer, I guess. Yep. You was with him in the auto, though I reckon he dropped you way back. I'm asking you to whisper where that young gink is. You get me?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

"I hit two of the bunch, and they tipped me into a ditch," remarked Mr. Pike. "I figured on piping them home,

and they put up a getaway that left me beat. I sure did lose them, like I was a rural rube losing a roll on Broadway! Surest thing you know. I been rubbering around ever since, and I'll say there ain't much of this location I ain't rubbered over, looking round for some of that bunch of guys. I found you. Surest thing you know! You're one of the bunch. You're telling me! You don't want me to get busy and twist that fat head off'n your shoulders? Nope?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "No!"

"Surest thing you know!" agreed Mr. Pike. "But that's jest what I'm going to do next if you don't spill the beans. Get me?" His icy slits of eyes glinted at the fat Owl. "Whore's young Van Duck? Don't tell me you don't know, like them other guys; that ain't the stuff I want. Shoot!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I don't mind telling you. Serve the cheeky beast right! He's at Wharton Lodge."

"Where'll that be?"

"It's Wharton's place—about a mile from here, down the road." Bunter pointed with a fat finger. "They're all gone to bed hours ago."

"I guess that cuts no ice." The gunman slipped from the stile. "Get a move on, big boy."

Bunter stared at him.

"I'm not going there," he said. "The old fossil's too jolly shirty, unless Wharton—"

"Pack it up!" said Mr. Pike. "Maybe you've told me the truth, and maybe you ain't. I ain't one of them trusting guys you read about in books. You're going to lead me to that shebang, like I was a small boy and you was my loving nurse, by the hand. Surest thing you know! And I ain't parting with you none till I got Putnam under these here eyes what are looking at you, bo! Hump it!"

"But, I say— Whoop!" roared Bunter, as Mr. Pike, grabbing him by a fat arm, hooked him off the stile.

Bunter landed in a heap.

"Ow! Wow!" he roared.

"Want some more?" asked Mr. Pike.

"Ow! No! Wow!"

Bunter scrambled to his feet.

He did not want to walk a mile back to Wharton Lodge; he had no hope whatever of being regarded in a favourable light at that establishment if he presented himself with a gunman who knocked up the house in the middle of the night.

But it was not a matter of choice. It was not what Bunter wanted, but what Poker Pike wanted that mattered.

Grunting, the fat Owl of the Remove rolled along by the side of the wiry gunman.

Possibly Mr. Pike was puzzled at finding the fat schoolboy out of doors at that late hour of the night on his lonely own, but that did not interest him; what interested him was that he had at last found a guide to Putnam van Duck—and he did not mean to lose that guide till he had cinched the millionaire's elusive son.

Bunter grunted and groaned as he rolled wearily along. That mile back to Wharton Lodge seemed to him unending.

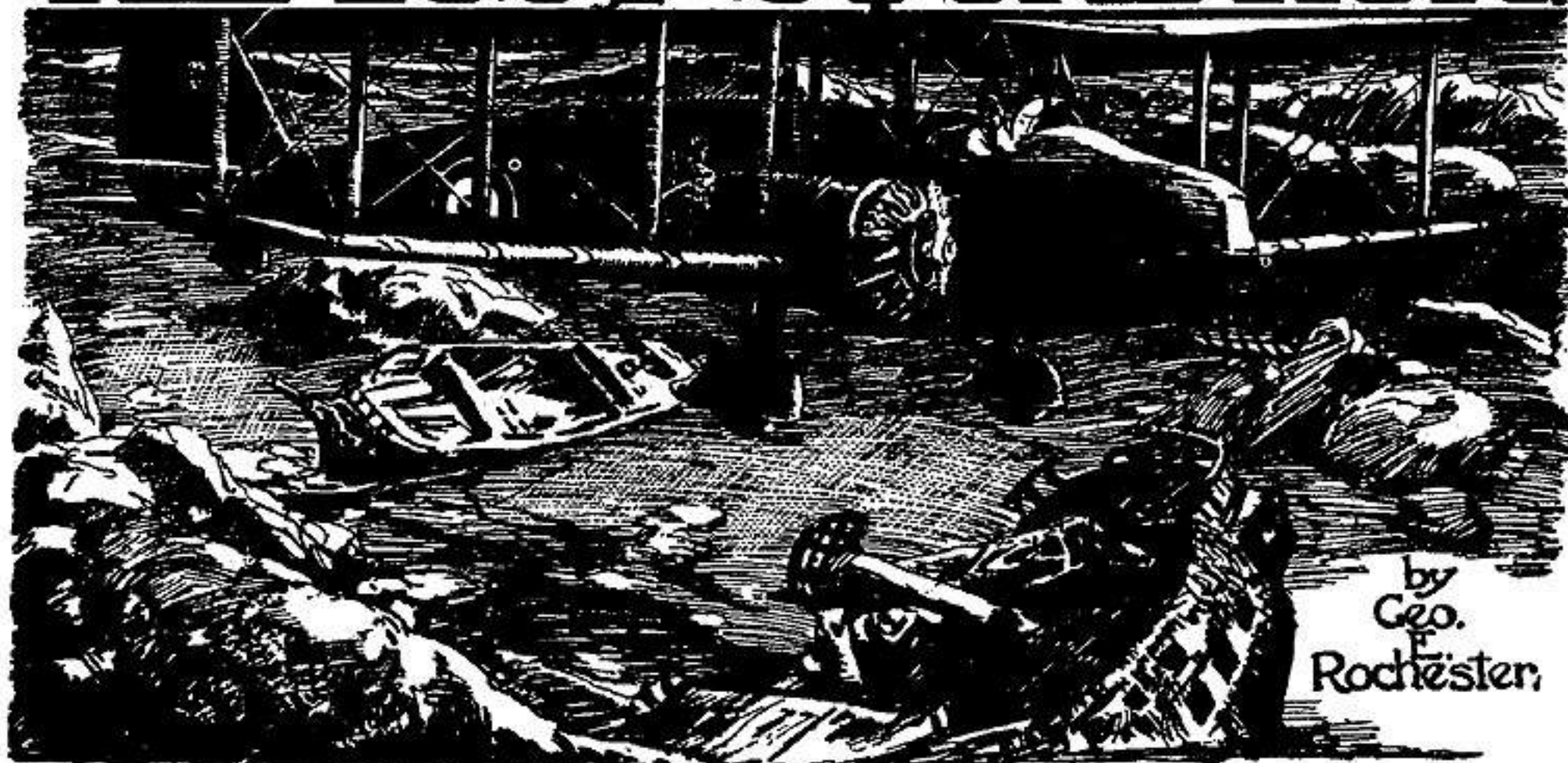
"That's the place!" he gasped at last, as they came along by a tall park fence. "Keep on and you'll get to the gates—"

"I guess you're keeping on, too!" said Mr. Pike; and Bunter groaned and kept on.

He was too tired to run, even if he could have dodged—and he had no chance of dodging the gunman's keen, watchful eyes.

(Continued on page 26.)

THE LOST SQUADRON!



In the Middle Watch!

SQUADRON-LEADER AKERS and Flight-Lieutenant Ferris are cast away on a desert stretch of land which has risen out of the depths as the result of a huge tidal wave.

After a series of thrilling adventures they meet more survivors, among whom are Coles, Huck, and a negro named Jim Crow, who have made a rich haul looting stranded derelicts.

At long last, ships come to the rescue of the castaways. Anxious to get clear with their booty, Coles & Co., together with the aid of Larsen, Crawley, and Baines, seize the tugboat Rosa, overpower the three scamen aboard, and make for the open sea. Running short of coal, they anchor to replenish their stock from one of the wrecks. During the first watch Crawley and Baines plan to double-cross the rest of the party and skip with the booty.

When Jim roused Coles and Huck in the middle watch to take over guard, he had something to tell them.

"Dem two guys, Baines and Crawley," he said, "have bin in de fo'c'sle more'n an hour to-night wid de three scamen. I can't see dat it means anyting, but it might, so jest keep yore eyes skinned!"

Coles and Huck promised they would, and leaving Jim to turn in, they ascended to the bridge where they lounged against the forward rail, smoking and talking in low, rumbling tones.

From an idle and fruitless discussion as to what Baines and Crawley could have wanted in the fo'c'sle, they passed on to a review of their own chances of getting away with the booty which they and Jim had collected.

"I reck'n us'll do it," said Coles confidently. "Jim ain't no fool, an' if us kin only git this coaling over without bein' spotted, then we'll make America."

"We got a mighty tough break, picking like we did on a ship with empty bunkers," complained Huck.

"We suttinly did," agreed Coles. "But there was no other ship to pick on. We might have knowed, though, that the bunkers of a craft like this was bound to be low—"

He broke off suddenly, peering through the darkness in the direction of the fo'c'sle.

"What'n heck's that noise?" he demanded, as to their ears came a low, long-drawn moan.

"Guy snoring," volunteered Huck.

"That ain't a snore," returned Coles.

"Listen!"

Tense and rigid, they listened with straining ears, and again from the fo'c'sle came a low groan.

"There's somethin' happened in there," said Coles decisively. "That guy sounds as though he's hurt bad. Come on, we'd better investigate!"

Drawing his automatic from his pocket, and with finger crooked in readiness round the trigger, Coles descended the bridge ladder, and followed by Huck, moved forward in the direction of the unlighted fo'c'sle.

As they neared it, they heard the groan again, and even the stolid and unimaginative Huck could no longer mistake it for snoring. It was the groan of a man in mortal pain.

"What's happened in hyar?" demanded Coles roughly, coming to a halt in the inky blackness of the fo'c'sle doorway.

No one answered, nothing stirred. Taking a step forward, Coles began to fumble for his matches in the pocket of his reefer jacket. Then suddenly he tensed, conscious of a presence near him in the darkness. He heard a soft step beside him, a sharp intake of breath, then before he could either cry out a warning to Huck or leap aside, something descended with crushing force on his skull and he sagged forward at the knees to pitch a limp and unconscious heap to the floor.

Simultaneously there came a muttered word, a rush of feet, and Huck was borne back against the bunks, rough hands and pressing bodies muffling his cry of surprise and alarm.

Beneath sheer weight of numbers he went to the floor. A match flared, giving him a momentary vision of distorted faces, then a boot crashed savagely against the side of his head and he passed into black oblivion.

"Got 'em!" said the shaking voice of Baines. "Light that cursed lamp, somebody!"

Again a match flared into life, and the fo'c'sle lamp was lighted, its sickly illumination disclosing Baines, Crawley, the three tugboat hands, and the huddled and prostrate forms of Coles and Huck.

"Get 'em tied up before they come round," ordered Crawley, straightening up from beside Coles, whose gun he had retrieved and slipped into his own pocket. "Sweet, wasn't it, the way the pair of 'em walked into the trap?"

"You've said it!" grunted one of the three seamen, as he helped his two companions to securely truss Coles and Huck.

"And now for the nigger," said Baines nervously, when Coles and Huck, bound hand and foot, had been unceremoniously flung on to separate bunks. "I only hope the brute's asleep."

"If he isn't, there's one or two of us going to get hurt," said Crawley grimly. "Come on, and move as quietly as you can!"

Picking up a belaying-pin, he led the way softly from the fo'c'sle.

Reaching the companion ladder, the five stealthily descended in single file, Baines bringing up the rear.

The door of Jim's cabin was ajar, and from inside there issued the sound of full-bodied and hearty snoring.

"Sleeping innercent as a child," whispered Crawley, with a grin. "Now, listen! This cabin's fitted with electric light like the others, and the moment I switch on we'll rush him. Don't give him a chance. Let him have it as hard as you can paste it into him. Are you ready?"

His companions assured him in hoarse whispers that they were, and, stealthily pushing open the cabin door, the bare-footed Crawley stepped across the threshold.

Holding his breath, and with the utmost caution, he groped for the electric light switch. As his fingers touched it and closed on it he took a fresh grip on his belaying-pin.

Next instant the cabin was flooded with brilliant illumination. With a shout, Crawley leapt towards the bunk on which Jim was sleeping.

The shout awoke Jim, but before he could move, before he could stir, the

belaying-pin had descended with crushing force on his skull.

With a moan, the negro relaxed and went limp.

Jubilantly Crawley swung on his companions.

"Got him!" he cried. "That's the three of 'em. Get him 'ud up!"

Swiftly the three seamen set to work, lashing Jim's arms behind his back and binding his legs and ankles.

"And now," said Crawley, when the job had been completed to their satisfaction, "the three of you had better get along to the stokehole and see about getting steam up. There's enough coal in the bunkers to get us back to Camelot."

"Wait a minute," growled one of the men. "What about the loot? It's in this cabin, isn't it?"

"Yes, there it is," said Crawley, indicating the two bulging sacks at the foot of Jim's bunk.

"Well, just to be on the safe side," said the other, "we're taking possession of that as well as the ship."

Crawley's eyes narrowed, and his hand moved towards the pocket in which reposed the gun he had taken from Coles.

"The stuff's all right here!" he snapped.

"That may be," returned the man, "but me and my two mates are going to put it where we can keep an eye on it. You've helped us to retake the ship, mister, because you say you reckon the game's up and that you're bound to be captured sooner or later. You're figgering on turning King's evidence. I don't say that ain't sensible of you. As a matter of fact, I think it is. But what I do say is we ain't trusting you any—"

"No?" rasped Crawley. "Then stick 'em up!"

As though by magic his gun had appeared in his hand and was covering the three seamen.

"You ain't trusting me, ain't you?" he jeered. "Well, I wasn't expecting you to. That's why I've got this gun. Make a move, just one of you, and I'll blow your brains out!"

He spoke out of the corner of his mouth to Baines.

"Get loaded up with as much of that swag as you can stow away about you," he ordered. "Then fill my pockets. I'll look after these mugs!"

With an almost frantic haste Baines got to work, stuffing his belt and pockets with jewel-cases and rolls of notes from the sacks. It was only when he could carry no more that he turned his attention to Crawley, who was still keeping the three seamen covered.

Taking care not to get between the men and the gun, Baines proceeded to cram Crawley's pockets full of the best of the swag, until at length Crawley brusquely called a halt.

"That'll do!" he snapped. "Put the key of the door in the lock outside!"

Hastily crossing the floor, Baines withdrew the key from the inside of the door and thrust it into the lock on the outside.

"We're going now," said Crawley, addressing the three seamen, "and we're taking the precaution of locking you in. But if you do manage to kick the door down before we get clear don't come after us, or'll you'll get a bullet, and I don't moan mebbe!"

Still keeping the men covered, he began to back towards the door.

Under the menacing threat of that blue-black barrel the trio could do nothing save stand motionless.

It was when he had almost reached the threshold that Crawley heard a slow and heavy step in the corridor outside, heard Baines gasp, then heard the deep and growling voice of Larsen say behind him:

"What is happening in here?"

Pursuit!

CRAWLEY halted, and for a moment he stood rigid. He dare not turn his head, dare not take his eyes from the three seamen, and in his heart he was cursing Larsen for this unlooked for and inopportune appearance.

"What are you doing, Crawley?"

Again the deep voice of Larsen growled from the doorway, and this time there was a suspicion in it, which made Crawley hesitate no longer.

"Tell him, Baines," he said, speaking over his shoulder, but still keeping the three men covered.

"D'you mean—d'you mean tell him everything?" gulped Baines.

"Yes, you fool!" snapped Crawley. "You know we were just going to his cabin to tell him!"

Baines knew nothing of the sort. What they had just been going to do was, quit the ship, leaving Larsen to look out for himself. But, that plan having now been frustrated by the appearance of Larsen, Baines took his cue from Crawley and clumsily proceeded to explain what had happened.

"We kidded them three fellers into helping us to take the ship, Larsen," he said. "They thought we was going back to—Camelot with them to turn King's evidence, but all we was after was the loot—"

"Yes, and now we've got it we were just coming to rouse you, Larsen," cut in Crawley. "We're clearing out with as much of the stuff as we can carry, and the only reason we didn't tell you before was that we know you'd be no use in the scrap what we've had with the nigger and his two mates."

"Don't lie, Crawley!" said Larsen harshly. "You and Baines were going to quit like the dirty rats you are!"

"You're wrong, Larsen—"

"I'm not wrong!" grated Larsen. "You were going without me. I know the sort of snake you are, Crawley! Yes, and you, Baines! I'll talk to you later about this, when—when I'm stronger. I'll learn you to try to double-cross a man like me, Crawley!"

"I wasn't trying to double-cross you, Larsen," reiterated Crawley. "Honest, I wasn't. Baines knows—"

"Baines is as big a liar as yourself!" rasped Larsen. "There's a pair of you, and you haven't got an ounce of pluck between you. But I'm coming with you, Crawley. You don't get rid of me so easily!"

"We want you to come with us, Larsen," said Crawley with an effort. "Get hold of some swag, and we'll go."

Not yet had he seen Larsen, for not once had he taken his watchful gaze from the three seamen whom he was keeping covered; but now, as Larsen limped slowly forward into the cabin, Crawley shot a swift glance at him from out the corner of his eyes.

Far from being a prepossessing sight was Larsen, and fearful indeed must have been the punishment he had taken from Jim. His bearded face was still swathed in bloodstained bandages, his sunken cheeks were bruised and discoloured, and his bloodshot eyes were puffed and swollen.

He walked with dragging, shuffling step, and as he bent over the two sacks to help himself to as much loot as he could carry Crawley saw that his hands, raw and skinned, were shaking as though with the ague.

"You look in a pretty bad way, Larsen," observed Crawley.

"I'm not in so bad a way that I can't smash you, Crawley!" snarled Larsen.

Crawley made no further comment, but, waiting until Larsen had stuffed his pockets and belt as full as he could, he jerked his head in the direction of the door.

"Get up on deck and into the boat with Baines," he said. "I'll hold these fellers!"

"Yeah, git goin', Larsen," drawled the weak voice of Jim Crow from the bunk. "Git goin', case I gits dese ropes loosened an' whips you agin!"

So occupied had Crawley, Larsen, Baines, and the three seamen been with their own affairs that they had failed entirely to notice Jim's return to consciousness, and his voice startled them considerably.

Larsen was the first to recover from his momentary surprise, and, limping to the side of the bunk, he stood glaring down at the negro.

"So you're awake, nigger," he grated. "and I've got you just where I want you!"

With the words, he drove his clenched fist with savage force down into Jim's upturned face, bringing blood spouting from squat nostrils and thick lips.

It was as foul and cowardly a blow as could well be imagined, and even Crawley felt sickened at the vicious brutality of it.

"That's enough, Larsen!" he said sharply, as Larsen raised his fist to strike again. "We've got no time to waste on the nigger. Leave him alone, and let's go!"

But Larsen paid no heed. The thrashing he had received from Jim had scared his mind as deeply as his body, and, with bruised and bearded lips asnarl, and bloodshot eyes ablaze with hate, he drove his fist again into the upturned face of the bound man.

"Stop him, Crawley!" croaked Baines from the doorway, and his face was ghastly. "Stop him, man!"

"Larsen"—Crawley's voice was metallic—"if you do that again I'll drop you!"

Larsen slowly turned his head, his blood-smeared fist upraised to strike again.

"You'll drop me?" he snarled. "You rat, you haven't got the pluck to shoot!"

With that he turned again to Jim.

"This time, nigger," he said slowly—and Baines shuddered at his voice—"I'm going to kill you! I'm going to smash your face right in!"

Then it was that the nearest seaman acted. Braving the menace of Crawley's gun, he leapt forward, and, seizing Larsen's upraised arm, whirled the man round, and drove his fist full into the convulsed and bearded face.

Simultaneously Crawley's gun spat lurid flame, but it was only to stop one of the other seamen who had rushed at him. Next instant he had leapt to the door and was outside with Baines, slamming shut the door behind him and turning the key in the lock.

"Come on, you fool!" he panted to Baines; and together they dashed up the ladder to the deck.

The boat was lying moored alongside

and, tumbling into it, they hurriedly cast off. Then, seizing the oars, they commenced to row frantically in the direction of the shore and were swallowed up in the night.

Meanwhile, down in the cabin, the three seamen had overpowered Larsen, and whilst two of them sat on him, the third was smashing the lock of the door by the simple expedient of kicking lustily at it with his heavy boot.

The overpowering of Larsen had not been difficult, for the man had been in no shape for a fight.

The lock of the cabin door yielding, rope was soon procured, and, trussed and bound, Larsen was carried to his cabin and flung on to his bunk.

A council of war between the three seamen then followed, and, abandoning any idea of going after Baines and Crawley, they decided to commence getting steam up right away with a view to setting off as soon as possible for Camelot.

"After all," said one of them philosophically, "we've got four of the fellers and most of the loot. It's not a bad haul, all things considered!"

After taking another look at their captives, they descended to the stoke-hole and started to rake out the fires and get them going again.

Jim, lying on his bunk, his face bruised and swollen, was thinking desperately. He had recovered somewhat from the nausea caused by Larsen's savage blows, and he realised to the full the plumb awful jam which he, Coles, and Huck were in.

Apart from having raided derelicts, the three of them would now find themselves faced with the much more serious charge of having seized a ship sailing the high seas on its lawful occasions. That was piracy—a hanging matter.

Something had got to be done, decided Jim, and done mighty quick. But what could be done? Bound and helpless as he was—and as he guessed Coles and Huck were—their chance of escaping the gallows was nil.

"Lordy, lordy," he groaned, "this chile am sure gonna swing!"

He lay quiet for a while, gathering his strength. Then slowly, and with a grim determination, he began to expand his mighty muscles, straining at his bonds until the rope cut into his flesh.

His lungs were filled to capacity; his heart was pounding madly. But, oblivious to everything save escape, he strained and strained with a terrible intentness, until at length sheer exhaustion caused him to relax and go limp.

A while he lay, drawing great breaths into his labouring lungs; then tentatively he began to move his arms and legs, testing the tightness of the rope which bound him.

As far as he could discover, it had yielded not the fraction of an inch. But nothing daunted, he went to work again, straining at the bonds until the perspiration started out in beads on his forehead and his great knotted muscles formed his black and glistening skin into the semblance of moulded, quivering iron.

But he had been tied by expert hands, and the taut rope, cutting deeper and deeper into his arms and legs, would not yield. Time and again Jim tried to loosen it, but at length, weak and exhausted, he relaxed and confessed himself beaten.

Well, it was to be a hanging, then. He, Coles, and Huck would swing together. Perhaps Larsen would be with

them, for if Larsen had not been guilty of raiding derelicts, he had, at least, been in on the seizing of the Rosa.

And what about Crawley and Baines? Would they be caught? Almost certain to be, sooner or later, reflected Jim. The only chance of getting clear had been to get the Rosa coaled and put to sea.

He had been a fool ever to have brought Larsen into the game. And Larsen had been a fool ever to have trusted Crawley and Baines.

"Yeah, I guess us is all rogues together," mused Jim—"all rogues together!"

A while he lay, staring up at the low ceiling of the cabin. Then, as strength slowly returned to him, he heaved himself up on the pillow, and raising his head, looked about him.

The cabin contained only a chair and a small dressing-chest. On a hook behind the door hung oilskins and a sou'-wester, and on one wall was nailed the dingy picture of a ship, cut from some periodical.

But it was the dressing-chest which held Jim's attention. On it was a comb, a hairbrush, and a small cheap shaving mirror. Long and earnestly Jim gazed at that mirror. Then, suddenly swinging his bound feet to the floor, he cautiously rose and straightened up.

It was all he could do at first to maintain his balance, but eventually he began to find what, with grim humour, he termed his "sea-laigs." That done, he groped behind him with his fingers, and, after pulling the blankets to the floor, he took a hop forward in the direction of the dressing-chest and swayed perilously.

He managed to keep his balance, however, and another hop took him a few inches nearer the chest. Another hop, and then another, and he began to feel more confident. But it was slow work, and he knew that at any moment he might be disturbed by one of the seamen coming to take a look at the prisoners.

The negro reached the chest without mishap, however, and, leaning against it, he picked up the shaving mirror with his teeth. Still holding it, he turned away and commenced the return journey to the heap of blankets lying on the floor by the side of the bunk.

Reaching them, he dropped to his knees; then, lowering his head, he carefully dropped the mirror so that it lay face upwards. That done, he shuffled forward until one knee was pressing on the glass. Then, slowly and deliberately, he exerted pressure with his knee until there came a sharp crack and the glass splintered into pieces.

Shuffling backwards, Jim surveyed the broken fragments; then, selecting the piece he wanted, he bent his head and picked it up with his teeth. Laboriously he turned about, still on his knees, and with the piece of broken glass held tightly between his teeth, he lowered his head and inserted one splintered corner of the fragment into the crack between the floorboards.

Now came one of the most difficult and delicate parts of Jim's task. He could move his knees slightly, and, shuffling into position, he raised his right knee an inch or so from the ground and pressed it down on the glass, wedging it more firmly between the floorboards.

His knee was bleeding profusely by the time he had completed the job to his satisfaction. But he paid no heed to that as jubilantly he stretched himself out full length on the floor and began to work the rope which bound his

arms up and down on the rough edge of the piece of glass.

Time and again he paused to strain at his bonds, and time and again he returned to his sawing. Then suddenly he felt something give, and this time, after he'd stretched his mighty muscles to their utmost and then relaxed, the rope fell loosely away from about his arms and he knew that they, at least, were free.

It took the negro some minutes to disentangle his arms from the coils, but he managed it at last. Then he set feverishly to work to untie the knot of the rope which bound his legs.

When that was done he rose stiffly to his feet and stood a moment gingerly massaging his bruised limbs and ankles. Then, with grim and purposeful stride, he quitted the cabin, and, bounding up the ladder, gained the deck.

He knew where he was going, knew what he intended to do. Crossing the deck to the port rail, he stood for a moment staring shorewards through the greying light of early morning.

Next moment his arms flashed up and he dived, his lithe, black body cleaving the water with scarcely a ripple. Then with powerful strokes he struck out for the beach.

The cold salt water refreshed him probably more than anything else could have done, and by the time he had reached the beach he was beginning to feel more like his old self.

The negro gained the shore near where Baines and Crawley had beached the boat after their flight from the Rosa, and, making his way to the boat, he scanned the firm sand for footprints.

He found them easily enough, two pairs of tracks leading southwards along the beach, and grimly he set off in pursuit, walking swiftly with long, raking stride.

He knew that it would take a few hours yet for the Rosa to get up steam, and in the meantime he was determined to catch up with Baines and Crawley, and, after relieving those two gents of the booty they had stolen, give them something to remember him by.

Not only had they ruined all his plans, but they had cleared off with a good part of the loot which he, Coles, and Huck had spent long and laborious hours in wresting from the safes of stranded ships, and for which they had eventually risked not only their liberty but their lives.

O.K., then! Baines and Crawley would find that treachery such as theirs was a game which did not pay.

They were keeping to the beach, obviously because the going was easier there than inland.

Like a black Nemesis, Jim stalked along their trail, increasing his pace until he was almost running.

Only once did he stop, and that was to pick up a long piece of seaweed which he stripped until all that was left was the tough and supple black stem—a deadly weapon in such hands as his.

Then on he went again, following the tell-tale footprints in the sand. That Baines and Crawley would be hurrying, he knew, but they had not had more than an hour's start at the most, and they would be moving at nothing like the rate he was.

The light was growing stronger now, but there was no sign of his quarry ahead, and eventually Jim broke into a run.

(On no account, chum, miss the concluding chapters of this thrill-packed yarn. You'll find 'em in next week's great value-for-money issue of the MAGNET.)

HIS GUNMAN GUARDIAN!

(Continued from page 24.)

But suddenly those keen eyes left Bunter, as if Poker Pike had totally forgotten his fat existence.

To Billy Bunter's astonishment, the gunman made a sudden dart towards the high fence at the side of the road, pulling a gun from his pocket as he did so.

Bunter blinked after him blankly.

He had seen nothing in the shadows, his eyes not being so keen as Poker Pike's.

Bunter did not know that there were two shadowy figures crammed close to the park palings in the shadows; that one had his arms bound, and that the other—a man in horn-rimmed spectacles—was holding him by the arm.

But Poker Pike knew. He had spotted Bud Parker and his prisoner.

It seemed like a nightmare to Bunter.

He saw the gunman dash across the road, gun in hand; he heard a startled voice; and then perceived a moving shadow by the fence—and then came flashes, stabbing the darkness, and the roar of a firearm. With a squeak of terror, the fat Owl flung himself down in the grass by the road.

Nobody heeded him. Poker Pike was rushing down on Bud Parker, firing as he rushed, splashing lead along the road and the fence.

Bunter heard a yell, and the sound of running feet. Louder sounded the roar of Poker Pike's automatic.

Bang, bang, bang!

The fat Owl blinked round in terror. In the starlight a man in horn-rimmed spectacles was running frantically up the road, with Poker Pike loosing off lead after him—bullets spattering up the dust round him as he ran.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

A figure, gagged, with arms bound, lurched out of the shadow of the park fence.

"Oh crikey!" repeated Bunter, as he recognised Putnam van Duck.

Bang! roared Mr. Pike's final shot.

Bud was gone.

He had not waited for Chick Chew to get back with the car. The arrival of Mr. Pike, with his ready gun, had quite altered his plans. Never had Mr. Parker made so prompt a getaway.

He was gone; and Poker turned to Putnam.

"Say! I'll mention that you're my antelope, with the hide on!" he remarked. "I'll tell a man, I ain't losing you agin, you Putnam van Duck!"

"Oh crikey!" said Bunter, for the third time.

He crawled to his feet.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

All Right for Bunter!

KNOCK, knock!

Wells, half-dressed, opened the door.

Colonel Wharton, in flowing dressing-gown, looked down from the stairs over the banisters.

Harry Wharton and Hurree Singh, in pyjamas, stared on either side of him.

"Good gad!" said the colonel.

"Great pip!" said the colonel's nephew.

And the Nabob of Bhanipur murmured that the great-pipfulness was terrific.

Wells almost fell down as Putnam van Duck walked in, and, following him, came a wiry man with a hickory face, with a grubby bowler hat screwed down on his bullet head. And last, but not least, came a fat youth with a hopeful but uneasy blink behind his big spectacles.

"What!" gasped Colonel Wharton.

"I'll say I'm sure sorry to wake the whole caboodle!" said Putnam van Duck. "I ain't jest been out for a leetle pascar this time of the night. Chick got me out of a window."

"Good gad!"

"And Pike blew along and got busy with his gat, and here I am again," said Putnam. "I guess Chick's side-kicker has gone to tell Chick to call again. He sure has fallen down on it this time. Now, sir, if you've had enough trouble to my tally, I'll sure beat it pronto."

"Nonsense!" gasped Colonel Wharton. "You will go back to bed, and every precaution shall be taken—"

"I guess Poker's precaution enough, sir," grinned Van Duck. "I got to tell you, sir, that this guy is the galoot my popper put to keep tabs on me, and he won't quit."

"Not so's you'd notice it," remarked Poker Pike stolidly.

Slowly it seemed to occur to Mr. Pike that he was indoors in an establishment different from the "joints" to which he was accustomed, and he removed his hat.

"Your—your guardian can be accommodated here, my boy," said the colonel. "Certainly he shall stay."

"Surest thing you know," remarked Mr. Pike calmly.

"Wells, you will see—"

"Certainly, sir!" gasped Wells.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Who is that?" rapped the colonel, staring at Bunter grimly.

"That fat guy brought Pike along, jest in time to catch Bud Parker before Chick came back with the auto," said

Putnam. "But I sure don't know why he blew in here on my tail! You want anything—you, Bunter?"

"Oh, really, Van Duck—"

"I'll mention that the butler guy's waiting to shut the door, and you're on the wrong side of it," remarked Van Duck.

"Beast! I say, you fellows!" Bunter blinked up at the two juniors, grinning down from the stairs. "I say, I've lost my train, and—and—I mean, I came back to—to—to save that beast from the other beast."

"Wells, Master Bunter will stay the night," grunted the colonel.

"Yes, sir."

Wells closed the door.

Bunter was on the safe side of it. Fortune, after all, had smiled on the fat Owl of the Remove. Colonel Wharton, perhaps, fancied that he was going on the morrow. Bunter fancied that he wasn't. And Bunter was right—he didn't.

What Chick Chew thought and said when, coming back with the car for the kidnapped millionaire's son, he met his confederate in frantic flight, was not known at Wharton Lodge.

Probably what Mr. Chew said was something very emphatic.

Anyhow he had, as Putnam put it, fallen down on his enterprise. No doubt he was going to try again—it being a matter of personal and professional pride with Mr. Chew not to register defeat. Aware of that, Putnam van Duck quite throw down the idea of parting with his gunman guardian, and made up his mind to tolerate Mr. Pike and his gun.

"I guess I got to chew on Poker," he told Harry Wharton. "I guess Pop was right. Poker's the guy to put paid to Chick. I got to chew on that guy for keeps."

"But at Greyfriars—" said Harry.

"When you come to the school—"

"I'll say Poker'll come, too"

"Oh, my hat!" said Harry.

He chuckled at the idea of the gunman at Greyfriars, keeping "tabs" on a new fellow in the Remove. There was no doubt that Poker Pike and his gun would cause rather a sensation at Greyfriars. It made the new term unusually interesting to look forward to.

THE END.

(Enjoyed the yarn, chum? Thought you would! I guess you're looking forward to the next story in this grand new series. Note the title: "GUN PLAY AT GREYFRIARS!" and make a point of ordering next Saturday's issue of the MAGNET well in advance!)

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25-4-36

THE HIKING HEADMASTER!

By DICKY NUGENT

"I'm jolly glad we've left the Head behind!" grinned Jack Jolly, as he and his pals tramped down to the gates of General Jolly's manshun one bright Spring morning. And Merry and Bright and Fearless chimed in with a hearty:

"Hear, hear!" "We get enuff of the old fogey at skool, without having to put up with him on hollerday, too!" added the kaptin of the Fourth. "Like his cheek to invite himself to my pater's place!"

"Let's hoap he's gone by the time we get back!" chuckled Frank Fearless. "In any case, I'm looking forward to a couple of days hiking—not to menshun the search we're going to make for that missing bar of gold that fell out of an airplane somewhere over this part of the country last week! Won't it be a bit of luck for us if we find it and get the hundred pounds reward?"

"Yes, rather!" "Hundred quid or not, it's a relief to be away from the Head!" grinned Merry. "We can—oh!"

He broke off with a gasp of surprize. Right in front of the St. Sam's juniors was the very man he was talking about—Doctor Birchmall, of St. Sam's! That alone was serprizing enuff; but what was still more serprizing was the Head's eggstraordinary attitude. Dressed in hiker's clobber, he was crawling about on all fours, nibbling the grass near the gates; and, as if that wasn't puzzling enuff, he was wearing round his neck a chain, the other end of which was tied to a stake in the ground!

"My hat!" gasped Jack Jolly. "He's set the billy-goat free and chained himself up in its place! What's the idea?"

At that moment, Doctor Birchmall spotted the juniors and beckoned them over. Jack Jolly & Co. obeyed the summons with alackrity. They were awfully anxious to find out the meaning of the Head's amazing behaviour.

"Good-morning, sir!" they chorused.

A look of fear came into the Head's greenish eyes.

"Not so loud, you yung idjuts, or they'll hear!" he whispered. "Lissen, boys: I'm in a fix. I am not, as you mite suspect, acting the goat—"

"My hat! What ARE you doing, then, sir?"

"I am adopting the guise of a goat—a distinction with a difference!" replied the Head. "To reveal the truth, boys, there are two detectives

outside the gates, waiting to serve me with a writ for non-payment of income-tacks!"

"Few!"

"I threw them off the scent last nite, but when I got up early this morning, hooping to hike my way to freedom, it was only to find them waiting outside for me! Luckily, I had this branewave," said the Head, with a feint smile. "I decided to take the place of the billy-goat so as to be near the gates! Now I am waiting for them to go up to the house. As soon as they do so, of course, you won't see me for dust! Not so dusty, eh?"

"Grate pip! Wouldn't it be simpler to pay your income-tacks?" asked Frank Fearless.

"Unforchunty, Fearless, I haven't the needful, or I would! I asked General Jolly for a loan; but he's as mean as they make 'em, and—"

The Head broke off, as the rattling of keys sounded from the direction of the gates.

"Loeke, the lodge-keeper, is letting them in, sir," grinned Jack Jolly. "You'd better start nibbling the grass again, if you don't want them to be suspicious!"

"Thanks, Jolly; I will!" And the Head started making a pretence of chewing up tufts of grass with an air of relish.

It was really serprizing how closely the Head resembled a goat from a distance. Probably it was his lean, angular figger and beard that did it. What-
ever the eggplanation, he hoodwinked the two 'tecs all right, and they walked up the drive to the house without giving him a second glance.

The moment they were out of site, the Head flung off his chain and jumped to his feet.

"Worked like a charm!" he grinned. "Now for my get-away! Are you going hiking, too, boys?"

"Ye-es, sir, but—"

"Eggsellent! We can all go together! This way!"

Jack Jolly & Co. inwardly groaned. It was



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HOLIDAY ROUTINE AT BUNTER COURT!

By BOB CHERRY

Cheery old Bunter has just been telling me what happens at Bunter Court at holiday time. So gather round, ye Bunter fans, and listen to the dope, just as I get it straight from the horse's mouth!

Breakfast is served by Hodgkinson, the butler, and the eighteen footmen in the luncheon-room or in any of the guests' fifty bed-rooms if the guests wish it. The best plate is always used—solid platinum, set with diamonds. The servants have to be content with the worst—mere silver plate.

After brekker, guests are wheeled in bathchairs to the terrace by Podgkinson the butler and the forty footmen. There they take their choice of the various amusements prepared for their pleasure. There is a string of hunters for those who yearn for a gallop through Bunter Park, and tennis, golf and cricket champions to play with those who feel like adjourning to the private courts, course and pitch respectively.

Lunch is served in the

evening banqueting-hall by Dodgkinson and the sixty-five footmen. The best plate is again used—solid silver, studded with emeralds. The servants use the worst—mere platinum.

The afternoon is set aside for rest, in any of the seventy-five guests' bed-rooms. Dinner is served in the luncheon-room by Dodgkinson and the hundred-and-twenty footmen. Again the best plate is used—solid gold, set with sapphires. The servants use the worst—mere silver, studded with rubies.

Supper, Bunter mentioned, in a moment of absent-mindedness, is taken sitting on a pair of steps in the kitchenette.

It may strike you that there are one or two contradictions in this account of the routine at Bunter Court, but you must excuse Bunter for being a little vague; he hasn't visited this ancestral home of his just lately.

In fact, there are strong grounds for thinking that he never has visited it—except in his fat though brilliant imagination!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT AT THE ZOO!

Grins PETER TODD



"Lonzy has recently become interested in the theory that man is descended from animal and, with a view to studying the theory, he has been spending half his holiday at the Zoo. I went along with him myself the other day and I must say I found plenty of food for thought.

I hadn't been inside the place more than a couple of minutes before I exclaimed: "What on earth is Skinner of the Remove doing in that cage over there?" It gave me a soverie jolt when 'Lonzy told me that it was not Skinner but a wolf!

One exhibit I could have sworn was Coker. Only the sign outside its cage convinced me otherwise. It was a grizzly-bear.

Then there was a camel in the grounds that looked the living image of Fisher T. Fish, and a sea-lion that brought Mr. Prout to mind in a jiffy.

"Lonzy, old sport," I said, as I rejoined my cousin; "there's not much doubt about the truth of your idea that men are related to animals—"

Then I broke off with a gasp, as I woke up to the fact that I was talking not to 'Lonzy but to an ostrich that looked exactly like him! And—would you believe it?—some of the keepers had got similarly

mixed up and were trying to shoo 'Lonzy into a cage under the impression that he was an ostrich!

"M yes, there's food for thought at the Zoo right enough. Trot along and see for yourself, dear reader; but take identification papers with you!"

(We can't help suspecting that Peter is trying to pull our legs; but seeing what an old pal he is, we're printing his yarn just the same!—ED.)

IT'S MORE THAN HOSKINS DOES!

A correspondent tells us that when Hobson of the Shell made a speech at the last meeting of the Senior Debating Society, he struck exactly the right note.

Hoskins, the Shell pianist, is green with envy!

GREYFRIARS FACTS WHILE YOU WAIT!



"Stand at the cross-roads with your arms up, sir," suggested Jack Jolly. "Perhaps they'll mistake you for a signpost!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" "What about climbing up into that tree, sir?" asked Bright, pointing to a tree at the side of the road.

The Head looked at it, then nodded eagerly. "Good wheeze, Bright! I will! Bunk me up, some of you!"

Jolly and Bright gave the Head a helping hand to lift him into the tree before the

But Nemmyssis was on the Head's track. Even as Jack Jolly finished speaking, the ferocious tooting of a motor-horn in the distance announced the approach of an ortomobile. Doctor Birchmall stopped and glanced over his shoulder like a startled fawn. Then he gave a horse cry of fear.

"Quick, boys! It's the cops!" Jack Jolly & Co. looked back; and when they reckernised the same two 'tecs they had last seen walking up the drive to General Jolly's manshun, they felt as though a new hoap had dawned in their lives!

"They're only just in time!" grinned Frank Fearless, as he mopped his perspiring brow. "Another five minuits and we should all have been turned into grease-spots!"

"Don't be selfish, Fearless!" whimpered the Head, who was dancing about like a cat on hot brix. "Can't you think of some way to hide me?"

"What the dickens—!" The Head held up the brick and Jack Jolly & Co. jumped, as they saw that it was of a pekuliar yellowish culler.

"See this brick?" grinned the Head. "It happens to be the bar of gold that dropped out of that airplane last week! The finder is to receive a reward of a hundred pounds—and the finder happens to be myself! Comprey!"

'tecs arrived, and in a couple of jiffies Doctor Birchmall was climbing up amongst the branches with the agility of a monkey. And then, just as he detectives' car raced up on the seen, an eggstraordinary thing happened. Through shaking the tree, the Head dislodged a brick that was lying on one of the upper branches. The brick hit him on the nose.

And the Head overbalded. An instant later, he pitched downwards, to alight with a fearful wallop on the heads of the two 'tecs!

"Bang! Crash! Wallop!" "Yaroooooo!" "Ow-wow-ow!" Somehow or other, the driver mannidged to bring the car to a stop and the 'tecs turned round to the back, where the Head had come to rest.

To their utter distamshment, they found 'em hugging the brick that had caused his downfall and grinning all over his dis!

HELL RAISE THE ROOF OVER THIS!

Ogilvy, who hasn't spent a penny of the pound his uncle gave him last month, failed in a recent singing test because he didn't breathe deeply.

Yet he seems to be able to hang on to his note all right!

PRIZES FOR PEA-SHOOTING

H. Vernon-Smith offers Five Free Feeds to the five sportsmen scoring the best hits from Remove study windows next week. Points awarded for seniority of a victim and position of shot. Top score if you hit a Beak on the boko!



Mark Linley was telling Removites how, on his last visit to his home in Lancashire, he went down a coal mine, and was able to help when a miner was hurt by a fall of coal. Linley dragged off a heavy beam which had fallen from the roof on to the man, and was warmly congratulated. Marky "glowed!!"



Removites represented the countries of their birth in a junior boxing tournament. Close finishes were the rule, Bob Cherry just defeating Tom Brown in the final to win the championship for England. Runners-up were Tom Brown (New Zealand), Delarey (South Africa), and Hurree Singh (India).

WOULD YOU BELIEVE IT?



Peter Todd could hardly believe his ears when he heard Bunter say he did not like toffee—till Bunter added unless it had plenty of sugar in it. Dutton, who was making toffee over the study fire, did not hear Bunter. If he had, he might not have let the Owl share it. A "sticky" prospect!



The crew of the herring drifter which ran ashore at Pegg Bay were in a sorry plight, until Tom Redwing of the Remove pluckly swam out with a life-line. Redwing was brought up by the sea, and many of his leisure hours are spent by it. The rescue was quite in his "line!!"



Ten wickets for five runs was Hurree Singh's remarkable analysis when bowling against the Upper Fourth in the First Form match of the season. Temple explained that his men needed practice—but Bob Cherry remarked that he has never seen them yet when they didn't "Collapse" of Temple & Co.!



When Vernon-Smith said there was a chestnut-tree on Courtfield Common so widespread it would shelter all the Remove except Bunter, "W. G. B." was annoyed! Bunter is certainly an ogre—but the giant chestnut tree beats him by several feet in girth. The only "living" thing that does, says Smithy!



Woodwork in

INCREDIBLE!

Snoop claims to be able to supply "inside" information on nearly everything. We can hardly believe it—knowing what a complete "outsider" he is!