

The Best of the Bunch—The "HOLIDAY ANNUAL"—Got Yours Yet?

The Magnet

2^D

Billy Bunter's
Own Paper



LORD BUNTER
takes the **PLUNGE!**

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS WEEK ISSUE OF—

The GREYFRIARS GUIDE



A TOUR OF THE SCHOOL.

By a HOLIDAY ANNUAL.

(1)

'Twas only just a month ago
That I was newly bought and splendid,
But now I'm torn and smudged and worn,
And my career's completely ended.
With spotless pages, colour plates,
And stories, humorous and pleasant,
Bob Cherry thought the book he bought
A most delightful Christmas present.



CHRISTMAS CRACKERS

Old Inky doesn't worry
When he goes out carolling,
For he can always "Hurree"
If the folk won't let him "Singh."

It's a lovely Christmas dinner—
Lick your tongue!
Bird's-nest soup and tender snails,
Choice rat-pies with puppies' tails,
Carried cats and frog and whales—
It's a lovely Christmas dinner
For Wun Lung!

When Skinner sent an almanac
At Christmas to his Uncle Ned,
Although the dates were printed black,
His birthday date was marked in red!
My legs looked just like nutcrackers
When I was skating—but
It was the ice on which I fell
That really cracked my nut!

When I went out carolling
A dog began to howl,
He howled so loud I couldn't sing,
The noise he made was foul!
And then, from out his cottage door,
Appeared old Gaffer Jones;
Said he: "We've heard you sing before
And recognised your tones!"

Christmas Greetings from the Greyfriars Rhymester

I wish the best of health and luck,
The best of Christmas cheer,
To everyone who has the pluck
To read ME through the year!
(They deserve it.—ED.)

(2)

Frank Nugent borrowed me next day,
And lent me to his minor, Dicky;
From him I met, to my regret,
Young Sammy Bunter, fat and sticky;

His major Billy took me back
And sold me to a Fishy rotter,
Who sold me for a shilling more
To Coker as a gift for Potter.

(3)

George Wingate borrowed me from him,
And Tubb, his fag, annexed me gladly;

Then from the fags, reduced to rags,
To Trotter I went very sadly.
He left me on a window-seat
Where Nugent found me and returned me!

Bob took one look at me, his book,
Then silently and sadly burned me!
Thus ended, full of fire and flame,
My tour of Greyfriars College—Shame!

THE GREYFRIARS ALPHABET

HORACE HACKER, M.A.,
master of the Shell Form.

H is for HACKER, a master we hate,
He lives in an almost perpetual bate.
His features are acid and so is his tongue,

We do not imagine he ever was young.
To think of old Hacker an inky-faced boy

Makes Shell fellows chuckle with daring
and joy.



It cannot be true that he ever was pressed

To bend himself over for six of the best!
He'd certainly answer the master:

"How dare you tell me to bend myself over that chair?"

This insolence, sir, you shall dearly repent,

To meet your requirements I cannot consent!

The whole situation's unparalleled, sir,
A thing that should not be allowed to occur!"

An hour or so longer he'd stand there
and speak,

And probably finish by caning the
Beak!

A WEEKLY BUDGET OF FACT AND FUN

By
THE GREYFRIARS
RHYMESTER

CHRISTMAS GRINS

Bolsover major had nightmare on Christmas Eve. He dreamed he was kissing Quelchy under the mistletoe!

Fisher T. Fish is going to have his Christmas pudding X-rayed before taking a slice. There's a threepenny-bit in it somewhere.

Cecil Ponsonby, of Highcliffe, is spending Christmas at Dartmoor.—At last!

Quelchy has been asked to carve the turkey in his hotel. He is bound to "cut up rough."

PUZZLE PAR

Here are parts of a tree. ROOT, STEM, BRANCH, BOUGH, SPRIG, LEAVES, and FRUIT. Each of these words is associated with one of the following, though not in this order—BAY, GINGER, HOLLY, LICORICE, LAUREL, MISTLETOE, GRAPE. Can you pair the correct words together?

Answer at foot of column.

There was much handshaking and congratulation among the fellows who, after a long and stern fight, succeeded in not having Bunter for Christmas.

Among the big-game hunting trophies in Mr. Prout's study will shortly appear the stuffed head of a savago wait, which he shot as it howled beneath his window.

Mr. Hacker's cook forgot to put the stuffing in his turkey. The unfortunate woman is now too busy writing 500 lines to worry about Christmas.

ANSWER TO PUZZLE

Licorice-root, Stem-ginger Laurel-branch, Mistletoe-bough, Sprig of holly, Bay-leaves Grape-fruit.

The Greyfriars Guide Hopes to Meet You All Again in the New Year!

Playing the role of Lord Reynham in a magnificent castle, Billy Bunter fancies he's miles above his old schoolfellows. But when danger threatens, the Owl of the Greyfriars Remove clings to Harry Wharton & Co. closer than a brother!

LORD BUNTER'S BODYGUARD!

By Frank Richards



Under cover of the tree, Harry Wharton watched the two ruffians lift the unconscious form of Bunter from the trunk at the back of the car!

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Bunter All Over!

"NOT a step!"
"Look here——"
"Not a step!" repeated Bunter firmly.

Five fellows gave Billy Bunter exasperated looks.

But exasperated looks had no more effect on the fat Owl of Greyfriars than water on a duck's back.

"We've got to walk!" hooted Bob Cherry.

"Rats!"
"Look here, you fat ass——" said Harry Wharton.

"Not a step!"

Walking never appealed to William George Bunter at the best of times. And this was, really, one of the worst of times. Snow had been falling for an hour or more, thick and fast; and it was coming thicker and faster. Traffic in the High Street of Castlewood had completely stopped. The old Sussex town was buried under a blanket of snow. A taxi could not be had for love or money.

Harry Wharton & Co. were good walkers, and not afraid of a spot of bad weather, but a walk of two miles through a snowstorm did not attract them. But as there was nothing else to be done, they made up their minds to it.

Billy Bunter hadn't, and wouldn't! What was going to be done, in the circumstances, Billy Bunter did not know. But he knew what was not going

to be done. He was not going to walk through the snow.

"You bloated chump——" breathed Johnny Bull.

"Yah!"
"My esteemed idiotic Bunter——" murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"You needn't jaw!" said Bunter. "I'm not going to walk through this! I ordered them to send the car! I'll sack that chauffeur!"

"You howling ass!" said Frank Nugent. "How do you think a car could get through this?"

"I'm not accustomed to being kept waiting for my car!" said Bunter loftily. "This sort of thing won't do

universe, in which it was impossible for any car to shove along.

The Famous Five realised very soon that it was no use waiting for the car, which couldn't come for them. Even had it been there, it could hardly have carried them away. Billy Bunter declined to realise it. He insisted on waiting—and they had now been waiting half an hour. And five of the party were not going to wait any longer.

"Better start!" said Johnny Bull. "If Bunter wants to hang on here, we're not stopping him."

"I say, you fellows, you're not going without me!" howled Bunter.

"Come on, then!" said Harry Wharton.

"Shan't!"
"You blithering, blethering, blathering bloater——" hissed Bob Cherry.

"Beast!"
"We can't stick here till we turn into icicles, Bunter!" said Harry Wharton. "Get a move on, and don't be such a fat slacker!"

"Boot him!" suggested Johnny Bull. Billy Bunter turned his big spectacles on the exasperated five, with a blink of wrath and disdain.

"I'm not walking it," he said. "It's over two miles to the castle, and I can't, and won't, and shan't, see? And you fellows ain't going without me, either. I've stood you a topping Christmas holiday at my castle——"

"Whose castle?" asked Bob.
"Mine!" roared Bunter. "My castle, you cheeky ass! I've fed you on the

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Exciting Yuletide Adventures of HARRY WHARTON & CO., of GREYFRIARS.

for me! They ought to manage it somehow!"

"Fathead!"
"Beast!" retorted Bunter.

Really, it was a difficult position. Billy Bunter's party at Reynham Castle had run across to Castlewood in the car to see the pictures. The car had been ordered to return for them.

But while they were watching the pictures the snowstorm had come on. It had been snowing all the while they watched. They emerged into a snowy

fat of the land! My hosts of servants have waited on you! You've used my horses and my cars! All I've asked you to do, in return for my munificent generosity, is to stick to me and keep those beastly kidnappers off! That's the least you can do, I think!"

"I'm going to kick him!" said Johnny Bull, breathing hard. "Bunter has to be kicked—and he needs it more when he's playing at being a lord than he ever did before."

"Behave yourself, Bull!" rapped Bunter.

"What?" roared Johnny.

"You're not in the Remove passage at Greyfriars now! I keep on telling you so! Have a spot of manners when you're a nobleman's guest in a magnificent castle!"

"The kickfulness is the proper caper!" grinned Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"No check, luky! Shut up!"

"You fat, frabjous ass——" exclaimed Harry Wharton. His temper was very near to failing him.

"That will do, Wharton! Hold your cheeky tongue!"

"Why, I—I—I'll——" gasped the captain of the Greyfriars Remove. "I'll——"

"You'll do as I tell you!" said Bunter. "Shut up! I've heard enough from you!"

"If you want to be booted all the way back to the castle——"

"You won't come back to the castle if you don't mind your manners! I've got my position to think of, before the servants! I think you fellows might try to do me a little credit! After all I've done for you! I really think that!"

The Famous Five gazed at William George Bunter as if they could have eaten him.

This was Bunter, all over!

Playing the part of Lord Reynham, at Reynham Castle, had got into Bunter's head! He was, for the nonce, somebody; and kept on forgetting that he really was nobody!

Old Sir Peter Lanchester had picked him to play that part, while the real lord was kept safe from the Smiler and his kidnapping gang; but since Bunter had been at the castle, it was probable that the old Sir Peter wished that he had picked somebody else!

He had come to know Bunter better during the Christmas holidays, and the better he knew him, the less he admired him!

Sir Peter had to stand for it, having presented the fat Owl at the castle as his ward, young Lord Reynham.

But the Famous Five did not have to stand for it—excepting for the circumstance that they had promised to see the fat Owl safely through the vacation. Often and often, they had become fed-up. When Bunter was in danger, he was wont to cling to his old pals closer than a brother. When he was not in danger, swank supervened—and Bunter was hard to stand.

And really it seemed sometimes that the fat Owl, having played the part of a lord for a couple of weeks, really fancied that he was a lord, and monarch of all he surveyed.

"What I want you fellows to do," said Bunter victoriously, as the Famous Five glared at him, "is to remember your position—and mine! Be respectful! Do as you're told! I don't want to be hard on you! I've taken you up, and I mean to treat you well! But I don't want, and won't have, any cheek! If I have any more cheek, I tell you plainly that I shall have to consider

whether I can let you stay any longer at my castle."

Harry Wharton breathed hard.

"We've promised to see you through, you fat chump!" he said. "You let old Sir Peter suppose that you were ready to face danger here—and at the first spot of it, you got us here to protect you! But that does it! We'll clear. No need to walk to the castle, you fellows—they can send our bags after us! It's only a short walk to the railway station! Come on."

"Good egg!"

"Good-bye, Bunter!"

"Say good-bye to Sir Peter, and Captain Reynham, for us!" grinned Nugent. "Ta-ta, old fat bean!"

Billy Bunter blinked at his Christmas guests. He was quite satisfied, in his own fat mind, that the gorgeous glories of Reynham Castle were an irresistible attraction to the Famous Five—as they were to his fat self. So he was surprised, as well as annoyed, when the five juniors started to walk away through the thickly falling snow.

"I say, you fellows——" he yelled.

"Good-bye!"

"You're not going!" howled Bunter. "I—I say, you fellows, why, that kidnapping beast Smiler may be watching us this very minute, for all I know! I say, you ain't leaving a pal in the lurch!"

"You fat idiot!" roared Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"You blithering dunderhead——" hooted Johnny.

"Oh, really, Bull——"

Harry Wharton paused. Really it was a little difficult to decide how to deal with Lord Bunter.

"I say, you fellows, what are you getting your backs up about?" demanded Bunter. "Have I said anything to offend you?"

"Wha-a-at?"

"Oh, my hat!"

"I shouldn't think of turning you out of my castle to go back to your poor little homes——"

"You burbling idiot!"

"Oh, really, Nugent! Look here, it looks as if that car isn't coming, and—and if you like I—I'll walk. There!" said Bunter, in a burst of graciousness.

The Famous Five looked at one another.

Harry Wharton burst into a laugh.

"Oh, come on," he said, "we've got to stick to the fat frog! Come on, you fat ass! We're seeing you through; but if you ask to be booted again, you'll get what you ask for! Get a move on, fathead!"

And, Lord Bunter getting into motion at last, the Greyfriars fellows tramped away through the thickly falling snow, and headed for Reynham Castle.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

A Lift for One!

"Oh lor'!"

"Buck up, Bunter!"

"Beast!" groaned Bunter.

"Only another mile or so!" said Bob Cherry encouragingly.

"Oh dear! Oh crikey! Oh lor'!"

It was not an easy walk for any fellow in thick snow, which clung to the soles of the boots, and made walking hard and heavy. But if it was not easy for the Famous Five, it was fearfully hard for Billy Bunter.

The winter darkness had fallen. There was hardly a gleam of a star through the snow. Mist hung over trees and hedges. A cold wind blew from the sea, whirling snowflakes. Nobody was

enjoying that walk, but five fellows realised that grousing would not help.

Neither was it necessary for the Famous Five to grouse. Billy Bunter did enough grousing for the whole half-dozen.

Bunter grunted and gasped and grumbled and groused. It was a sort of perpetual melody all the way. And his pace, which had not been rapid to begin with, dropped to a snail-like crawl.

"How long are we going to be getting in, at this rate?" asked Johnny Bull, with deep sarcasm.

"The longfulness will probably be terrific!" sighed Hurree Janset Ram Singh. The junior from India's coral strand was enjoying the weather even less than Bunter, though he did not grouse.

"I'm tired!" snorted Bunter indignantly.

"You'd better put it on a bit, old fat man!" said Bob.

"Shan't!"

"The sooner we're in, the better. Suppose those jolly old kidnappers dropped on us?" suggested Bob.

"How would they know we'd been to the pictures at Castlewood?" yapped Bunter. "You can't scare me!"

"Might be tipped by somebody at the castle. We jolly well know they've got a confederate in the place."

"Oh, rot!" said Bunter.

A hint of the kidnappers, as a rule, was more than enough to alarm the fat Owl; but Bunter was too tired and too peevish to think of kidnappers now. All he could think of was that weary tramp through the snow. His fat little legs were feeling as if they were going to drop off. Bunter had twice as much weight to carry as any other fellow in the party, and it was telling on him.

"If a fellow could only get a lift!" he groaned.

"Not likely—in this!"

"Oh dear!"

"Put your beef into it, old porpoise!"

"Oh lor'!"

"Save your breath for walking!"

"Beast!"

Bunter crawled on wearily.

Harry Wharton glanced back in the shadowy, misty lane. Two or three times he had thought that he had heard a sound on the road, and now he was sure that he heard the clink of harness.

Some sort of a vehicle was coming up the road from Castlewood. It was not a car; no car was likely to venture out in a foot of snow. Nor would he have expected to see any vehicle at all. It was slow and hard work for a horse to pick a way along. Still, the rattle of harness showed that some country cart was coming up the road behind; and slow as its progress must have been, it was moving faster than the walkers, for it was evidently overtaking them.

"I say, you fellows!" Bunter caught the sound and stopped. "I say, that sounds like a horse and cart. I say, hold on!"

He blinked back through his big spectacles, in the misty gloom. A moving light glimmered, evidently on the vehicle that was approaching. Billy Bunter blinked at it with deep thankfulness.

Since he had been a lord, Billy Bunter had grown fearfully aristocratic, and hardly deigned to step into anything but a first-class car. But at the present moment, with his fat legs dropping off, aristocratic prejudices were forgotten. He would have been glad of a lift in a cart or a wagon, or even a wheelbarrow. Anything that went on wheels was good enough for Billy Bunter at that weary and dreary moment.

The juniors halted and looked back at the approaching light. It was not likely that a vehicle could give a lift to six, unless it were a wagon; but a lift for Bunter would solve the chief problem. Once relieved of the crawling fat Owl, the Famous Five could put on a brisker pace. At the present rate of progress they seemed likely to be a couple of hours covering the remaining mile to the castle.

It was a small cart that loomed up in the dim snowy dusk. A man dressed in corduroys, with a hat pulled down over his face, and his collar turned up against the weather, was driving it. The cart was piled with a load of faggots, and it could be seen at a glance that no space was available for passengers, except for one sitting beside the driver.

"I say, stop, will you?" squeaked Bunter, as the cart came plugging through the snow.

The driver looked down at the bunch of shadowy figures in the gloom, but he did not stop.

"What's wanted?" he asked, in a gruff voice. "If I stop my 'orse he will want some starting again in this 'ere! What do you want?"

"Look here, stop—"

"Ain't I said I can't stop?" grunted the carter. "I got to get these faggots to the lodge at the castle. Wish I 'adn't started now."

"You're going to Reynham Castle?" asked Harry, walking beside the tramping horse, followed by his friends.

"Ain't I jest said so?" The carter seemed surly, but the weather was not of a kind to make any carter good-tempered.

"I say, if you're going to the castle, give me a lift?" exclaimed Billy Bunter anxiously. "We're going to the castle."

"Ow can I give you a lift—arf a dozen of yer?" grunted the carter. "The 'orse couldn't do it, even if I 'ad room in the cart."

"I say, you fellows, as you're so keen on walking, you can walk the rest," said the fat Owl. "I say, my man, you give me a lift! I'll stand you five shillings."

The carter eyed the party.

"I could give one bloke a lift, and I'd do it for five bob," he said.

"I say, you fellows, help me up!" gasped Bunter.

So long as he got a lift for his fat self, Bunter regarded the matter as satisfactory. And the Famous Five, who were more than fed-up with crawling like snails, regarded it in the same light.

"Up you go!" said Bob.

The cart drew to a stop, and Billy Bunter was bunked into the seat beside the driver.

The cart plugged on again, the fat Owl grunting with satisfaction as he rested his weary limbs.

The driver gave the horse a touch of the whip, and the cart moved a little faster than before.

The Famous Five walked on behind it. "Thank goodness for that!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Now we can walk!"

"Best foot foremost!" said Bob cheerily.

Crack, crack, crack! came the sound of the carter's whip in advance. Possibly Bunter was urging the carter to make haste. He was, at all events, making haste, and, in spite of the difficulty of pulling the cart through deep snow, the horse was putting on more speed.

The tail-light winked farther and farther ahead of the tramping juniors. Now that they were relieved of the crawling fat Owl, they tramped on a good deal more briskly. But they did not keep the cart in sight, and the tail-

light, winking from the gloom ahead, suddenly disappeared.

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Bagging Lord Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER gave a sudden squeak.

"Here, hold on! Keep to the road, will you? Where are you turning off to?"

The carter made no answer. He had put out the tail-light, unnoticed by Bunter. But a quarter of a mile from

BOB CHERRY
gives you . . .

A Nursery Rhyme for Christmas Time

Eat-a-cake, eat-a-cake, Bunter man,
Eat up the cake as fast as you can,
For Smithy has missed it, so eat the
last lump
Before he arrives on the scene with
a stump!

Little Boy Bull, come blow on your
horn,
And make us all wish we had never
been born;
I've just had a licking from Quelchy,
you see,
So blow a few groans on your cornet
for me!

Fisher T. Fish has lost a quid
And can't think where to find it!
But there's the note, on the back of
his coat,
Where it's jolly well pinned be-
hind it!

Diek Rake can eat no cake
Because he's found none there,
For Billy Bunter got there first
And cleared the cupboard bare.

Hey-diddle-diddle, I'll ask you a
riddle—
The difference 'twixt Bunter and
me?
He's got the "big check" on his
trousers that I
Shan't get from the Editor—see?

Rock-a-bye, Coker, perched on a
bike,
Slaughtering chickens and pigs and
the like;
If the bike skids, old Coker will fall—
Down will come Potter and pillion
and all!

the spot where he had picked up Bunter a dark lane jutted off the road. To Bunter's surprise and annoyance, the carter was turning his horse into it.

As he had stated that he was taking his load of faggots to the castle lodge, all he had to do was to keep to the high road, which passed the gates of Reynham Castle. Instead of which, he was turning off the main road into the dark lane that led in the direction of the sea.

"That's not the way to the castle!" yapped Bunter. "You said you were going there! Look here, keep straight on!"

Still without answering, the carter swung his vehicle round into the lane and drove on into deep darkness.

In the narrow lane, between high hedges, the snow was thicker and deeper than on the high road. The driver lashed his horse, but it dropped to a mere walk.

Billy Bunter, in amazement and annoyance, grasped the man's arm.

"Can't you hear me?" he snapped. "I tell you that ain't the way to Reynham Castle! That leads down to the shore, five miles away! Do you hear me?"

"I hear you, my lord!" answered the carter, with a change in his voice that made the fat junior jump.

While with the juniors, the carter had spoken like any other country carter, only rather gruffly. Now his voice was quite different. It had a mocking tone in it that Bunter knew.

The fat Owl blinked at him in startled terror. He could hardly make out the man at his side in the dimness, but he guessed. His fat heart almost stood still. Then, with a squeak of terror, he half-rose to jump down from the cart.

An iron grip on his arm forced him back into his seat.

"Sit where you are, my lord!" went on the mocking voice—the voice, as the hapless Owl knew now, of the Smiler; the mysterious kidnapper who had haunted the pretended Lord Reynham all through the Christmas holidays. "I cannot part with your lordship yet!"

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, I—I'm going to get down! I—I say, I—I'd rather walk!"

"No doubt!" grinned the Smiler. "But I could not think of letting your lordship walk! I should be sorry to knock your lordship on the head with the butt of this whip; and no doubt you would be sorry, too, my lord! If you'd rather not, you had better keep still!"

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter.

He kept still.

"I have had some difficulty in getting hold of you, my lord!" chuckled the Smiler, evidently very elated with his success. "I shall not part with you again in a hurry! Thank your lordship for helping me!"

"Eh?" gasped Bunter. "How did I help you?"

The Smiler chuckled.

"I dare say you can guess that you and your friends were watched in Castlewood," he said. "The snowstorm gave me this chance—with your lordship's help. You hung about long enough for me to make my arrangements; and I was aware, my lord, that if I came along with room only for a lift for one, which one of the party would claim that lift. You see, my lord, I am acquainted with your lordship's kind, unselfish, and considerate nature!"

And he chuckled again.

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter. "I—I wish I'd let one of the other fellows have the lift now! Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter groaned dismally. He was in the trap this time. His fat lordship had played fairly into the enemy's hands.

Obviously, the kidnappers' confederate at Reynham Castle had put the Smiler wise—probably by telephone—that the Greyfriars fellows had gone to the pictures at Castlewood that afternoon.

The Smiler & Co. had been on the watch, ready to seize any chance that might turn up to get Bunter away from his bodyguard.

The snowstorm had given them the chance, and the cunning and wary Smiler had made the best use of it—with, as he mockingly pointed out, his lordship's help. Had not Bunter,

insisted on waiting so long for the car that could not come, had he put on speed on the way home, had he not bagged the lift and left the other fellows to walk, the Smiler's task would not have been easy. Bunter had made it easy for him.

"Oh, those beasts!" groaned Bunter. "Letting you get me off like this right under their noses—"

The Smiler chuckled again. He had assumed a surly gruffness in talking to the juniors, to prevent suspicion that he had any wish to give his fat lordship a lift. But he was in great good humour now.

"I say, where are we going?" mumbled Bunter.

"This lane leads, as your lordship has mentioned, to the shore," answered the Smiler. "It is not easy going, but that's not a matter of choice, in the circumstances; I can assure your lordship that I should have preferred to offer your lordship a lift in a car. But the weather did not permit, my lord, and your friends might have smelt a rat, I fancy. They had no suspicion of a carter—taking a load of faggots to the castle. But we shall arrive sooner or later, my lord, and you will have quite a comfortable trip in a motor-boat—"

"Oh crikey!"

"Merely a short trip!" grinned the Smiler. "I can promise you quite a comfortable cabin on a very good vessel, which will convey you, my lord, to a much pleasanter climate than this. I hope, my lord, that you will like the climate when you arrive there—you are booked for a very long stay!"

"I—I say, I—I've got to go back to Greyfriars at the new term, you know!" gasped Bunter.

The Smiler chuckled again at that. "Look here, I ain't Lord Reynham!" said Bunter desperately. "It—it's all a mistake! I—I never was, you know?"

"It is hardly worthy of a nobleman to tell barefaced falsehoods, my lord, especially such palpable ones!" grinned the Smiler.

"I tell you I ain't!" wailed Bunter. "You only think I'm Lord Reynham because you haven't seen him since he was a kid of eleven, when old Peter parked him away to keep him out of your clutches. Old Lanchester knows all—"

"That will do, my lord!"

The Smiler cracked his whip and lashed the horse. The cart was going at a mere crawl now, the horse hardly able to drag it through the thick snow that was banked up in the narrow lane.

But lashing the horse was useless; the animal was doing its best, and could do no more.

The Smiler muttered an oath.

He had taken the first turning off the high road, anxious to get his prisoner away. But the going was much harder in the narrow lane than on the highway, and progress much slower. Several times the horse stumbled, and the cart lurched.

Had they still been on the high road, Bunter might have hoped that the Famous Five would have overtaken him. But there was no chance of that now.

He had no doubt that they had already passed the corner where the cart had turned off, and gone tramping on towards the castle, never dreaming that he was no longer ahead of them.

Bunter was captured, and he could not even hope to make his captor believe that he was not really Lord Reynham. He was received and acknowledged at the castle as the young lord; he had been taken there by the young lord's

guardian, Sir Peter Lanchester. Even the young lord's cousin, Rupert Reynham, never dreamed of doubting that he was the genuine article. To the kidnapper, his denial seemed the most absurd of falsehoods—an absolutely fatuous attempt to get out of the trap by denying his own identity.

The horse stumbled again, and the Smiler rapped out an oath. He laid down the whip and drew a cord from his pocket.

He grabbed Bunter's fat hands, knotted the cord round the podgy wrists, and tied the end to the back of the seat.

Then he stepped down from the cart to lead the horse.

Billy Bunter groaned.

Had the Smiler left him at liberty, he would have jumped down and taken his chance of dodging away in the darkness.

But the wary rascal had taken care of that.

The fat Owl blinked round him dismally through his big spectacles. Hope of help there was none. Frosty, snowy hedges shut in the lane; dimly through the gloom loomed spectral branches of trees. The snow was still falling heavily. No one was likely to be abroad in the lonely lanes in such weather.

The Smiler, leading the horse, tramped on, muttering an oath now and then. The wild weather had served his turn; but it was causing him trouble now. He had a good many miles to cover, and it was hard going.

"Oh lor'!" groaned Bunter.

From the bottom of his fat heart he wished that he had never played at being a lord. A gorgeous Christmas holiday in a magnificent castle had tempted him, and he had banked on escaping the danger by surrounding himself with Greyfriars fellows. Again and again they had saved him from the clutches of the kidnappers, who were after Lord Reynham. But they could not save him now.

Billy Bunter had enjoyed being a lord. He had spread his lordliness all over Reynham Castle. Now he would have asked nothing better than to be Billy Bunter again! And even that was denied him. He had played at being Lord Reynham—to the kidnapping gang he was undoubtedly Lord Reynham—and now he was booked for the unknown fate intended for the young lord; and in those dismal moments Billy Bunter was the unhappiest daw that had ever strutted in peacock's feathers!

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Track in the Snow!

HARRY WHARTON came to a sudden halt.

Tramping up the snowy road, collars turned up and heads down to the bitter wind, the Famous Five were putting on all the speed they could. The thought of the crackling log fire in the hall at Reynham Castle was very attractive.

But the captain of the Remove halted at the turning. Dark and misty as it was in the lane, the deep tracks of the cart that had gone ahead of them were visible enough—indeed, so deep were those tracks in the thick bed of snow that every now and then some of the juniors stumbled in them.

"Stop a minute, you fellows!" called out Harry.

"By gum!" exclaimed Bob, in a startled tone. He had noticed what Harry had noticed a moment earlier.

"What—?" began Nugent.

"Stop and look at this!" said Harry. He bent down, scanning the thick snow.

Save where the cart had trundled through, it was undisturbed and smooth. Beside the deep tracks of the cart it lay glistening in a smooth sheet. Those deep tracks were powdered with newly falling flakes, and in a short time they would have been filled up, leaving no sign.

The heavy furrow in the snow did not run straight on, on the way to the castle. It swept round in a curve, leading away into the side-lane.

In a light snowfall the juniors would not have noticed it, and would have gone tramping on, past the end of the lane. But a furrow dragged in snow seven or eight inches deep was quite another matter.

"That cart turned off here," said Harry. "Look!"

"What the dickens!" exclaimed Johnny Bull, staring at the snow. "I suppose that carter knew his way—"

"He said he was going to the castle!" said Harry. "He must have known the way. It's a straight high road to the castle."

"Then why—?" said Nugent.

Harry Wharton, with a knitted brow, stood staring up the dark lane, black as a hat, between frosty hedges, up which ran the track of the cart.

His friends gathered round him, staring, too.

"Blessed if I make this out," said Bob. "Bunter knew the way, if the carter didn't. Why didn't he tell him?"

Wharton set his lips.

"There's only one answer to that," he said quietly. "We've been spoofed! That cart followed us out of Castlewood specially to pick up Bunter."

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Bob. "The jolly old kidnappers—"

"It can't be anything else! I thought that tail-light disappeared rather suddenly. That was why he was hurrying on, too, after picking up Bunter."

"He didn't seem keen to pick up anybody—" said Nugent.

"If he had been, we should have suspected him at once!" answered Harry Wharton. "I never dreamed that a carter, with a load of faggots— But there's only one reason why he's turned off the road, and why Bunter didn't stop him from turning! And that's—"

"They've got him!" said Bob.

"And we're going to get him back!" said Harry. "Come on! If we hadn't noticed the track turning the corner—and I suppose he never expected us to—he would have walked the fat ass off easily enough. We should never have missed him till we got to the castle. But now—"

"Now we're not ten minutes behind him," said Bob. "And it will be pretty hard going for a cart up that lane. Come on!"

The Famous Five turned into the lane.

They tramped in the furrow left by the horse and cart, in dense darkness, amid whirling flakes.

It was possible, perhaps, that the carter had mistaken the way, and that Bunter had not noticed it in the dark. In that case, they had to overtake the fat Owl and turn him back.

But they did not think that such was the case. It seemed to all of them clear enough that this was another move on the part of the kidnapping gang, who believed Billy Bunter to be Lord Reynham.

They tramped on as fast as they could. In the thick snow, the cart could not be very far ahead of them, but they saw no gleam of the tail-light,



"Yurrrrrrrrrgh! Beast! Urrrrgh!" spluttered Lord Bunter, as a snowball aimed by Bob Cherry landed on the side of his fat head. "Wharrer you up to, you silly idiot? Larking with snowballs—gurrgh!" Squash! Another snowball landed on the same spot as the first.

They could guess that it had been put out. The cart had vanished in darkness, but it could not be far ahead.

For a quarter of an hour the juniors tramped on, making the best speed possible; and then, on the wind, a sound came to their ears from the darkness ahead—the sound of a horse labouring through the snow and the creak of the jolting cart dragging after it.

"That's it!" breathed Bob.

"That's it!" repeated Harry. "The tail-light's out; and the man can have had only one reason for taking in the light. He never expected us to spot that he had turned the corner, but he was not taking chances."

"Plain enough now!" said Johnny Bull. "It's the Smiler, or Ferret, or Ratty—one of the three! We can handle him, whoever he is! Put it on!"

The juniors broke into a trot. It was rough going, and they could not have kept it up long. But it needed only a few minutes.

Before their eyes, looming up in the gloom like a dark shadow, was the cart, with its load of faggots.

Their footsteps made little sound on the snow, and that little was drowned by the creaking and jolting of the cart and its load.

As they reached the cart they separated, Wharton and Nugent passing it on the left, Johnny Bull and Bob and Hurree Singh on the right.

In the deep gloom they saw a fat figure perched up in front, and caught a gleam of spectacles.

But they noted that the driver was not in his seat. The next moment they discerned that he was leading the horse, jerking and dragging at it savagely, to

urge the animal on. His muttering voice came back to them, muttering an angry oath.

The Smiler did not look round, and was evidently quite unaware that pursuers were close on him.

But Billy Bunter, blinking down from the cart, spotted the shadowy figures that came panting up on either side of the vehicle.

He did not recognise his friends in the gloom; it did not occur to his fat brain that they had spotted the tracks and turned the corner in pursuit. But he saw several running figures, and that was enough for Bunter. He yelled the moment he saw them.

"Help! I say, help! I say, I'm Lord Reynham! I've been kidnapped! I say, I'm tied to this seat! Help! Help!"

The Smiler, at the sound of that frantic yell, ceased to drag at the horse and turned back, with a savage glare, towards Bunter.

"Quiet, you fat fool!" he snarled. "Do you think there's anybody in this wilderness to hear you? Be quiet, or I'll stick a gag in your mouth! You—you—"

"Help!" yelled Bunter.

The Smiler, with a savage face, made a step back. Then he saw what Bunter had seen—a bunch of running figures, level with the cart.

"Get him!" panted Bob, putting on a spurt.

But for Bunter's yell, the juniors would undoubtedly have "got" the Smiler, collaring him before he knew they were there.

But the fat Owl had unconsciously warned the kidnapper in time.

For a split second the Smiler stared

blankly; then, with Bob's grasp almost on him, he made a desperate leap backward.

"Bag him!" panted Harry.

There was a yell of rage from the Smiler. He made another spring back—and another. Then, as all the juniors plunged at him together, he turned and tore away, disappearing through the frosty hedge.

Bob Cherry, leaping after him, slipped in the snow and fell. His hand touched the Smiler as he tore out of reach.

The rascal's escape had been narrow. He owed it to Bunter. But he was gone, vanishing in snow and darkness.

Harry Wharton & Co. gathered round the cart. The horse had come to a halt of its own accord.

"I say, help!" yelled Bunter.

"Help! I say—"

"Shut up, fathead!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh! Oh crikey! Is that you fellows!" gasped Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I'm tied to this seat! Oh crikey! I say, is that beast gone?"

"The gonefulness is terrific."

"Oh crumbs! I—I say, you fellows, did you come after me?" gasped Bunter.

"Oh, no!" grunted Johnny Bull. "We got here without coming after you!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! Why did you let him get hold of me?" yapped Bunter. "Letting that beast walk me off under your silly noses, when I'm standing you a splendid holiday at my castle just to keep him off. If that's what you fellows call

gratitude, I can jolly well say—
Gurrrrrrrrrrrggh!"

A snowball, landing on the side of Bunter's fat head, caused him to complete his remarks with a wild, spluttering howl.

"Gurrgh! Wurrgh! Beast! Oooooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Have another?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Yurrrrrrrrrrrggh! Beast! Urrgh!" spluttered Lord Bunter.

"Wharrer you up to, you silly idiot? Larking with snowballs—Gurrgh! After letting me be walked off by that kidnapping beast—Yarooooh!"

Squash!

Another snowball smote in the same spot as the first. Bunter spluttered and roared.

"Go on!" said Bob encouragingly, "I'll keep it up as long as you do, Bunter!"

But Bunter did not go on. He realised that his rescuers did not find his observations grateful or comforting, and that replies would take the form of snowballs. He spluttered, and gasped, and grunted, but he said no more.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Unexpected!

SIR PETER LANCHESTER stood in the great stone porch at the stately entrance of Reynham Castle, and looked anxiously down the drive, thick with falling snow, winding away between lines of leafless trees.

Beside him stood Captain Reynham, his nephew, cousin of the young lord whose part the fat Owl of the Remove was playing at the old Sussex castle.

The young Army man was smoking a cigarette, and there was a faint smile on his handsome face, as he looked out into the whirling snow.

But that smile vanished, and he looked grave as the old baronet turned a worried glance on him.

"The boys have not returned from Castlewood yet, Rupert!" said Sir Peter. "It is quite impossible for a car to get through this snow! If they have walked—"

"A rather severe walk for my Cousin William!" drawled Rupert. "He is not, I think, much of a walker. He will be tired."

"If they get in safely—that matters little!" muttered Sir Peter, with another anxious glance down the long avenue.

"Why should they not?" drawled the captain. "Even William will manage it, given time—and the others are hardy young rascals—they will not turn a hair."

"I cannot help thinking of the kidnapers!" said the old baronet. "It is a lonely road—it must be absolutely deserted in this weather—"

"Even kidnapers would hardly be tempted out in this!" said Rupert Reynham. "I cannot picture them strolling about in this snowstorm, on the chance—"

"They may have been given word!" said Sir Peter, with a troubled brow. "You know, as well as I do, Rupert, that they have some confederates in the castle."

Rupert shrugged his shoulders.

"I know that you think so, Uncle Peter," he answered; "but I cannot believe so, myself. Jasmond has faith in all his staff—"

"There can be no doubt about it. Someone discovered the secret door into
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the King's Room, occupied by William," said Sir Peter; "but for his school-fellow friends being on the watch, he would have been taken away by the secret passage. I knew nothing of it—and it can only have been discovered by some occupant of the castle."

"Possibly from outside!" suggested the captain. "Your detective, Tomlinson, has explored it, and found that there is an outlet in the park. It may have been discovered from that end."

Sir Peter Lanchester shook his head.

"It is possible," he said, "but it is far from probable. Besides, the knowledge those rascals have shown of William's movements proves that they have a spy within the household who conveys information to them."

"But who?" said the captain.

"I have not the remotest idea!"

"But your detective—"

"Neither has he!" said Sir Peter.

"There is someone here who cannot be trusted; but I can see no clue to his identity."

"And you think that he may have tipped his confederates that William is hung up at Castlewood with his friends?" asked the captain thoughtfully. "In that case, you have only to inquire who has left the castle during the last couple of hours."

Sir Peter shook his head again.

"I have no doubt that the telephone was used," he said.

The captain started a little.

"You think so?" he exclaimed.

"One of the telephones could be got at, I have no doubt," answered Sir Peter. "We know quite well that such a method of communication is used by them. You remember when the boy Bull arrived here on Christmas Eve, he almost ran into two of the rascals, in the fog, on the avenue—the villain who is called the Smiler, and the man he addressed as the 'guy'nor'—and the boy heard the latter say that he would get his confederate on the phone if he was wanted—"

"I know the boy said so!" sneered Captain Reynham. "I rather thought, myself, that a fertile, boyish imagination had something to do with it."

"I don't think so, for a moment. They are all very sensible lads, and Bull appears to me especially level-headed—a very sensible and practical lad!"

"If anything should happen to William, I should be sorry that you adopted my suggestion of bringing him here, instead of leaving him in his safe concealment."

Sir Peter made no answer to that.

He coloured faintly as he turned his head away, to stare down the shadowy avenue again.

Captain Reynham believed that his suggestion had been acted upon—but it had been acted upon only in part.

The captain had suggested that Lord Reynham, hitherto hidden safely from his mysterious enemies, should be brought openly to the castle, and a detective engaged to watch over him there; thus tempting the kidnapping gang to make some attempt, which would give the law a chance at them.

As he had not seen his cousin William since the latter was a small child, he had no doubt that Sir Peter had adopted his suggestion when Bunter arrived at the castle, announced there by Sir Peter as Lord Reynham.

He did not know his cousin by sight, and all he remembered of him was that he was plump. Like the rest of the household, he had received the pretended lord as the genuine article.

It was his suggestion that had put

that extraordinary idea into Sir Peter's mind.

Sir Peter regarded it as a good idea; but he had no intention of exposing his ward, a weak and sickly lad, to danger, and constant alarms.

For that reason he had looked for someone to play the part of his ward; and Billy Bunter was the lucky man!

Only the detective, Tomlinson, knew the facts—until Bunter had brought the Famous Five in; they, of course, knew that Bunter was Bunter, and not William Lord Reynham.

But they had been as discreet as the old baronet could have wished; the secret was safe with them.

More than once, old Sir Peter had been tempted to let his nephew, at least, know how the matter really stood. But the detective had urged upon him with such earnestness that not a single soul should be told, that the captain, like the rest of the household, was left in ignorance of the facts.

It was, therefore, rather an awkward topic; and Sir Peter, instead of replying to his nephew, moved a little farther off, to the entrance of the porch, to stare out into the falling snow.

His plan was, that if the kidnapers made an attempt on "Lord Bunter," Tomlinson should be on the watch for them; but at the present moment the detective was in the castle, and the sudden snowstorm gave the enemy an unlooked-for chance.

With deep uneasiness, he watched for a sign of the returning juniors—heedless of the bitter wind that scattered flakes round him.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation.

"They are coming! Thank goodness for that!"

Shadowy figures loomed out of the falling snow and dusky darkness into the bright electric light from the porch.

Sir Peter stared—and stared again.

Captain Reynham threw away the stump of his cigarette, stepping quickly forward.

"What—what—" ejaculated Sir Peter.

"Good gad!" said the captain.

It was a rough-looking cart, drawn by a weary horse, that loomed up the dim avenue—such a vehicle as had never, probably, approached the grand entrance of the castle before.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry, thick with snow, were walking with the horse, one on either side, Johnny Bull tramping a little ahead. In the cart could be seen Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The captain's eyes flashed over them as they came into the light. The Famous Five were all in view; nothing was to be seen of Billy Bunter.

"What—" exclaimed Sir Peter Lanchester.

"Anythin' happened?" drawled the captain.

"Yes!" Harry Wharton's eyes fixed curiously on the handsome young Army man as he answered.

"William has not returned with you! You don't mean to say that the kidnapers have got my Cousin William!" exclaimed the captain. He breathed quickly and hard. "Tell me at once—have you seen anything of them?"

"Yes—the man called the Smiler—"

"Good heavens!" breathed Sir Peter. "I feared it—I—"

"They've got William!" rapped the captain. His face was keen with excitement. "The Smiler—he got William?"

"He got him by offering him a lift, and—"

"Oh! They have him, then!" ex-

claimed Captain Reynham. "Uncle Peter, you seem to have been right—they—"

From the interior of the cart a fat figure rose to view, and a pair of big spectacles gleamed in the light.

"I say, you fellows, are we there? You might have woke me up! I say, help me out of this beastly cart!"

Captain Reynham gave a violent start and the colour wavered in his cheeks at that unexpected apparition, and he

stared blankly at Billy Bunter—alias Lord Reynham!

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

A Little Liveliness!

BILLY BUNTER blinked down through his big spectacles.

Sir Peter Lanchester's face registered relief at the sight of him. Bunter, evidently, had been sitting down in the interior of the cart and had

gone off to sleep there, and the halting of the cart had jolted him awake. That was the simple reason why he had not been visible at first.

But the expression on Captain Reynham's face caused the Famous Five to fix their eyes upon him, keenly, sharply. Bunter's unexpected apparition had evidently given the captain a shock.

He was so startled that for the moment he was quite off his guard. In

(Continued on next page.)

LEARN TO PLAY FOOTBALL!



OUR INTERNATIONAL COACH

THE IDEA IS GOOD BUT—

WHEN a goal has been scored—you remember we scored one in this match of ours last week—the game has to be re-started in just the same way as it began—that is, with a kick-off from the centre spot.

The only difference is that the ball is kicked-off by the opposite side from that which has just scored. Therefore, in this instance, the centre-forward of the opposing side will go through the process which our centre-forward went through at the start of the game. The referee waits to see that the players of both sides are ready—they should take up their positions as before—then he blows his whistle. The centre-forward kicks-off, and the game is in progress once more.

As the ball is passed to the inside-left of the opposing side, our inside-right dashes forward and tackles him for the ball. There is a bit of a mix-up, they both fall over, and the ball rolls wide. That was a good move on the part of our inside-right. He was wide awake, and he didn't give the fellow he was marking a second in which to get control of the ball before he tackled him.

I must say that it wasn't a very correct tackle, but that was because I haven't told you anything about tackling yet. The idea was very good, and it stopped the opponent from doing something useful with the ball. If the tackle had been more correctly done, the ball would not have rolled wide, but would have come out of the mix-up at the feet of our inside-right. So I think this is a good time for me to let you into a few of the "secrets" of tackling an opponent.

THE ONLY WAY

YOU remember, when we were talking about anticipation, a few weeks back, I remarked that the easiest and most effective way to take a ball from an opponent was to intercept the pass. Don't think I am going back on what I said then, because it still remains true; but there are occasions when the only way to get the ball from the man in possession is to tackle him for it. Anticipating what an opponent will do next, and nipping in to intercept the pass, is not always possible. Let me explain.

When tackling an opponent don't set about the job half-heartedly. Go in with all your might, using your body as well as your feet. It's the only way to come out on top!

Supposing our inside-right, instead of "going for" the player with the ball after it had been kicked-off, had stayed back and waited for him to pass it. The inside-left of the other side wouldn't have passed it at all. Seeing no one near him, he would have started to go through on his own, and our inside-right would have been left looking rather silly, waiting for a ball which did not come.

When the player with the ball saw he was going to be tackled, however, he could do one of two things. He could pass to a colleague before the tackle came, or he could hang on to the ball, and try to beat our inside-right. He tried the latter method, and on this occasion he failed. Our inside-right did very well to take the ball from him, but for his benefit and for everybody else's, let me explain the correct way to tackle.

When I was thinking about the most important things to tell you on this subject, I had a chat with Joe Nibloe, the famous full-back of Sheffield Wednesday. Nibloe is one of the few players who have won winners' medals for the English and Scottish Cup, and, being a full-back, he knows all about tackling. He told me that when he goes into a tackle he repeats to himself subconsciously the words: "That ball is mine."

In the opinion of Nibloe, the most important thing in tackling is to go for the ball without worrying about anything else. "That ball is mine," is his slogan. Why not make it yours? Go into a tackle determined that you are going to get the ball. Don't worry about whether you will get hurt.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

WHEN you have taken the ball from the fellow in possession, however, you have won only half the battle. The thing is to take it away from him in such a way

that you can do something useful with it yourself—in other words, you must try to come out of a tackle with the ball at your feet. You will be the most likely to do this if you tackle a player not only with your feet, but with your body as well. Don't just stick your feet out, hoping to kick the ball away from the other fellow's toes. Put your feet in the way of the ball, and put the weight of your body behind your feet.

You see what I mean? When you tackle, throw your weight towards the player you are tackling rather than away from him. It takes a bit of courage, I know, especially if you are a little 'un up against one of these hefty fellows.

Here is another point which our inside-right would have watched, if he had known about it, when he made that tackle which has given us much to talk about. He did not know, when he decided to go for it, that the player with the ball wouldn't pass to a colleague. If the player had passed, the obvious place would have been to his outside-left, because the middle of the field is well packed with players, as you may imagine, just after the ball has been kicked-off. In order to prevent the ball being passed to the outside-left, our inside-right should have tackled his opponent from the left side—in other words, from the side to which he was going to pass the ball. That would have compelled him to pass inside rather than outside.

Perhaps this point is not very important in a case like this. It is important for the purpose of tackling near goal.—Suppose a wing man is running along with the ball, waiting for a chance to centre it. The important thing is to prevent him getting the ball into the middle where one of his colleagues is waiting to have a shot at goal. Therefore, the player who goes to tackle him must do so from the "inside," forcing the man with the ball to pass outwards, where there is less likelihood of danger being caused.

I hope you have understood all this. It is really quite advanced stuff, but I feel that by now you will be ready to "tackle" the more intricate things in football. I haven't finished with tackling yet, either. You will hear more about it next week.

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that brief moment his face told what the Famous Five already suspected—that he had not expected his fat lordship to return to the castle. He had not been surprised to see that he was missing—but he was surprised to see that he was present!

For a long moment the captain stared at the fat schoolboy in the cart, his eyes starting—so utterly confounded by his sudden appearance that even the short-sighted Owl of the Remove noticed it and blinked at him curiously.

The next moment savage anger flashed into the captain's face. He made a stride forward, caught Harry Wharton by the collar, and shook him violently.

"You young rascal!" he thundered. "You lying young rascal! How dare you lie to me—you—"

Wharton, taken by surprise by that sudden outburst of rage; sagged in his grasp for a moment. The next, with flashing eyes, he gave the captain a violent shove on the chest that sent him staggering backwards.

"Hands off, please!" he snapped.

The captain, staggering back, slipped in the snow outside the porch and fell. As he rose on his elbow his face expressed such bitter rage and fury that Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry jumped to Wharton's side, and Frank Nugent and the nabob leaped down hastily from the cart. For the moment it looked as if Rupert Reynham was about to jump up and spring at Wharton like a tiger.

He might have done so, but as he sprang to his feet Sir Peter Lanchester hastily interposed.

In angry amazement, he waved the captain back.

"Rupert, are you out of your senses?" he exclaimed. "What do you mean by this—laying hands on a guest here? Are you mad, or what?"

Captain Reynham panted.

"That young rascal—"

"I say, you fellows, what's up?" squeaked Bunter from the cart. "I say, what's he getting his rag out for?"

The Famous Five did not answer Bunter. They stood in a group, eyeing the captain grimly.

"Rupert," exclaimed Sir Peter, "control your temper, sir! What do you mean by this—I repeat, what do you mean?"

With a visible effort, Captain Reynham pulled himself together and controlled his anger. His face reddened under the old baronet's astonished and angry glance.

"Sorry," he said. "But, really, it was too bad of the boy to play upon my—my anxiety in such a way. He led me to believe that my cousin was in the hands of those scoundrels—a schoolboy idea of a joke, I suppose! Is it a matter for jesting?"

"I did nothing of the kind!" said Harry Wharton curtly. "I was answering your questions."

"You young rascal!" The captain's temper flamed out again. "You said that the kidnapper had got him by offering him a lift—a foolish falsehood—"

"The kidnapper did get him by offering him a lift!" said Harry. "We got him back again, and here he is!"

"Oh!" panted the captain. "You—you—"

"Calm yourself, Rupert!" said Sir Peter severely. He turned to the juniors. "Please excuse my nephew; we have both been alarmed at your long absence, and feared that something had happened. Tell me what has happened to William."

"The Smiler picked him up in this cart—we took him for a carter," answered Harry. "But we spotted that

the tracks turned off the road, and guessed. We followed on and got him back. The Smiler got away—and we tipped the load out of the cart and used it to get back here. That's all!"

"I say, you fellows, give me a hand down! Do you want me to stick here all night?" squeaked Bunter.

"We've been a long time getting back here through the snow," went on Harry. "Bunter fell asleep in the cart—that's why Captain Reynham did not see him till he got up!"

The captain caught his breath.

"Sorry!" he muttered. "I—I supposed from what you said that William was in the hands of those rascals—and—and—I suppose you can understand my anxiety—"

He broke off abruptly, turned, and walked back into the hall. He brushed past a lean man dressed in black as he went in, hardly noticing him. But Mr. Tomlinson's hard, sharp eyes were very keenly on the captain, watching him curiously as he walked hastily across the hall and disappeared into the smoke-room.

"Come in, come in, my boys!" said Sir Peter. "Thank goodness you have all returned safely, at all events. Please do not take offence at what Rupert said—he was anxious about William, and naturally upset by such a misunderstanding."

"Blessed if I ever noticed that he was anxious about me before!" said Bunter.

"That will do, William!" said Sir Peter rather sharply. "Please come in at once, my dear boys! I will send a servant to take the horse away. Come, come!"

The Greyfriars fellows were glad enough to get in and to warm their chilly limbs at the blazing log-fire. It had been a long and weary tramp through the heavy snow—though, had they not borrowed the kidnapper's cart for the transport of William George Bunter, they might not have been in for two or three hours yet.

Jasmond and his myrmidons came to relieve them of snowy coats and hats, and they gathered gladly before the fire.

There Sir Peter elicited from them a fuller account of the adventure in the snow; an account to which Mr. Tomlinson listened also, in silence, but with keen attention.

"Evidently that scoundrel had information from his confederate in the castle, Tomlinson!" said Sir Peter.

"It would appear so!" said the detective.

"But who—?" muttered the old baronet.

Mr. Tomlinson did not answer that question.

The Famous Five, looking at his expressionless face, wondered whether he could have answered it.

Many times in the last few days they had wondered whether Mr. Tomlinson shared their own suspicions of Rupert Reynham. But Mr. Tomlinson's cold and self-contained countenance never gave any clue to his thoughts.

Billy Bunter blinked at the detective.

"Yes, who?" said Bunter. "I'd jolly well like to know who! If I paid a detective I should expect him to find out!"

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

"Shan't!" retorted Bunter. "What's the good of a detective if a crook carries on his games right under his nose?"

"Be silent, William!" said Sir Peter. Grunt from Bunter.

Mr. Tomlinson's face did not reveal that he heard Bunter's remarks at all. But the tips of his ears were growing red.

He left the group in the hall abruptly.

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Bunter gave a snort as he walked away.

"That man's no good!" he said loudly enough for Mr. Tomlinson to hear as he went. "Look at what happened the other day—you fellows copped that villain Smiler when he got into my room by the secret door, and Tomlinson let him go!"

"He did not let him go, William!" rapped Sir Peter sharply.

"Well, as good as," said Bunter. "He sat up to guard him till the morning, and the man got away in the night, didn't he? Tomlinson went to sleep and let him get away. Snoring while the man escaped! Fat lot of good having a detective like that about!"

"That will do, William!"

"Looks jolly suspicious to me!" said Bunter. "How do you jolly well know that Tomlinson ain't the man here who gives them the news?"

"You absurd boy!"

"Well, going to sleep, and letting the Smiler get away looks like it to me!" said Bunter. "My advice to you is to sack him, and get a better man!"

Harry Wharton & Co. wondered for a moment whether Sir Peter Lanchester was going to smack the head of the fat junior who was playing the part of Lord Reynham at Reynham Castle.

His look showed that the thought was in his mind, and that he would have derived satisfaction from the same.

However, Sir Peter restrained his natural desire to give Lord Bunter what he was asking for, and walked away after the detective.

Billy Bunter's fat head had had a narrow escape—not for the first time since he had been lord of Reynham Castle.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Plays Billiards!

CLICK! Click!

It was the sound of a billiard ball meeting another, and then another.

Harry Wharton looked in at the doorway of the billiards-room at Reynham Castle.

It was the day after the adventure in the snow. The afternoon was bright and frosty, and the Famous Five were going out. So they looked for Bunter. Wharton had his skates over his arm as he looked into the billiards-room.

The lake in the park was frozen hard, and the chums of the Remove were going to skate. It was improbable that Bunter was keen on joining them in skating; skating was a form of exertion, and therefore had little appeal for his fat lordship. Still, they did not want to walk off without telling him.

But it was not easy to find Bunter.

It was after the whole party had been looking for him for some little time that Wharton glanced into the billiards-room, hardly expecting to see Bunter there, but to make sure that he wasn't there.

Bunter, however, was there. Cue in hand, he was leaning his well-filled waistcoat over the table, blinking carefully through his big spectacles, and taking a shot. He brought off a cannon as Harry looked in.

From which it might be deduced that the balls had been left in a remarkably easy position, for otherwise Billy Bunter certainly would not have brought it off.

"Good man!" said the voice of Captain Reynham. "You've played a lot of billiards, William, I fancy. You seem to have had chances at school!"

"Well, not a lot, you know," said

Bunter. "But I'm rather a dab at billiards—I am at most things, really!"

Harry Wharton, standing at the door, simply stared.

Captain Reynham and Billy Bunter were playing billiards, apparently on the best of terms.

This was the first time that Rupert had been seen on friendly terms with his "Cousin William."

The captain's opinion of "William" was no secret to the Famous Five; indeed, Billy Bunter, obtuse as he was, had observed that the handsome young Army man regarded him as an offensive bouncer; and, in return, he regarded the captain as a cheeky and supercilious beast.

More than once, Lord Bunter had told the juniors that he was going to give the fellow a hint to go. His lordship had no use for cheeky poor relations in his castle.

However, his fat lordship had stopped short of that. Rupert, it was true, was a "poor relation" of the real Lord Reynham. But he was nephew to the young lord's guardian; and until the young lord came of age, Sir Peter Lanchester was master of the place. Even Bunter lacked the nerve and impudence to think of taking advantage of his peculiar position to the extent of turning Sir Peter's nephew out.

As a poor relation, Rupert might have been expected to make himself agreeable to his fat lordship; but very rarely had he done so. He seemed, very often, unable to conceal his dislike and contempt.

Bunter did not like it. He disliked it very much. And he got his own back, as he expressed it, by being offensive to the captain in many ways—especially by making allusions to poor relations in his hearing when Sir Peter was not about.

Many times, the juniors had expected the irritable, moody young man to box Bunter's ears, or boot him, for his impudence. Still, he could hardly box his lordship's ears, or boot him, in his lordship's own castle—so long as he could control his temper. But as it was quite obvious that he had an angry and passionate temper, the juniors would never have been surprised had he lost control of it when Bunter was making himself particularly offensive.

So it was simply astonishing to Harry Wharton to see the two of them on what seemed the best of terms.

They were playing billiards together, and the captain was not only smiling and agreeable, but he was taking the trouble to flatter Bunter.

He had only to see the fat Owl with a cue in his hand to see that he was a rotten player, and the remark that Wharton heard, as he came in, was sheer humbug. Not only had Bunter not made a good shot, but he could not have made the cannon at all unless his opponent had left the balls nicely placed for an easy one.

Bunter, of course, was quite satisfied. He fancied that he could play billiards, just as he fancied that he could play football and cricket. Bunter had a fertile fancy.

He proceeded to take aim for another shot with the ease and grace of a hippopotamus. The captain, a little behind him, looked at him—with a sarcastic sneer that was not visible to Bunter, but clearly visible to the junior looking in at the door.

They had not seen Wharton, and he paused a moment, looking on.

Bunter made his shot, and missed. Indeed, it was a safe bet that Bunter would miss every time, unless his opponent played his game for him.

Captain Reynham stepped to the table to take his shot.

Wharton, with a frowning brow, still watched. The captain, he could easily see, was a good man at billiards—he was, in fact, the type of man who would be good at that game. He did not score, but his shot left the balls in such a position that Bunter could scarcely fail to pot the red at his next shot. It was left almost hanging over the edge of a pocket. That this was done intentionally, Wharton knew as well as if Rupert Reynham had told him.

"Coming out, Bunter?" he asked abruptly.

"Eh?" The fat junior blinked round. "No, don't bother!"

"We're going skating."

"Well, go, then, and don't bother!" said Bunter.

Wharton breathed rather hard.

"Look here, Bunter, hadn't you better come? It's a lovely day, and the lake's frozen, and—"

"I wish you wouldn't interrupt me when I'm playing billiards, Wharton! Do clear off and give a fellow a rest!" yapped Bunter. "If you spoil my shot, you ass, you may cost me a fiver!"

"What?"

"A fiver! Now shut up!"

Harry Wharton came farther into the room. From what he saw, he could guess that Rupert Reynham had decided on a change of tactics, and was bent on making himself agreeable to the fat junior whom he believed to be his cousin, Lord Reynham. But he had naturally supposed that it was a game for "love," and Bunter's words startled him.

Captain Reynham turned his head away, a flush in his cheeks. He was not lost to a sense of shame, and he knew very well what Wharton must think of his playing for money with a schoolboy.

"Are you playing for money, Bunter?" asked Harry very quietly.

"We've got a fiver on the game," said Bunter breezily. "Why not?"

"Plenty of reasons why not, I think," said Harry.

"Quech isn't here," jeered Bunter. "Think a prefect is going to squint in at the window! Don't be an ass, old chap!"

Wharton was silent for a moment.

He had no doubt that Bunter, in the part of Lord Reynham, had succeeded in extracting pocket-money from Sir Peter on a liberal scale, but he hardly supposed that it ran into fivers. Bunter was not, as Rupert believed, a wealthy nobleman; he was the impecunious Owl of Greyfriars, and he certainly could not afford to play for such stakes.

"I shan't ask you to lend me the money if I lose," said Bunter sarcastically; "and if you look at the score you'll see that I'm winning."

"Fathead!"

"Ninety already out of a hundred, and Rupert's only made fifty!" grinned Bunter. "What about that?"

Harry Wharton did not state what he thought about that. What he thought—or, rather, knew—was that Rupert was allowing the fat Owl to win—or, rather, he was working hard at losing.

"Look here, you fat ass, stop it!" said Harry at last. "What would Sir Peter Lanchester think if he saw this?"

"What do I care? I'm master in my own house, I suppose?"

Wharton breathed hard.

"Will you come out?" he asked.

"No, I won't."

"You frowsy, fat Owl!" exclaimed

Harry angrily. "I've a jolly good mind to boot you round the billiards-table!"

The captain looked round at last.

"Is this specially your business, Wharton?" he asked, with a sneer. "I understand that William has you and your friends here to keep a sort of guard over him, but hardly to set up in judgment upon him."

"I should jolly well think not!" exclaimed Bunter hotly. "Mind your own business, Wharton! Who the deuce do you think you are, setting up in judgment on your betters?"

"You fat chump—"

"Yah!"

"Come, come!" said the captain. "Run away and get on with your skating, my lad. William does not want you here."

"No fear!" said Bunter. "Get out, Wharton!"

Wharton's eyes flashed at the young Army man.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" he rapped.

"Wha-a-at?"

"You wouldn't dare to lead that fat fool on like this if Sir Peter was about!" exclaimed Harry scornfully.

Captain Reynham's handsome face became crimson. He gripped his cue as if about to lay it on Wharton hard; and Harry clenched his hands. But Rupert restrained his temper; he gave the junior a bitter look and turned to Bunter.

"Is that how you allow your friends to talk to your cousin, William?" he asked quietly. "I am your guest here."

"No, it jolly well isn't!" roared Bunter. "Get out of it, Wharton! Do you hear? By gum, if you don't clear out I'll ring for a footman to put you out!"

"You fat fool—"

"Shut up and get out!"

Harry Wharton looked at him and looked at the captain; then quietly he turned and left the billiards-room.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Fed-up!

"HALLO, hallo, hallo!"

"My esteemed Wharton—"

"Harry, old man—"

Four juniors in the hall stared at Wharton in surprise as he joined them. His face was pale with anger. He threw down his skates.

"Not coming out?" asked Bob.

"No! I don't know what we'd better do!" Wharton was breathing hard, and his eyes were glinting. "I've a jolly good mind to clear right off this minute—"

"We can't do that, and leave Bunter to it," said Johnny Bull quietly.

"What's happened now?"

Wharton glanced round.

"We've got to talk this over. Come up to the King's Room."

"But what—"

"I can't tell you here—can't tell all the castle!"

"Oh, all right!"

The Co., puzzled, followed the captain of the Remove up to the King's Room. In that magnificent apartment Wharton slammed the door, and then looked into the adjoining bed-room to make sure that no listening ears were about, and shut the communicating door.

His chums waited in silence for him

to speak. They had seldom seen him look so intensely angry.

"Look here, you fellows," said Harry abruptly, "we've got it clear in our minds that Captain Reynham is at the bottom of this kidnapping business. We're all agreed on that?"

"I think so," said Bob slowly. "But there's nothing to go on if you're thinking of that, old chap. We've got proof enough for ourselves; but old Peter would simply snort if we told him that his nephew—"

"Well, look at it," said Harry. "Johnny is certain that the rotter he heard speaking to the Smiler in the fog on Christmas Eve was the captain. He's sure it was his voice, though he didn't see him."

"Quite!" said Johnny Bull.

"We know that we got the Smiler when he got in here by the secret door, and the captain insisted on joining Tomlinson to keep guard over him till morning. We know that the captain gave the detective a cigarette, and that he went to sleep, and the Smiler got away. We jolly well know that it was a drugged cigarette."

"We can't prove it," said Nugent.

"We know that Bunter was twice got hold of by the Smiler when the captain contrived to leave him stranded by himself—"

"Yes, but—"

"We know that that kidnapping gang aren't after Lord Reynham for ransom, or anything of that kind. They started on him when he was a kid of eleven, nearly five years ago. Old Peter only protected him from them all these years by parking him at a school under an assumed name. They've been hunting him ever since. That doesn't mean ransom; that means a special motive—it means, as we all know now, that Lord Reynham is to disappear, and his death to be legally presumed, so that the next heir can step in."

"We know it—at least, we're sure of it!" said Bob. "But—"

"The butfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Since we've found it out," went on Harry, "I've had an eye on Tomlinson. And, having an eye on him, I've got the impression that he has an eye on Captain Reynham. I suspect very strongly that his suspicions are the same as ours."

"Well, he doesn't know what we know; but I suppose a detective would naturally think of the man who stands to gain," said Nugent—"and that's Captain Reynham, of course."

"Well, then," said Harry, "what about putting the whole thing up to Sir Peter Lanchester and leaving it at that and getting out?"

Four heads were shaken together.

"N.G.!" said Johnny Bull. "We know what we know, but old Peter doesn't. He's not going to believe very easily that his nephew is a scheming, plotting scoundrel. Most of it rests on my recognising the captain's voice in the fog, and old Peter would think I'd made a mistake."

"Look here, old chap," said Frank Nugent quietly, "it's no good putting it up to old Peter without proof. You've agreed to that yourself till now. What's made you change your mind?"

Harry Wharton paused.

"Well, I suppose you're right," he said slowly. "But—but I can't stick it any longer with that fat fool. That plotting rascal has changed his tactics now; he's making up to Bunter."

"He can't stand him," said Bob.

"I know he can't; he loathes the sight

of him—and no wonder, if it comes to that! Before we spotted his game we wondered how he could stay on here, with that fat fool insulting him nearly every time he sees him. Well, we know now why he stays on; he's staying on till he lands the fat chump into the clutches of his confederates, thinking that he is Lord Reynham. But he's on a new dodge; he's playing billiards with Bunter now and letting him win, with a fiver on the game."

"Oh, my hat!"

"And Bunter ordered me out!" said Wharton, breathing hard.

"The fat chump!"

"We've promised to see him through; but there's a limit," said the captain of the Remove. "That's the limit. We should have cleared off before—or rather, we should never have come here at all—but for protecting that blithering owl. He spoofed old Peter into believing that he was the kind of chap to take on a risky job—and he got us here to keep off the risks. I don't mind that, but we're not standing his silly cheek—at least, I'm not. We've got to keep the secret. And we can't boot the fat chump all over the castle that's supposed to belong to him. But—"

"We can't go and leave him to it," said Nugent.

"I tell you there's a limit! They can't work that secret door stunt again. It's been screwed up, and the passage behind is blocked. He's got dozens of footmen at his beck and call, and he can have them sleeping round his bed at night, instead of us. I can tell you I'm fed-up!"

"But—"

"Oh, but—but—but—" growled Wharton.

Bob Cherry laughed.

"We didn't expect Bunter to have good manners when we came here, old bean. He's only a silly idiot; but he's really in danger. I think it's up to us to stand it as long as we can. Let's get out of doors."

"You silly ass! You think out of doors is a cure for everything!" grunted Wharton.

"So it is—or nearly," said Bob cheerfully. "We can't stop Bunter blagging in his own jolly old castle. Let the fat frump rip, and blow him! Let's get out—"

"Oh, rats!" growled Wharton.

"I've a jolly good mind to pack my bag, and clear off by the next train!"

"You couldn't please the captain better," said Johnny Bull dryly. "If you want to please that rotter, and leave him a clear field, go ahead!"

There was a pause.

"Oh, let's get out!" said the captain of the Remove, at last. And the Famous Five went out with their skates.

And as they skimmed merrily over the frozen surface of the lake in Reynham Park, the clouds cleared from Wharton's brow. Bob Cherry's usual recipe for trouble was, after all, a good one—out of doors was a cure for a good many worries and troubles. In the sharp, frosty air, skating on the frozen lake, Harry Wharton soon forgot Billy Bunter, and all his works.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Once Too Often!

"GIVE you your revenge!" grinned Billy Bunter.

"You're too good for me, William."

Bunter grinned complacently.



From the interior of the cart a fat figure rose to view and a pair of spectacles gleamed in the light. "I say, you fellows, are we there? You might have woke me up! I say, help me out of this beastly cart!" Captain Reynham gave a violent start as he stared blankly at Billy Bunter.

He was quite willing to believe that he was too good for Rupert Reynham on the billiards-table.

Indeed, there seemed proof of it to Bunter—as he had in his pocket a five-pound note, won at the game from Cousin Rupert.

Sprawling in a deep leather arm-chair in the billiards-room after the game, Bunter was smoking a cigarette, and feeling no end of a man of the world.

He was revising his opinion of Rupert.

Hitherto, he had regarded him as a supercilious, unpleasant beast, who looked at a fellow as if a fellow wasn't there, which was frightful cheek on the part of a poor relation. He had, he flattered himself, given the beast back as good as he gave, too.

Now, however, the captain had turned up a much more agreeable side of his character. There was no trace of superciliousness. There was no hint of dislike or disdain.

Even Bunter did not suppose that the captain had discovered, all of a sudden, what a nice fellow he really was. But he did suppose that Rupert had come to the conclusion that it was worth his while to "grease" up to a rich relation.

Which made Bunter chuckle inwardly, in view of the fact that he was not Rupert's relation at all; and, so far from being Lord Reynham, had never even seen the young lord in his life.

Of that, of course, Bunter was not going to give a hint—friendly as he was getting with the captain.

Bunter was not good at keeping a secret; but he could keep the secret

on which his position at Reynham Castle depended. He was by no means tired of playing the part of a noble lord.

What the captain thought of him was not revealed in his smiling face. His thoughts could not have been flattering; of an egregious young ass, who did not even suspect that he had been allowed to win that fiver on the billiards-table, and who sat smoking a cigarette, when he would immensely have preferred to be sucking a stick of toffee.

"What about a stroll when you've finished your smoke?" asked the captain. "A turn or two on the terrace would—"

"It's cold," said Bunter.

"I'll ring for your coat."

"Oh, all right."

The captain rang. Bunter was arrayed in hat and overcoat by menial hands, being much too aristocratic to put on a coat unaided.

Captain Reynham opened the french windows, and they stepped out on the terrace.

It was carpeted with snow, and Bunter grunted. Fresh air did not appeal to Billy Bunter very strongly. Still, as he had not yet been out that day at all, even the lazy fat Owl was willing to put his fat nose outside for ten minutes or so.

"Shall we walk and meet your friends?" asked the captain. "They will be coming back from the lake, I fancy, by this time."

"It's a jolly long walk," objected Bunter.

"There's a short cut by a corner of the park—under ten minutes."

"Oh, all right!"

They entered the park by a narrow path that ran between thick, frosty trunks. Leafless branches met over their heads, like a network against the steely sky. No snow was falling, but there was a thick carpet of it on the earth, in which the two pairs of foot-prints were clearly imprinted.

Mist hung among the frosty trees. Billy Bunter, on his own, could never have found his way to the lake. But the captain, of course, knew the ways about the park, and Bunter rolled on contentedly by the side of the tall, slim young man.

Captain Reynham paused abruptly, and fixed his eyes on a dusky opening among the trees.

"Did you see someone?" he asked quickly.

"Eh? No!" Bunter blinked round.

"Where?"

"I think he dodged behind that old beech." The captain pointed. "Wait here a minute or two, William. I had better see—"

"I—I say, I—I think I'll be getting back," squeaked Bunter. The mere hint of someone lurking in the park was enough for Bunter. "I say, you come back with me—"

"I think I had better see who it is," said the captain gravely. "Perhaps you had better turn back, though. You must not run risks, William."

On that point, William was in full agreement.

The captain turned off the path under the trees, and William George Bunter revolved on his axis, and started back towards the castle.

It was easy enough for even Bunter

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(Continued from page 13.)

to find the way, as the footprints were deep and clear in the soft snow.

He hurried on, anxious to get out of the park, and in sight of the castle. The captain had disappeared among the trees, and he was alone.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, suddenly coming to a dismayed halt.

He had taken hardly a dozen paces, when a figure leaped from behind a tree by the path, and grasped him by the shoulder.

Bunter's little round eyes almost popped through his spectacles in alarm.

He opened his mouth for a yell, and a hand was clapped over it instantly.

"Quiet!" snarled the Smiler.

"Urrghh!"

The fat junior gurgled under the gripping hand. The captain, and probably the Greyfriars fellows, might have been within hearing. But the Smiler was taking care of that.

Bunter blinked at him in horror.

How the Smiler had happened to be lurking by that particular path, just when he had gone out for a walk with Captain Reynham, he did not guess; but there he was, and Bunter was in his grasp once more.

Swiftly the Smiler knotted a scarf over Bunter's mouth. Then, with a grip of iron on a fat shoulder, he dragged him off the path into the trees.

What happened next was a surprise to the Smiler, as much as to Billy Bunter. A figure appeared with a sudden spring from apparently nowhere, and, before the Smiler knew what was happening, he was grasped, and tipped over headlong.

He went down on his back with a crash and a grunt, Bunter staggering away, blinking in bewilderment.

Like a fellow in a dream, the fat Owl watched Mr. Tomlinson. It was Sir Peter's detective who had appeared so suddenly and unexpectedly from nowhere. He was kneeling on the fallen ruffian, and even as the astonished Smiler began to struggle, his hands were dragged together, and the handcuffs clicked on his wrists.

Mr. Tomlinson rose, a faint grin on his hard face. The Smiler, mad with rage, wrenched furiously at the handcuffs.

"This time," said Mr. Tomlinson cheerfully, "I think you will not get away. Not this time. It was once too often, my man!"

Billy Bunter dragged the scarf from his mouth. He gasped for breath, and ejaculated:

"Oh crikey!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

With the Handcuffs On!

"**B**ALLO, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Great pip!"

"The jolly old Smiler!"

The Famous Five were coming back
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from the lake, their skates swinging on their arms, when they spotted the group in the stone porch. They broke into a run at once, and arrived breathless.

"Tomlinson's got him!" gasped Nugent.

"The gotfulness is terrific!"

"Hurrah!" chortled Bob.

Mr. Tomlinson glanced at the Famous Five and smiled faintly. His usually expressionless face betrayed his elation at his success.

The Smiler stood there—handcuffs on his wrists, rage in his face, and the detective's hand on his arm. Sir Peter Lauchester stood rubbing his hands with great satisfaction. A dozen servants looked on. Billy Bunter was gasping for breath.

The detective had walked his prisoner back to the castle at a good speed—and Bunter had had to put on pace to keep up.

"Excellent—excellent!" Sir Peter was saying as the juniors arrived. "My dear Tomlinson, excellent! Take care that he does not escape again!"

"I shall not go to sleep again, sir, while this man is in my charge!" said Mr. Tomlinson very dryly. "I shall take remarkably good care of that!"

Harry Wharton & Co. exchanged a quick, involuntary look.

To their ears, there was a significance in the detective's tone that was lost on the old baronet. They wondered whether he suspected—as they strongly did—that he had been drugged the night the Smiler had escaped after his capture in the haunted room.

"I say, you fellows, he's got that beast!" squeaked Billy Bunter. "I say, he had me—collared me in the park—"

"You went into the park alone, fat-head?" asked Bob.

"No fear—I went with Captain Reynham—"

"Oh!" exclaimed all the five together.

They were not surprised that the Smiler had been on hand, in that case.

"Only the captain saw somebody dodging among the trees, and I started back," explained Bunter. "This beast got me only two or three minutes after I'd left the captain, see?"

"I—I see!" gasped Bob.

"The scfulness is terrific!" murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

All the Famous Five "saw"—much more clearly than Bunter did. They suspected that Mr. Tomlinson "saw" also.

"Then Tomlinson popped up!" grinned Bunter. "I had no idea he was there—and that beast hadn't, either—"

"How very, very fortunate!" exclaimed Sir Peter, rubbing his hands. "We have the scoundrel at last. This is the same man—"

"The Smiler!" grinned Bunter. "He ain't smiling now— He, he, he!"

"My dear Tomlinson, this is splendid!" exclaimed Sir Peter. "I congratulate you, Tomlinson! How did you happen to be on the spot? It was remarkably fortunate, but how did it happen?"

"It did not 'happen,' sir!" answered Mr. Tomlinson, in the same dry tone. "As his—hem—lordship went for a walk in the park, I considered it my duty to keep him in sight—without getting in sight myself. That is all."

"Oh, quite!" said Sir Peter, perplexed. "But as he was in company with my nephew—"

"I thought it possible, sir, that they might happen to part company, in

which case his lordship might be in danger, sir."

Again the Famous Five exchanged a quick look. This remarkable foresight on the part of Mr. Tomlinson indicated only one thing to their minds—that his suspicions took the same line as their own.

"Well, well, it appears that you were right, as it actually occurred," said Sir Peter. "Possibly one of the rascals allowed my nephew to see him, to draw him away from William—from what William says. He may have caught the other—we must hope so. At all events, we have this scoundrel!"

"We have him, at all events, sir," assented Mr. Tomlinson. "If you will order a car, Sir Peter, I will take him directly to the police station at Castlewood. The sooner he is under lock and key the better."

"Oh, certainly! Ah, here comes my nephew!" exclaimed Sir Peter Lauchester, as Captain Reynham came in sight, approaching from the direction of the park at a rapid run.

Harry Wharton & Co. watched him curiously as he came. That he had led the fat Owl into a trap, and that he had believed that Bunter was still in the trap until he sighted the group before the porch, they had no doubt whatever.

The Smiler's eyes turned on him, as he came up, panting for breath.

Captain Reynham looked at him, at the detective, at Sir Peter, and at the juniors, in turn. The juniors did not fail to note that Mr. Tomlinson's eyes were fixed very keenly and curiously on the captain's flushed face.

"You—you—you have—" Captain Reynham stammered. "What has happened—who-what—"

"You know this man Rupert," said Sir Peter. "It is the same scoundrel who was caught in the King's Room a few days ago and escaped—"

"Oh! Yes! Now—now you say so. I seem to recognise him!" gasped the captain. "But what—how—"

"He seems to have been lurking in the park, and he seized upon William when you left him," said Sir Peter. "You did not find the other?"

"The—the other?"

"William says that you left him to look for some man you saw among the trees—"

"Oh! Yes! He—he dodged me in the park," stammered the captain. "One—one of this rascal's associates, I have no doubt."

Harry Wharton & Co. stood silent. Knowing what they knew, they could guess the terror and dismay under which Rupert Reynham was struggling at that moment.

The Smiler, his right-hand man in the kidnapping scheme, was a prisoner again—he had not only failed once more, but he stood in the detective's grip with the handcuffs on.

They wondered whether Rupert was in dread of the rascal telling what he knew! The Smiler was, at all events, banking on his secret confederate to save him, as he had saved him before. His eyes were fixed on the captain, with an expression that the juniors understood.

"Tomlinson, fortunately, was on the watch!" said Sir Peter, with intense satisfaction, which he had no doubt his nephew shared. "The scoundrel is a prisoner again. This time—"

"This time we must make su. of him," said the captain. He was recovering his coolness. "Let him be taken into the house and the police telephoned for—"

Bob Cherry winked at his comrades. The juniors were wondering what move the captain was going to make with a view to getting a chance of releasing his confederate. This was it!

"Tomlinson is going to take him directly to the police station, Rupert," answered Sir Peter.

"Is that safe?" asked the captain. "The man has confederates—there might be an attempt at a rescue, and it is a lonely road. Surely it would be wiser to keep him here and send for the police."

"Perhaps so," assented the baronet. "Yes, perhaps you are right, Rupert. The rascally gang might resort to desperate measures, for all we know."

"I think, sir, that I can undertake to place the man safely in official hands!" said Mr. Tomlinson.

"Well, perhaps—" The baronet paused, looking from the detective to his nephew and back again. "No doubt—"

"With your permission, Sir Peter, I will convey this rascal to the police station at once," said Mr. Tomlinson dryly.

"One moment!" cut in the captain. "I do not want to rub it in, Tomlinson, but the last time this man was in your hands, he escaped. I think it very unwise, uncle, to run the same risk again."

Mr. Tomlinson flushed faintly.

"He will not escape this time!" he said briefly.

"I should be glad to be assured of that!" said Captain Reynham. "Please do let the man be kept here till the police can take him away, uncle. It is much the safer plan."

"Well, if you think so, Rupert—"

"I do most decidedly."

"Really, sir—" said Mr. Tomlinson, biting his lip.

"After all, Tomlinson, it is certainly the fact that the man escaped the last time he was in your hands," said Sir Peter. "Let him be taken into the gun-room; and I will telephone at once for the police."

"But, sir—"

"Please do as I say, Mr. Tomlinson!" said Sir Peter Lanchester, with a strong hint of command in his voice.

Mr. Tomlinson compressed his lips.

"Very well, sir; it is for you to give orders here!" he said.

And he led the handcuffed rascal into the building, and all the spectators of the curious scene followed.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton & Co. Take a Hand!

"LEAVE him to me!" said Captain Reynham.

The Smiler stood in the gun-room, scowling, the handcuffs on his wrists. Mr. Tomlinson stood quite close to him—watchful as a cat. Harry Wharton & Co. looked in at the doorway.

Sir Peter Lanchester had gone to the telephone, and was already ringing up the police station at Castlewood. In half an hour, probably, a police-car would be at the castle, with constables to take charge of the kidnapper.

That half-hour was all the Smiler had—and all his secret confederate had. Once he was taken away in official hands, his confederate could do nothing to save him—and could only hope that the prospect of an ultimate share in the plunder would keep him silent.

The juniors could not help wondering, with keen interest, what steps Rupert

Reynham would take this time. On the previous occasion, it had been late at night, and he had, as the juniors believed, succeeded in planting a drugged cigarette on the detective. Mr. Tomlinson, at all events, had gone to sleep on the watch, and the Smiler had escaped.

The captain's problem was not so easy now. And Harry Wharton & Co. had made up their minds that, whatever measures he might take, those measures were going to be defeated.

To the schoolboys, the captain paid no heed. It was the detective with whom he had to deal.

"Leave him to me!" repeated the captain. "I think, Tomlinson, that you are losing time—the man I saw in the park is undoubtedly a confederate of this scoundrel—you may get him yet, if you lose no time—"

"I have little hope of it, sir," said Mr. Tomlinson dryly, "and I certainly prefer not to leave my prisoner. Please share my watch if you so desire."

Sir Peter Lanchester came in from the hall. The old gentleman was rubbing his hands with gleeful satisfaction.

"The police will be here soon, very soon!" he said. "We must take care that the scoundrel does not escape this time."

"I shall take care of that, sir!" said Mr. Tomlinson.

"I was suggesting, uncle, that the man should be left to my care," said the captain. "There is another of the gang lurking in the park, or was a short time since, and it may not be too late for Mr. Tomlinson to secure him."

"Excellent!" exclaimed Sir Peter, at once. "I will accompany you, Tomlinson—let us go at once. You will not leave the rascal alone for one moment, Rupert, till the police are here?"

"Not for a second!" said the captain. "Rely on that."

Mr. Tomlinson drew a deep, deep breath.

"Sir Peter Lanchester, I prefer to remain in charge of my prisoner!" he said very distinctly.

"He will be quite safe in my nephew's hands, Tomlinson," said Sir Peter, staring at him.

"I will undertake not to go to sleep!" said the captain, in a sarcastic tone. "Rely upon me for that."

"Come, Tomlinson!" said Sir Peter, rather sharply.

To the juniors in the doorway, Tomlinson's face was an interesting study at that moment. His unwillingness to leave his prisoner in Rupert's hands had, to their minds, only one meaning—he distrusted the captain. But if that was the case, he certainly could not state what he thought to the captain's uncle.

He was in an extremely difficult position; for if there was, as the captain stated, another of the gang lurking in the park, it was up to the detective to get after him, if he could.

"Come!" repeated Sir Peter. "I am waiting, Tomlinson! You are losing time—losing, perhaps, another prisoner!"

There was no help for the hapless detective. He could not speak out; and he was under orders at Reynham Castle.

"Very well, sir!" he almost gasped. "Perhaps these young gentlemen would like to remain here till the police come!" he added, like a man catching at a straw.

"Thank you—I do not desire the help of schoolboys in taking care of a handcuffed man!" said the captain.

"We're quite willing—" began Bob Cherry.

"Nonsense!" said the captain.

"Please do not butt into matters that do not concern you, my boy!"

Mr. Tomlinson's face did not express his feelings—but the juniors could guess that they were deep, as he followed the baronet from the gun-room.

Harry Wharton & Co. lingered at the doorway, and the captain calmly shut the door in their faces. The key turned inside—perhaps as an additional precaution against the escape of the prisoner—more probably, in the opinion of the Co. to leave the captain uninterrupted while he devised ways and means for releasing the prisoner, while concealing his own part in the release.

The Famous Five walked back into the hall.

"Well," said Bob, "this is a go!"

Harry Wharton set his lips. Looking out of the doorway, he could see the unhappy Mr. Tomlinson going into the park with Sir Peter—the old baronet quick and eager, the detective lagging.

"That villain's not getting by with this, you fellows!" said the captain of the Remove, in a low voice.

Johnny Bull grunted.

"He's got by!" he answered. "It's the same game as before—that kidnapper will get out of the same window! The spoofing rotter will make out that he got loose somehow, and knocked him down with a chair or something—anyhow, the man will be gone when the bobbies get here. That's the game."

"That's the game," agreed Harry, "and it's a game that we're going to put paid to!"

"How?" asked Nugent.

"The Smiler can't be let out by the door—running the gauntlet of a dozen servants—the captain's got to keep up appearances. It's the window, or nothing. That window looks over a shrubbery—"

"Just what he wants!" said Bob.

"Plenty of cover—"

"And just what we want!" said Harry. "We're going to stick in that shrubbery, and watch that window till the police get here!"

"Oh!"

"I say, you fellows!" Billy Bunter rolled over to the Famous Five. "I say, what about tea?"

"We're going out—"

"Silly asses—I'm going to tea!" And Bunter went.

Harry Wharton & Co. went out. They strolled casually along the terrace, and then quietly made their way to the shrubbery under the gun-room window.

There was, as Bob had said, plenty of cover; thick banks of evergreens, loaded with snow.

Keeping in cover of the evergreens, the Famous Five approached the gun-room window, as near as they could, without revealing themselves to watchful eyes within.

Then they waited.

It was not likely to be a long wait. The kidnapper and his confederate had no time to lose.

They had no doubt that the captain was already releasing the Smiler from the handcuffs. What story he would tell, when he had to account for the prisoner being gone, they could not guess, but they had no doubt that he would invent some plausible explanation. In the position in which he now found himself, the schemer had to take risks, and there was little or no doubt that he would take them.

"Hark!" whispered Bob suddenly.

There was a sound of a casement cautiously opening. It was followed by the "plop" of foot landing in the snow.

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A second later, the evergreens were shaking, as a figure plunged into their cover, to escape observation from other windows.

The Smiler, most assuredly, never dreamed that those evergreens were already populated.

He made that discovery suddenly and unexpectedly as unseen figures suddenly pounced on him and bore him to the ground.

The Smiler gave a startled gasp, and struggled. He fought almost like a wildcat. But every one of the Famous Five had hold of him, and he was pinned down helplessly. His eyes fairly burned with rage, as he glared up at the Greyfriars fellows.

Bob Cherry gave him a cheery grin in reply to his savage glare.

"Waiting for you, old bean!" he said. "It's jolly cold here—much obliged for not keeping us waiting long."

"The obligefulness is terrific, my esteemed and execrable Smiler!" chuckled Hurree Jamsat Ram Singh.

The Smiler, with gritting teeth, wrenched and wrenched. But he wrenched in vain; the Famous Five had him, and they kept him. The handcuffs were gone—but Bob Cherry produced a whipcord from his pocket, winding it round the thick wrists, and knotting it again and again. The Smiler, panting with rage, lay a helpless prisoner.

"Now sit on him!" said Bob cheerily. "We've got him, and we're keeping him till the bobbies come! Sit on him till we hear the car!"

The Smiler spat out furious curses. He ceased to do so as Bob crammed a handful of snow into his mouth. After that he lay, in savage, vindictive silence, while the juniors listened for the sound of the police car from Castlewood.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Not Gone!

INSPECTOR SHUTE, of Castlewood, stepped from the car as it stopped at the castle door.

A constable followed him up the steps, where Jasmond let them in. The butler led them directly to the door of the gun-room.

He tapped on that door, and turned the handle.

The door did not open.

Jasmond knocked again, and called: "Please open the door, sir! Inspector Shute from Castlewood!"

There was no reply from within.

"The prisoner is there?" rapped Mr. Shute.

"Yes, sir," said the perplexed butler. "Captain Reynham remained in charge of him, and he appears to have locked the door. It is very odd that he does not answer."

"Very odd indeed!" rapped Mr. Shute. He knocked sharply on the door with his knuckles. "Captain Reynham! Please open this door!"

There was no reply, but from within a sound was heard, as of someone struggling.

The inspector knitted his brows.

"Something is wrong here!" he rapped. "Captain Reynham! Will you answer? Can you answer?"

"Here is the master!" said Jasmond.

Sir Peter Lanchester came in, a little breathless. He was followed by Mr. Tomlinson.

"What is it?" asked Sir Peter.

"What—"

"I understood from you, sir, on the telephone that the man called the Smiler had been secured, and that I was desired

to take him into custody!" rapped the inspector. But—

"That is the case," said Sir Peter. "My nephew is guarding him till your arrival. He is in this room. Why—what—?" Sir Peter turned the door-handle, and knocked. "Rupert! Open this door, Rupert! What has happened?"

There was a sound again from within, but no reply, and the door did not open. Mr. Tomlinson set his lips hard.

"Something has happened!" exclaimed the old baronet in an agitated voice. My nephew—alone with that ruffian—Rupert! Rupert!"

"The man was handcuffed!" said Mr. Tomlinson, between his set lips. "The man was quite powerless."

Inspector Shute stared at him.

"This does not look like it!" he rapped. "This door must be forced!"

"Jasmond!" exclaimed Sir Peter. "James! Thomas! Francis! Lose no time! Force this door at once! Good gad! What may have happened to my nephew? Yet the ruffian was handcuffed; he appeared perfectly safe!"

There was a swift hammering and clanging on the lock of the gun-room door. In a very few minutes it was forced open.

Sir Peter hurried in the moment it was open, with deep and intense anxiety in his face. Inspector Shute stepped in swiftly after him, Mr. Tomlinson following, his lips hard set.

The casement stood open. The Smiler was gone. On the floor lay Captain Reynham, bound hand and foot and gagged. He was struggling with his bonds.

"Rupert!" gasped Sir Peter.

Inspector Shute stooped over the bound man and quickly removed the gag—a twisted handkerchief—from his mouth.

The captain gasped for breath.

His hands and ankles were tied with a cord snapped from the curtains. In a few seconds the inspector had released him.

"Rupert! What has happened here?" exclaimed Sir Peter. "The man—has he escaped?"

"I fear so, uncle!" gasped the captain. "I am sorry—truly sorry, but I think I can say that it was not my fault! I had no doubt—no doubt whatever—that he was secure!"

"He was handcuffed!" grunted Mr. Tomlinson.

"So I supposed!" snapped the captain. "But your handcuffs, Mr. Tomlinson, can hardly have been secure. The man, at all events, succeeded in releasing his hands. Either the handcuffs were not securely locked, or else he was able to slip his hands out of them."

"They were securely locked!" said Mr. Tomlinson grimly.

"He got his hands free, at all events! Believing him to be secure, I was looking from the window when I was suddenly struck down from behind!" snapped the captain. "I was dazed by the blow—almost stunned—and could make no resistance while he made me a prisoner, as you found me. I have been struggling to get loose and cry out ever since, but—"

"The man is gone!" grunted the inspector.

"He escaped by the window while I lay helpless," said Rupert. "I am more sorry than I can say, uncle; but—"

"Thank goodness it is no worse, Rupert!" said Sir Peter. "You might have been severely injured, as the man was not, after all, secure! Really, Mr. Tomlinson, I trusted you—"

Mr. Tomlinson's thin lips shut harder, but he made no rejoinder.

The Castlewood inspector glanced at him—a grim glance. That glance told very plainly what Inspector Shute thought of private detectives.

"Well, the man is gone!" grunted the inspector again. "We have come here for nothing! How long since, Captain Reynham?"

"About twenty minutes."

"We may pick up his track in the snow. There may be a chance yet," said Mr. Shute. "I shall lose no more time, at all events."

He hurried back into the hall, followed by the constable.

As he strode towards the door he suddenly stopped, with a gasp.

Five juniors were coming in, and in their midst they led a man with his hands tied behind him.

Inspector Shute blinked at them. The constable blinked. Jasmond and a dozen footmen blinked.

"Who—who is this?" gasped Mr. Shute.

"The man you want, sir!" said Harry Wharton.

"The jolly old Smiler," chuckled Bob Cherry—"not at the moment smiling, but the genuine Smiler, sir!"

"The smilefulness is not terrific, but it is the esteemed and execrable Smiler!" grinned Hurree Jamet Ram Singh.

"You—you boys—you stopped him?" gasped the inspector.

"We did, sir!" said Johnny Bull. "We thought you'd like to find him here when you came! Here he is!"

"Here he is, as large as life!" said Frank Nugent.

The Smiler stood, silent and scowling. His game was up now with a vengeance.

Mr. Shute, grinning with satisfaction, clapped the handcuffs on his wrists.

"What—?" came Sir Peter's voice.

He came out of the gun-room, followed by Mr. Tomlinson and Captain Reynham.

The captain's face whitened at the sight of the Smiler. He stood gazing at him, transfixed.

Mr. Tomlinson's face lighted up.

"This is the man!" he exclaimed.

"This is the man, Mr. Shute!" said Sir Peter.

Mr. Tomlinson glanced at the smiling faces of the Famous Five. He smiled himself. The corner of his eye was on Rupert Reynham's white face.

"But how—?" exclaimed Sir Peter. "Is it possible that you boys saw the rascal escaping and stopped him?"

"Just that, sir!" said Harry. "As he got away last time, sir, we rather thought he might get away again, so we parked ourselves in the shrubbery under the gun-room window and watched for him."

"And he walked right into our hands, sir!" said Bob. "Very obliging chap!"

Mr. Tomlinson shot a swift, penetrating look at the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

"This is excellent!" said Mr. Shute. "These boys have been very useful, sir; they deserve great praise! We have the man. I shall take him into custody on your charge. I must warn you, my man, that anything you may say will be taken down, and may be used in evidence!"

The Smiler said nothing.

He stood silent, scowling, his eyes lingering on the face of Rupert Reynham.

"Before you take him away, inspector," said Sir Peter, "I wish to put a question to the man."

"He is not bound to answer," said Mr. Shute.

SING, BOYS, SING these—



Specially Written for College Carol Parties by HAROLD SKINNER.

You All Know This One

Good old Quelchy once looked out
On the Feast of Yuletide,
While his class sat round about,
Fed with beastly school-time!
Brightly shone the fire that night,
Though the cane was cruel,
When a porpoise came in sight,
Singing to the schoo-oo-el!

"Hither, Wharton, stand by me!
If thou know'st it telling,
Yonder person, who is he?
What is that he's yelling?"
"Sire, we know him!" Wharton
grinned.
"He's a human barrel,
Trying now to raise the wind
With a Christmas carol!"

"Bring my cane, and bring it well,
Bring my birch-rod hither!
I will teach him how to yell
When I journey thither!"
Quelch and Wharton forth they went,
Forth they went together,
Through the fat boy's wild lament,
And the wintry wea-ea-ther!

Hark, the song grows fainter now,
Bunter's sight grows stronger!

Fails his heart, he knows not how,
He can sing no longer!
But Good Greyfriars men be sure
He will soon be starting
Quite a different kind of roar
If he's slow depar-ar-ting!

Merry Christmas Bells

A very old carol with modern improvements.

Oh, how we hate the rising-bell,
It's never late, and who can tell
The agonies we have to bear
When rising in the wintry air?
But—ring the merry, merry, merry
Christmas Bells,
Yes, ring 'em till the echo roars!
While their happy music on the breezes
swells
We'll join our merry, merry snores!

Oh, dismal din—the classes bell!
We trickle in, and know full well
We'll soon be getting Quelchy's cane
And shrieking like a parrot in pain!
But—ring the merry, merry, merry
Christmas Bells,
Yes, ring 'em till the welkin blinks!
While their happy music on the breezes
swells
We'll have another forty winks!

"Oh, quite, quite! My man," said Sir Peter, fixing his eyes on the sullen, scowling face, "you are now in the hands of the law. It is perfectly well known here that you have some confederate in this household who has helped you in your dastardly attempts to kidnap Lord Reynham. Will you give his name to Inspector Shute?"

Captain Reynham pulled himself together.

"The man is hardly likely to do that," he said. "I have no doubt that he still expects assistance from his confederate, and that he feels that he can rely on him to give any help he can in the present circumstances."

"Possibly, possibly," said Sir Peter. "But now that he is faced with a long term of imprisonment—"

"There are many ways in which his confederate can still assist him, though not in the way of regaining his liberty," said the captain. "Such as secretly paying lawyers for his defence, and helping him when he comes out after serving his sentence."

"Really, Rupert, you are encouraging the man to keep silent by such remarks!" exclaimed the old baronet testily. "Pray say no more! Now, my man—"

"I ain't saying nothing!" said the Smiler stolidly, breaking silence for the first time.

"Rascal!" exclaimed Sir Peter indignantly. "A member of my household is in collusion with you—some servant that I have trusted! Now that you are in the hands of justice—"

"You can sort over your servants

It makes us sad—the assembly bell,
To some poor lad it means a knell,
For on the platform in Big Hall
His pride will have a terrible fall!
But—ring the old etcetera Christmas
Bells,

Yes, ring 'em till they all turn red!
However much their music on the
breezes swells
They'll never get us out of bed!

The Mistletoe Bough

This famous carol, all about Lord Lovel's Bride, is all about Mr. Bunter's Son for a change.

The Doctor stood in the college Hall.
"Be silent there!" they heard him call.
"Last night in bed, beneath the sheet,
I found—and with my naked feet—
A hidden Mistletoe Bough!"

And when the chuckles died away,
The Reverend Head went on to say,
"The culprit will be brought to book,
I hear a certain junior took
This spreading Mistletoe Bough!"

"That boy, named Bunter, will stand
out,
And tell me why he stole about
Beneath my bed-room window, and
Why he was holding in his hand
A certain Mistletoe Bough?"

"Oh, really, sir!"—in tones of woe,
"I'm so short-sighted, as you know,
It was an absolute mistake,
I really never meant to take
That beastly Mistletoe Bough!"

"You see, I put it there instead
Of holly, sir, inside your bed!
For I was certain I had got
A bough of holly, sir, and not
That rotten Mistletoe Bough!"

At this, the Doctor's features took
An extraordinary look.
"Bend over, boy!"—his birch-rod gone,
He cast a frantic eye upon
That hefty Mistletoe Bough!

And when the grisly scene was done,
Said Bunter: "It's not everyone,
Who can declare with truthful eye
That they've been firmly walloped by
A stinging Mistletoe Bough!"

Christmas Is Coming

Christmas is coming, and Gosling's get-
ting fat,
If you put a penny in the poor man's
hat,
He'll give you a look that is terrible
and grim,
Nothing less than half-a-quid will do
for him!

yourself, and find the man, old feller!" said the Smiler.

"That is an admission, at least, that it is one of the menservants!" said Captain Reynham.

"Yes, yes; no doubt, no doubt! Mr. Shute, I leave this scoundrel to you."

The Smiler was left in safe hands. Sitting in the car between Inspector Shute and a constable, with the handcuffs on his wrists, the Smiler was booked. Sir Peter Lanchester's ward was relieved of one, at least, of his enemies; and relieved of him for good!

But Rupert Reynham gave no hint of what he was thinking. His face bore a cheerful expression, and only the chums and perhaps Mr. Tomlinson—detected a trace of strain in his bearing.

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THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Something Like a Shindy!

"**G**REAT pip!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

It was the following morning. The Famous Five had been up, and out, for some hours before Lord Bunter thought of stirring—as usual!

Now they had come in again, and Bob Cherry had come up to the King's Room to see whether Bunter was up, and to lend a friendly hand at rolling him out of bed if he wasn't up.

Bunter was up! He had had breakfast—more than one; and turned out of bed. He was not dressed yet; but he was sitting in the King's Room, enveloped in a voluminous dressing-gown. With him sat Captain Reynham. Both of them were smoking cigarettes.

Bob Cherry stared at them. A few days ago it would have surprised him to see the captain on pally terms with the fat Owl. But the Famous Five were aware that Rupert had changed his tactics towards his supposed cousin. He was on the very best terms with Bunter now.

If he hoped that it would lead to the fat junior taking another walk in the park, he was disappointed. Bunter had not stirred out of sight of the castle since the Smiler had grabbed him in the park.

Certainly, it had not occurred to his fat mind that Rupert Reynham had led him into a trap on that occasion. But he was not taking any chances.

In view of the new state of affairs, Bob was not surprised to see the captain in the King's Room with Bunter. But he was surprised to see how the two were occupied.

They were sitting at a card-table: the fat, untidy Owl sprawling in his dressing-gown; the captain handsome and fastidiously dressed, as usual. Cards were on the table, and little heaps of half-crowns, and a small pile of currency notes. That was how Bunter was spending his morning!

He blinked round at Bob through his big spectacles.

"Don't come in!" he said.

"What?" gasped Bob.

"I'm busy! Don't interrupt the game! Go out and skate, or something—anyhow, don't worry!" said Lord Bunter.

"You fat, frowsy, frabjous, fozzling frump!" roared Bob.

Captain Reynham glanced at him. There was a faint flush in his cheeks. The fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove regarded this sort of thing as "sporting," and was quite satisfied with himself and his companion. But Rupert was no fool, and, utterly unscrupulous as he was, he winced at the disgust and scorn in Bob's ruddy, honest face.

He had his own game to play, and he was playing it by any method that came to hand. The fatuous folly of the fat Owl gave him an opportunity; and he was using it without scruple. But he flinched under Bob's eyes.

"You rotter!" exclaimed Bob. He was speaking, not to Bunter, but to the captain. "You rotten rascal!"

Rupert's eyes glittered at him.

"Are you speakin' to me?" he drawled.

"You know I am! Look here, stop that!" roared Bob. "You rotten rascal, leading that fat fool on to gamble! You ought to be booted!"

The captain's face flushed, and then whitened.

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Billy Bunter became as red as an enraged turkey-cock.

"You cheeky fathead!" he roared. "Get out! Shut up! By gum, if you think I'm going to stand manners of that sort in my castle, Bob Cherry—"

"You fat idiot!"

"You cheeky beast!"

"Stop that at once!" roared Bob.

"You silly chump!" howled Bunter. "Can't I do as I like in my own house? If you don't like it, clear off! Who wants you here, I'd like to know?"

"You do, you fat rascal! You're afraid of a shadow, if you haven't got somebody to protect you!" roared Bob savagely.

"Yah!"

Bob Cherry strode into the room, his eyes blazing. He strode straight at the card-table, and kicked it.

The table flew. Cards and coins and currency notes showered over the polished oak floor of the King's Room.

Captain Reynham sprang to his feet with a gasp of rage. Billy Bunter blinked in speechless wrath through his big spectacles.

"You impudent young cad!" roared the captain. "William, shall I throw that young hooligan out?"

"Yes, rather!" gasped Bunter. "Kick him out! Cheeky rotter! Sponging on a fellow, and kicking up a shindy! Chuck him out, Rupert!"

"Hands off, you blackguard!" roared Bob.

But the captain's angry grasp was on him the next moment.

Bob Cherry, with flashing eyes, hit out.

Bob was a hard hitter. Rupert staggered under the blow. But he grasped the junior, and whirled him towards the door.

Strong as he was, sturdy, and full of pluck, Bob was no match for a grown man. But he resisted every inch of the way.

A chair went crashing—a table rocked. Billy Bunter, spluttering with wrath, blinked on, through his big spectacles.

There was a pattering of feet in the corridor without. The other members of the Co. coming up after Bob, heard the din, and hurried on to see what was the matter.

They stared into the King's Room in amazement at the sight of Bob Cherry struggling in the grasp of Rupert Reynham.

"Bob!" gasped Wharton.

"My esteemed Bob—"

"Lend a fellow a hand!" panted Bob. "The brute's too big for me! Will you lend a fellow a hand?"

"I say, you fellows, you keep out!" squeaked Billy Bunter. "I don't want you here! Rupert's chucking that cheeky cad out by my orders! Look what he's done to my card-table!"

Harry Wharton & Co. did not heed Bunter. They rushed at the captain together, grasped him, and dragged him away from Bob.

Rupert Reynham went sprawling and gasping on the floor. Bob Cherry stood panting.

"But what—what—" gasped Nugent.

"Can't you see?" snapped Bob. He pointed to the scattered cards and money on the floor. "Look!"

"None of your business!" howled Bunter. "Pretty state of affairs, I think, if a chap can't do as he likes in his own castle!"

"Shut up, you fat fool!"

"Beast!"

Rupert staggered to his feet. His

immaculate clothes were considerably dishevelled, by the struggle, and he panted for breath. He made a stride towards Bob Cherry, and the Co. closed round their chum at once.

"Get out!" said Harry Wharton tersely.

"You cheeky cub—"

"Get out, or you'll be thrown out!" said the captain of the Greyfriars Remove.

"Look here, Wharton, you cheeky ass—" squealed Bunter.

"Shut up, Bunter!"

"Shan't!" roared the indignant fat Owl. "Look here! If you can't be civil, I won't have you staying in my castle, so there!"

"Kick him!" said Harry.

"Yaroooh!"

"Now, Captain Reynham, get out!" said Wharton. "You can go out on your feet, or on your neck, whichever you prefer! Sharp's the word!"

"You cub—"

"That's enough! Are you going?"

"I say, you fellows—"

"Shut up, you bloated blitherer!"

"You cheeky beasts—"

"Kick him again, Johnny!"

"Yow-ow-wooop!"

"Now chuck that cad out, you men!" said Harry, as the captain stood panting and glowering.

But Rupert Reynham backed to the door. He had handled Bob, but the Famous Five together could have handled him easily, and it was clear that they were going to do it. He breathed rage as he backed.

"Sir Peter will hear of this!" he panted.

"Would you like Sir Peter to hear of that, too?" asked Harry Wharton, scornfully, pointing to the scattered cards and money on the floor. "You cut, your uncle would kick you out of the place himself, if he knew! You don't dare to let him know! Get out! You make me sick!"

And the captain stepped out of the King's Room, and Wharton slammed the door after him.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Bath for Bunter!

BILLY BUNTER glared at the Famous Five with a glare that might have cracked his spectacles. The fat Owl was spluttering with rage.

"You—you—you cheeky cads!" he gasped. "You—you cheeky rotters! You—you cads! You—you swabs! I'm fed-up with you! Meddling in a fellow's business, you—you—you cheeky rotters—"

Bunter gasped for breath.

"Shut up!" said Johnny Bull, in a deep growl.

"Shan't!" roared Bunter. "Get out, the lot of you! I've been kind to you fellows—taking you up, and asking you to my castle for Christmas, and all that—and this is how you repay my generosity!"

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him. Bunter waved a fat hand at them.

"Just get out!" he said. "I don't want you here! I never wanted you, if you come to that! You make out that you came here to protect me! Yah! I'm not a fellow to want protecting, I hope!"

"Well, my hat!" said Bob.

"I've been kind to you, and you're ungrateful—just as ungrateful here as you are at Greyfriars," continued Bunter scornfully. "I've given you a

splendid time in my castle! After all that, you can't even be civil! Well, I'm done with you!"

The Famous Five stood looking at him.

"You make out that I want you here," went on Bunter. "Well, I don't! I'm all right now! I mean, I'm not afraid of a little danger! They've got that beast Smiler—he's safe in prison! They've screwed up that secret door; nobody can get at me here now. I'm pretty sick of having you fellows about, making out that you're protecting me! If I want any protection—which I don't—I've got a friend here, see?"

"A friend?" repeated Wharton. "Who?"

"My Cousin Rupert!" said Bunter, with dignity. "He's offered to sleep in the dressing-room next to my bed-room, if I like, instead of having all you fellows camped round my bed. You've been a lot of trouble and nuisance camped in my room—"

"You fat villain!" shrieked Bob. "You made us camp in your room to protect you, you fat funky freak!"

"Did I?" sneered Bunter. "Well, I don't want you there, I can tell you. In fact, I won't have you! If you fellows want to stay on here we've got to come to an understanding. You've got to behave yourselves, and kick up no more rows, and you've got to be civil to Rupert. I shall expect you to apologise to Rupert—"

"You fat idiot!"

"I shall insist on that," said Bunter firmly. "Otherwise—I'd better put it plain—I expect you to go. You've barged in here, sticking on to a chap because he knows you at school. It's a bit thick, I must say, that! But I've been pretty decent to you. This is how you repay me!"

"I suppose," said Johnny Bull thoughtfully, "that he would burst all over the castle if I punched him."

"Yah!"

Harry Wharton drew a deep, deep breath.

"This does it!" he said. "Bunter will have to take his chance. We're getting out of this."

"I know I am!" said Johnny Bull grimly.

The Co. all nodded assent to that. They had come to Reynham Castle, at the fat Owl's urgent and almost frantic request, to protect him from the kidnapers. Clearly Bunter believed that he was safe now.

The most determined and dangerous of the gang, the Smiler, was under lock and key. The secret passage into the King's Room had been discovered and blocked up, and Captain Reynham had undertaken the role of protector.

The schemer's game was to get rid of the schoolboys, who had hitherto protected the supposed Lord Reynham. His fat lordship was playing the schemer's game for him.

"Go as soon as you like," sneered Bunter. "The sooner the better! My kindness has been repaid with ingratitude! Go back to your poor little homes! I can jolly well tell you, I don't want you here!"

"You think you will be safe with Rupert Reynham on hand?" asked Harry, with a curious look at the fat Owl.

"You think he will protect you?" grinned Bob.

"I don't want any protection that I know of," answered Lord Bunter loftily. "I hope I can protect myself. I'm not a fellow to funk a little danger, like some fellows I could name. Still, if I wanted any help, I jolly well know that

Rupert would be more useful than a lot of silly schoolboys."

"Oh, my hat!"

"Your manners have been rotten all along," went on Bunter. "I've stood it! I asked you here, meaning to give you a good time, and I've put up with your rotten manners; but there's a limit. You can't expect me to stand this sort of thing, barging into my apartments like a mob of hooligans, when I'm playing a quiet game of poker with a friend. It simply won't do. You fellows aren't accustomed to expensive places and good society. I am. You'd better go."

"We're going, you fat fool!" said Harry. "But—"

Bunter waved a fat hand.

"That's enough!" he said. "Pack and go! You can stay to lunch if you like. I shall expect you to catch a train this afternoon. After kicking up such a shindy, you can't expect anything else. You needn't say any more. I'm going to dress now!"

Lord Bunter rolled into the adjoining bed-room with his fat little nose in the air. He shut the door after him emphatically.

"Well," said Bob, with a cheery grin, "that's that! Are we going to tell Bunter before we go that his new protector is the skunk who is on his trail?"

"Can't leave even that fat idiot in the dark about that," said Nugent. "I suppose he's too much of an idiot to believe it; but we're bound to tell him."

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"No good telling that to Bunter," he said. "He hasn't sense enough to understand, and he would think we were stuffing him, to make an excuse for staying on here. He's fool enough."

"Oh crikey!"

"Ten to one he would tell the scoundrel, and Rupert would simply be warned and put on his guard," said Harry. "Bunter wouldn't believe it, and he hasn't sense enough to keep his mouth shut."

"Yes; but—"

"No good telling Bunter, but we can tell Tomlinson, and put him wise to all we know," said Harry. "I'm certain now that he's got his eye on the captain; you saw how unwilling he was to leave the Smiler in his hands yesterday. He knew as well as we did that something would happen and the man would get away."

"I believe so," said Nugent, with a nod. "And the way he followed them when they went into the park, it's pretty clear that he didn't think that fat fool was safe there with the captain."

"The fact is, he's a pretty capable man, though he hasn't had much chance of showing it, so far," said Harry. "We'd better compare notes with Tomlinson, and then clear. We promised to see Bunter through; but we're let off that now, and I can't stand any more of him, for one."

The bedroom door reopened, and Billy Bunter blinked out into the King's Room.

"I've rung for Frederick," he said crossly. "He hasn't come up. He's kept me waiting a whole minute—or more! Does the fellow think I can dress without the assistance of a valet, or not?"

"You fat Owl—"

"Oh, really, Cherry— I say, you fellows, this is dashed annoying!" said Lord Bunter, blinking very seriously at the Famous Five. "Francis must have heard the bell. Is it possible that he has the impudence to keep me waiting?"

"Fathead!"

"I think I shall have to sack that

man Ronald," said Bunter, shaking his head. "One thing I can never stand, and never will, is impudence from menials."

"Perhaps he's getting tired of being called Frederick, and Ronald, and Francis," suggested Bob. "He might like to hear his own name for a change."

"I never can remember servants' names, Cherry. The man can hardly expect me to remember that his name's James."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! James—I mean Frederick—hasn't come up. Go and look for him, Cherry."

"Eh?"

"Go at once, and tell him I'm waiting."

Bob looked at the fat junior. Lord Bunter was evidently in his lordliest mood—common mortals only existed to carry out his lordly behests.

"I'm waiting, Cherry," said his fat lordship, with dignity.

"Well," gasped Bob, "I won't go and hunt up James; but perhaps I can be of assistance to your lordship. I'll try. Your lordship hasn't had your lordship's bath yet, I think. Your lordship isn't fearfully keen on baths. But I'll help you this time—"

"I'm not taking my bath this morning," said Lord Bunter hastily.

"Your mistake," said Bob; "you are!"

He made a jump at Lord Bunter, and grasped him by his fat neck.

His lordship gave a yell as Bob spun him back into the bedroom.

"Ow! Leggo, you beast! I say, you fellows—Ow! Wow! Ooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leggo!" shrieked Bunter.

Bob Cherry did not let go. He whirled Lord Bunter across the bedroom to the door of the bath-room. With his left hand he opened that door.

Bunter struggled wildly. Of all the luxurious appointments of Reynham Castle, the bath-room was the one that Bunter patronised least. But he was going to patronise it now—with Bob Cherry valeting his lordship.

"Ow! Beast!" roared Bunter, as he was whirled into the bath-room. "Wow! I tell you I ain't going to bath this morning!"

"And I tell your lordship that your lordship is!" grinned Bob. And he bumped Billy Bunter headlong into the marble bath, and turned on the cold tap.

Splash!

"Gurrrrghh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, sir!" gasped James. James had arrived at last. James gaped in at the bath-room doorway. "Oh, sir! What—"

"Too late, James-Frederick-Ronald-Thomas-Francis-Herbert," said Bob. "I'm valeting his lordship this morning. His lordship is taking his lordship's bath."

"Urrgh! Grooogh! I'm all wet! Gurrrghh!"

Bunter struggled up.

Bob Cherry shoved him down again. His fat lordship collapsed in streaming cold water, and roared and spluttered.

"Yaroooh! Urrgh! Beast! Woo-ooogh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There!" gasped Bob. "You can carry on now, James. Don't give his lordship any soap. His lordship

doesn't like soap. His lordship hates it, in fact—don't you, my lord?"

"Gurrgh! Beast! Lemme ger-roat! Urrghh!"

Bunter wallowed and splashed and spluttered. Bob Cherry, chuckling, left him to the grinning James.

Splashing and spluttering followed the Famous Five as they departed, leaving his lordship wallowing in his lordship's bath for the first time since his lordship had arrived at his lordship's castle.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Cards on the Table!

HARRY WHARTON tapped at the door of Mr. Tomlinson's room, which was at the end of the corridor on which the King's Room opened.

The detective opened the door, and lifted his eyebrows a little at the sight of the Famous Five.

"What—?" he asked.

"We're leaving this afternoon, Mr. Tomlinson," said Harry. "We want a few words with you before we go."

The detective gave him a very hard, keen look.

"Please come in!" he said curtly; and the juniors entered, Mr. Tomlinson closing the door after them.

He waved his hand to chairs.

"You are leaving?" he asked, in the same curt tone. "Why?"

"You may guess why," said Harry. "That fat fool is having his leg pulled by a man here who wants us to leave him unprotected."

Mr. Tomlinson's keen eyes had a sudden gleam in them.

"Meaning?" he asked quietly.

"Captain Reynham," replied Harry.

"You do not mean to say that you suspect—"

"I mean to say exactly that—and that, I believe, you have the same suspicion in your mind, Mr. Tomlinson," said Harry bluntly. "You need not confide in us if you don't want to, but I want you to listen to what we have to tell you. It may be of use to you in nailing that scoundrel."

"I am bound to listen to anything you may have to tell me, of course," said Mr. Tomlinson primly.

He listened without an interruption, while the juniors told him what they knew. Every now and then that alert gleam came into his eyes. When they had finished, he asked a few curt questions:

"You are sure it was Rupert Reynham's voice you heard speaking to the Smiler in the fog on Christmas Eve, Master Bull?"

"I wasn't sure at first, but I was afterwards," said Johnny. "I know now that he was the man."

"Sir Peter, of course, would suppose that you were mistaken."

"That's why he hasn't been told."

"Oh, quite! And, after that—"

"After that I had an eye on him, and when I was satisfied that he was the man, I told these fellows—and they're all satisfied," said Johnny. "Look here, the night the Smiler was caught in the haunted room, the captain sat up with you to watch him. You went to sleep after the captain left you—"

Mr. Tomlinson coloured faintly.

"And I believe," said Johnny, "that you guessed afterwards why. I did, anyhow. Captain Reynham gave you a cigarette before he left you."

"He did," said Mr. Tomlinson, very grimly.

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"It was drugged," said Johnny Bull. "That's why you went to sleep, and the Smiler got away. I believe you guessed it."

"What makes you think that?"

"The way you kicked at leaving the Smiler to him again yesterday. You knew the man would get away."

"You, also, apparently, as you watched for him, and caught him going," said Mr. Tomlinson, smiling.

"Well, my boys, I am glad you have come and told me all this. I knew that you knew something when I heard that you had watched for the man under the gun-room window yesterday. Certainly I never dreamed that you knew so much. This is very useful to me. But—" He paused.

"You needn't tell us anything, sir," said Harry. "We've a pretty clear idea of what you've got in your mind. What we want is to help you all we can to keep that fat chump out of danger after we're gone."

"That is the idiotic *sine qua non*," agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"From what you have told me," said the detective quietly, "I judge that you are able to keep your own counsel. If you are going, I will say nothing. But are you bound to go?"

"Bunter asked us here, and he's given us the order of the boot," said Wharton. "We've only been here on that fat fool's account, and he thinks he's safe without us now. It's happened to-day; but it was bound to happen, now that the captain is taking the trouble to pull his leg. His game has been to clear us off the scene all the time."

"Exactly so," assented Mr. Tomlinson. "And by going, to play into his hands, as that stupid boy Bunter is doing."

"Well, yes," said Harry slowly. "But I don't see how we can help it, Mr. Tomlinson. The fact is, we can't stand any more Bunter."

"Which is the captain's object and intention," said Mr. Tomlinson.

"Ye-e-es, I suppose so, but—"

"I quite understand your feelings, but you must remember that Master Bunter, with all his nonsense, is nobody here," said the detective. "He has no right either to invite guests or to dismiss them. He was brought here for a certain purpose, having deluded Sir Peter Lanchester into the belief that he was a courageous lad, willing and able to play a dangerous part. Sir Peter understands him better now, and has been very much annoyed by his fatuity and impudence—as I have no doubt you have observed."

"Sort of leaped to the eye, didn't it?" grinned Bob.

"I think," said Mr. Tomlinson, "that you would be well advised to take no heed of Master Bunter's absurdity, and to remain here."

"Oh!" said the juniors together, dubiously.

"Sir Peter Lanchester, who is master of the house, likes you, and makes you thoroughly welcome," said Mr. Tomlinson. "That being the case, you can surely disregard the absurdities of a foolish boy who is taking an unwarrantable advantage of the position in which he is placed."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Harry. "But—"

"And, foolish and offensive as Bunter is, you would not really wish harm to befall him!"

"Of course not!" said Harry. "We stand for his silly rot at school, and I suppose we could stand it here, if you

come to that. Of course, we're really Sir Peter Lanchester's guests, not Bunter's. But do you mean that you, as a detective, think we are useful here, in beating that rascal?"

"That is precisely my meaning!" said Mr. Tomlinson quietly. "As Bunter's schoolfellows and friends, you have many opportunities of watching over him that do not, of course, come my way. This has been proved, I think, by various occurrences here."

"No doubt about that! But—"

"If you choose," said Mr. Tomlinson, "you can be of immense help to me, in one of the most difficult tasks I have ever undertaken as a detective. You have proved that you can be discreet, which is all that is necessary. I am alone here, pitted against an unscrupulous and keen-witted scoundrel who has authority in the house, and the complete confidence of the man who has employed me to defeat him. It is a very extraordinary position, and I am naturally anxious to obtain all the help I can."

"We couldn't speak to Sir Peter, about his nephew," said Harry. "But a word from you, as a detective—"

Mr. Tomlinson shrugged his shoulders.

"So far from venturing to breathe a word to Sir Peter, against Rupert Reynham," he said, "I have not found it easy to keep him from placing complete confidence in his nephew, and thus ruining the whole scheme."

"Oh!"

"I can say nothing without absolute proof," said Mr. Tomlinson. "My position in that respect is, indeed, precisely the same as your own. You saw what happened yesterday! I could not tell Sir Peter Lanchester that his nephew was planning to set that scoundrel free. That was impossible. I had to take the chance—or rather, the certainty, of seeing my work undone. But for you boys, the man would have escaped again."

"Yes, I see that!" said Harry.

"If you remain, and continue to be as discreet as before, you may be of the greatest service," said the detective. "And Bunter is in very real danger."

"I suppose those brutes would let him go again, if they got him, when they found out that he wasn't really Lord Reynham?" said Bob.

"Possibly! Possibly not! He might know too much, after being in their hands, ever to be allowed to go free again," said Mr. Tomlinson. "My own belief is that they would keep him safe—in the same very secure spot that is already planned and arranged to receive Lord Reynham."

"Oh crumbs!" said Bob. "I—I suppose they would!"

"I do not think that his life would be in danger—because if the rascals were prepared to go to that length, they would have done that already, in dealing with the supposed Lord Reynham. But I am quite assured that he would remain a prisoner in some remote spot, probably thousands of miles from this country."

"We shall stick to him!" said Bob.

"Blow him!" granted Johnny Bull. "After that, I don't see that we've got much choice! After all, we can boot him when he's cheeky!"

"The bootfulness can be terrific!" agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

Mr. Tomlinson smiled.

"Another point is this," he said. "You have never seen the real Lord Reynham. I have seen him—he is a weak and somewhat sickly lad, and he has never recovered from the attempt to kidnap him when he was a child—"



Bob Cherry sent the card-table flying with his foot, and cards and coins and currency notes showered over the polished floor. Captain Reynham sprang to his feet, with a gasp of rage, while Billy Bunter blinked in speechless wrath through his big spectacles.

several attempts, rather! I feel sure that you must sympathise with him, and would be glad to help in relieving him of a danger that makes it necessary for him to be hidden, under an assumed name."

"You bet!" said Bob. "Poor kid! We'll do anything we jolly well can, Mr. Tomlinson—you can bank on that!"

"Then you will remain here," said the detective.

"Certainly, if you make a point of it," said Harry Wharton, at once. "If we're going to help save the real lord, we shan't be scooted off by the dummy lord, you can be sure of that."

"Cards on the table, then!" said Mr. Tomlinson, with a smile. "My own suspicion, or rather certainty, is precisely the same as your own. When Sir Peter first consulted me, I knew nothing of Captain Reynham; but the fact that he was next heir to the property and title indicated possibilities, that was all. The fact that he was abroad when the first attempts were made, years ago, seemed to tell in his favour—but that, of course, might simply have been a matter of cunning arrangement—an alibi established in advance. Without suspecting him, but regarding him simply as a possibility, I insisted with Sir Peter that he, like everyone else, should be kept in the dark—on the grounds of general caution. Sir Peter, fortunately, agreed—though reluctantly."

"Of course he never dreamed—" said Nugent.

"Neither then—nor now!" said the detective. "In point of fact, I found later that he had let the captain know that Lord Reynham was placed at

school under an assumed name. Fortunately he never mentioned the name, or the school—his pledge to me prevented that. Otherwise—"

"Otherwise, Rupert wouldn't be getting pally with jolly old Bunter just now!" grinned Bob.

"Scarcely! I made a few inquiries about the captain—learning that he was the son of a younger son, with nothing beyond his Army pay, except an allowance from his uncle—and that he was in debts of which Sir Peter knew nothing. I found that he had returned to England, taken up his residence here, and advised Sir Peter to bring Lord Reynham openly to the castle, as the best method of getting at his enemies. After which," added the detective, dryly, "I had a very keen eye open for the captain."

He paused.

"When I found that the kidnapers knew that the young lord was at a school under an assumed name," he went on, "I asked Sir Peter whether he had mentioned that fact to anyone—and learned that he had mentioned it only to Captain Reynham."

"But he never guessed, all the same—"

"He did not. He still wonders how the Smiler and company found it out. But—" Mr. Tomlinson paused again. "I did not feel sure, until the night I went to sleep, and the Smiler escaped. Then I remembered that I had smoked one of the captain's cigarettes before he left me."

"And then you knew?"

"Then," assented Mr. Tomlinson quietly. "I knew—what I could not prove, and what Sir Peter would not have listened to for a moment."

"A bit of a problem, and no mistake!" said Bob.

"The man is as cunning as a fox, and as unscrupulous as a wolf!" said Mr. Tomlinson. "Yet he has his limits! Nothing, I am assured, would induce him to commit the last and greatest of crimes. His cousin's life is in no danger. Short of that, he is prepared to use any and every means of robbing him of his property. Lord Reynham, once in his power, will disappear for ever—his death will be legally presumed; after a time, and Rupert Reynham will step in. That is the game—which I am going to defeat!"

The detective's eyes gleamed again, for a moment.

"Apart from professional considerations, and my desire to earn Sir Peter's very generous fee," he said, "I am determined that such scoundrelism shall not succeed—that a poor, persecuted boy shall not be sacrificed to the greed of an unscrupulous rascal! In that, I feel sure, you agree with me."

"What-ho!" said Bob. "All the jolly old way, Mr. Tomlinson."

"We're staying!" said Harry. "Whenever we can be of any use, Mr. Tomlinson, you've only to say the word. And we can keep our mouths shut—as you've seen already!"

And that was settled, and fixed, when the Famous Five left Mr. Tomlinson's room. Which, possibly, might be a surprise to Lord Bunter—and displeasing to his lordship—so it was fortunate that Lord Bunter did not matter!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Sticky!

"SAY, you fellows!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" said Bob Cherry affably.

And his comrades grinned.

After lunch that day, Billy Bunter had had his usual nap—requiring his usual rest after his usual exertions. Then he had played a game of billiards with his new pal, Rupert Reynham, and smoked a cigarette or two with that valuable friend. Then—declining the captain's invitation to accompany him on a stroll—he looked for the Famous Five—with the amiable intention of speeding the parting guests.

He found them in the hall, having just returned, fresh and ruddy, from skating—and with no signs of departure about them.

"What train are you fellows catching?" asked Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob.

This was rather a reversal of a state of affairs usual in the "hols." Every member of the Famous Five had been landed with Billy Bunter, more than once or twice, in the hols, and when Bunter was a guest, the most difficult thing about him was to get him to catch a train.

Now Bunter was—or fancied he was—the host; and the Famous Five were the fellows who wouldn't catch the train.

"What are you cackling at, fathead?" asked Bunter, blinking at Bob.

"The old order changeth, giving place to the new!" quoted Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at!" grunted Bunter. "Look here, you're pretty sticky—but you're going, Rupert's fed up with you."

"Bad taste on Rupert's part!" said Bob, shaking his head. "He can't know what really nice chaps we are."

"Well, you can't expect him to get over the way you treated him this morning," said Bunter. "I may as well tell you plainly, that he wants you to go. He makes a point of it."

"Dear me!" said Bob, "Rupert makes a point of it! Do you make a point of it too, old fat man?"

"I do!" said Bunter, firmly. "Sorry, and all that, but I'm fed up! Meddling when a chap's having a quiet smoke over a game of poker—you can't expect a fellow to stand for it! Besides, your manners are jolly bad—they let me down before my servants, you know—"

"Whose servants?" asked Nugent, grinning.

"Mine!" roared Bunter. "I don't want any cheek, Frank Nugent. Just get out when a fellow tells you he doesn't want you. You can have one of my cars to the station—"

"Whose cars?" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Mine!" howled Bunter. "Don't give me any cheek, Bob Cherry! Look here, when are you fellows going?"

"The whenfulness is terrific."

"I suppose you're not sticking on where you're not wanted!" said Bunter contemptuously.

"Hardly!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We couldn't have come here at all, if old Peter hadn't backed up your silly gas. Old Peter's invitation still holds good—and we're staying on it."

"I've told you I don't want you here—"

"Several times. Now we'll mention that we don't want you here."

"What!" yelled Bunter.

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"Are you going?" asked Bob chuckling.

"Me!" gasped Bunter. "Why, you silly ass! Look here, I didn't come along here to talk rot—"

"What are you doing it for, then?"

"I fancied that you were going to turn out sticky," said Bunter. "I noticed that your things weren't packed. They've been taken out of my rooms, though—"

"We're not camping in your rooms any more, old fat man. We've heard enough of your snore to last us till next term at Greyfriars."

"You're going!" hooted Bunter.

"Guess again!"

"Mean to say you're not catching a train?"

"Not the least little bit in the world!"

"Why I'll have you chucked out!" gasped Bunter, in almost speechless wrath. "I'll have you chucked out of the castle by my menials!"

"Let's put it up to Sir Peter!" suggested Bob. "Let's go and explain to him that you want us to clear out, so that you can smoke and gamble in peace with his nephew! I'm sure the old sportsman would be interested."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I—I—I don't want you to mention anything of that kind to old Peter!" said Bunter, hastily. "He would very likely get waxy. He's an old-fashioned old fossil. Of course, I'm master here—still, I don't want that old donkey to go off at the deep end. Rupert would get a ragging, too. Look here, you beast, don't you get sneaking to old Peter."

"Fathead!"

"I've told Rupert you're going—"

"Go and tell him we're not!"

"But you are!" urged Bunter. "I don't want you here—see? Rupert makes a point of it, and I make a point of it! Got that?"

"Suppose you and Rupert go and eat coke together?" suggested Bob.

"You silly ass! Will you get out?" hooted Bunter. "This is my castle, ain't it?"

"About as much as it's mine!" grinned Bob.

"Look here, I'm not asking you to stop any longer—see?"

"We're not asking you to stop any longer—see?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We've exactly as much right to ask you, as you have to ask us!" explained Bob Cherry. "And we don't like you here! You're not good company! You're lazy, and fatheaded, and you don't wash! Get out—see?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter blinked at the Famous Five in intense exasperation. Often and often he had been a sticky guest himself. But he had never expected the chums of the Remove to be so sticky.

But they were. They were fearfully sticky—and they were sticking.

"Well, of all the cheeky cads!" gasped Bunter. "Sticking in a fellow's castle whether he likes it or not! That's the limit! Look here, you cheeky beasts, what are you going to do?"

"I'm going to bump you for your cheek!" said Bob, cheerily.

"Same here!" said Johnny Bull.

"The samefulness is terrific."

"Hear, hear!"

"I say, you fellows—leggo!" roared Bunter, as he swept off the polished floor in the grasp of five pairs of hands.

"I say—yaroooop!"

Bump!

"Yaroooooooop!"

Bump!
"Oh crikey! Ow! Wow! I say, you fellows—"

Bump!
"Ow! Beasts! Wow! I say, old beasts—I mean old chaps—"

Bump!
"Yurooooooop!"

Bunter sat and roared.
Harry Wharton & Co. strolled away to the music-room, and left him roaring.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

A Mysterious Move!

"GOING!"
"Rot!"
"He's fed up with you fellows—and no wonder!" said Billy Bunter scornfully. "He can't stand you!"

"Fathead! He's not going!"
"He jolly well is! Pretty thick I think, for my friend Rupert to have to go, because you fellows won't!" said Bunter, contemptuously.

It was a couple of days later.
During those days, the Famous Five had had little of Billy Bunter's fascinating society—and had not missed it a lot.

But their eyes had been on Bunter, all the same.

They had rooms of their own now, and were no longer camped in Bunter's room round the canopied bed where the fat Owl slept and snored.

Bunter's new pal, the captain, occupied the dressing-room attached to Bunter's bed-room, and was, in Bunter's happy opinion, a sufficient protection, for which reasons, the Famous Five had their eyes open by day; and Mr. Tomlinson, they were aware, prowled a good deal by night.

As the secret door into the King's Room was no longer available, the juniors did not quite see how Rupert's new move was going to benefit him much; but they were wary all the same.

Indeed, now that the captain had lost his right hand man, the Smiler, they knew that he had to depend chiefly on himself—the other two members of the kidnapping gang, Ratty and the Ferret, were merely ruffians who could carry out orders, quite different from the cunning and resourceful Smiler.

What move the schemer was going to make, was rather a puzzle to them; but they had no doubt that he would make one, and make it soon—for he had to act before the end of the holidays.

At the new term, the fat junior whom he believed to be Lord Reynham would return to Greyfriars—and the kidnapers' task would be infinitely more difficult to carry out in a crowded school, than at the castle in Sussex.

But this new move, announced by Billy Bunter astonished them. They could not believe that the captain was leaving the castle, as stated by the fat Owl.

Leaving the castle meant giving up the game—and they could hardly believe that Rupert Reynham was abandoning the scheme upon which he had been concentrated for years.

"He's going!" said Bunter, "This afternoon! Didn't you see that big trunk come yesterday? He's packing it now."

"Rot!" said Bob Cherry. "He's not going!"

"You can ask old Peter!" sneered Bunter, "He's told him! Look here, you fellows, if you clear off—"

"Fathead!"
 "You see, he can't stand you—"
 "He seems to be able to stand you?"
 said Bob. "If he can stand you, old fat man, he can stand anything."
 "Beast!"

Bunter snorted and rolled away. His indignation was deep—at fellows hanging on at "his" castle against his wish. Sir Peter Lanchester did not seem somehow to regard it as Bunter's castle, however; and so long as old Peter made them welcome, the Famous Five were staying on.

And old Peter liked them there much more than he liked Bunter there—very much more. Bunter was, in fact, only there because the peculiar circumstances made him indispensable; while the old baronet really liked the cheery faces of the Famous Five about.
 "It can't be true!" said Harry, in

he's not catching a morning train. And that means—"

"That means that the car will pull out after dusk," said Bob. "And that means that something's booked to happen on the way that dear old Rupert doesn't want anybody to see."

"All the same, the secfulness will be terrific!" declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The juniors were rather curious to see Captain Reynham at lunch that day. Since the shindy in the King's Room, he had hardly spoken to any of them, or seemed to have noticed that they were in the castle at all.

At lunch he ignored them, as usual; but from his talk with Sir Peter, they ascertained that Bunter's news was correct. The captain was leaving. He was catching the six o'clock train at

and as they supposed that the captain would go in his own car, that would place the fat Owl completely in his hands—if they did not intervene.

In Bunter's present truculent mood, it might be a difficult matter for any of the party to go in the car also. But that did not apply to Mr. Tomlinson, whose duty it was to keep an eye on his lordship.

Wharton had a word with the detective in the afternoon, and learned that it was Mr. Tomlinson's intention to go with Bunter, if Bunter went with the captain.

Indeed, as the captain was well aware that Bunter would not be allowed out of the castle unwatched, Harry Wharton wondered whether this was, after all, the game. But he could think of nothing else

Lots of fellows talk about Santa Claus (or Father Christmas) and know nothing at all about him, except that he manages to keep his face clean while sliding down chimneys. Now I've been looking into his history, so lend me your ears and I will a tale unfold.

Once upon a time a poor old beggar was wandering through the snowy steppes of Russia. Climbing the steppes made him footsore and weary, and the only bit of luck he'd had in twelve years was when the snow froze his feet so he couldn't feel his corns.

He couldn't afford a shave, so his face was hidden in a long white beard—which was probably all for the best. And because he had a fat and jovial appearance, nobody would believe he was starving, and when he begged for alms, the passers-by would cast one eye on his girth, then smite him on the boko with ye brick.

"I say, you fellows," he whined, holding out his hat, "can you lend a fellow a groat until to-morrow? I'm expecting a postal order from a titled relation in the morning. The postal order will be for ten roubles, so if you lend me that, I'll hand you—I say, don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you—beasts!" And he got no alms—only boots!

He did everything he could think of to get money, except work—he didn't think of that—and when Christmas came round, he was without a bean,

The Story of Santa Claus

Discovered after years of tremendous research

By BOB CHERRY

Even a Russian farmer, who found Claus with a chopper in his turkey-shed, didn't believe he was there to chop up firewood.

"Thou varlet," he snarled. "Thou didst come after my turks. To pay for thy cheek thou canst go and gather me some firewood, or dadblame me, I'll pop ye in gaol for the festive season."

So poor old Claus tottered out, groping with numbed hands in the snow for bits of wood so small and rotten that a sparrow would have scorned to perch on them. He passed through a neighbouring park, belonging to a rich king, and as it was the Feast of Stephen, this king followed the custom of his house and looked out. Kings in those times always had to look out. It paid.

"Hither, page," roared this king, "come stand by me. Dost thou see what I seest? Or have I got them again? Bring me flesh and bring me wine, we'll ask this cödger in to dine."

a low voice when Bunter was gone. "The man can't be going."

"May be chucking it," said Nugent doubtfully.

Wharton shook his head.

"He's not chucking it. If he's going, it's some trick—some new move! I can't make it out yet—but that's it!"

"Maybe going to get his pal Billy to go in the car!" suggested Bob, with a grin. "If that's it, his pal Billy will go farther than he expects."

"By Jove! That might be it—the simplest of tricks!" said Harry, with a nod. "Bunter might go to the station to see him off—thinking he would come back in the car—"

"And he wouldn't jolly well come back!" grinned Bob. "Rupert would explain that he wanted to walk, or something—"

"That's it!" said Johnny Bull.

"Well, if Rupert really goes, some of us will be on the watch when the car starts for the station," said Harry. "If that fat fool goes in the car, we shall have to keep him in sight somehow. Bunter says it's this afternoon—"

Castlewood; which, at that time of the year was well after dark.

Once or twice the juniors caught Mr. Tomlinson's eyes fixed on the captain's face with a penetrating look.

They could guess that the detective was perplexed by the latest move of the schemer.

After lunch, the captain and Lord Bunter went into the billiards-room, where the click of the balls was heard.

Sir Peter, no doubt, fancied that they were playing a harmless game; but the Famous Five had no doubt that the captain was taking the shortest cut to Bunter's fat heart—letting him win money on the game.

Harry Wharton & Co. had intended to go out skating that afternoon. The snow had cleared off, but the lake was still frozen hard. But they gave up that idea since they had learned of Rupert's impending departure.

They remained in the castle; and five pairs of eyes were going to be very much on the alert when the captain went. They had little doubt, by this time, that the big idea was for Bunter to go in the car to the station—

Santa Claus was very interested in the flesh and wine—especially the wine—but what he liked most was the lavish gold and silver plate which adorned the table. So when the king turned his back, he stuffed the lot in a sack, pinched the royal reindeer sledge, and vanished like smoke. And King Wenceslas swore a mighty oath he'd never be such a sap as to ask a peasant into the palace again.

Being in a hurry, Santa Claus exceeded the speed in a built-up area until he was gonged by the Reindeer Corps. The cops cast a suspicious eye on his sack.

"Wotcher got in there?" they asked, and when they saw the contents, they whistled softly and took out their manacles.

"Presents, that's all," said Santa, banking on his jovial appearance. "I'm going to leave them at the houses of poor people!"

"Oh, yeah? We'll come with you and watch!"

There was no help for it, so Santa drove round, stuffing costly gold and silver plate in the peasants' cottages. Then the cops shook his hand and wished him a Merry Christmas.

"Merry Christmas? Har, har, har!" And poor old Santa drove straight off to the werkhouse and rang the visitors' bell.

And that, my beloved 'earers, is the story of Santa Claus.

More or less!

After tea, Billy Bunter made one more effort. He followed the Famous Five into the hall, and fixed his big spectacles on them, with a very serious blink.

"I say, you fellows—" he began.

"Don't!" said Bob Cherry.

"Eh? Don't what?" yapped Bunter.

"Don't say! Don't jaw! Just shut up!"

"Look here, you cheeky beast, will you clear off! You're practically turning my friend Rupert out by sticking here!" hissed Bunter.

Harry Wharton laughed. Evidently the captain had his fat lordship just where he wanted him. Never had Bunter, if he had only known it, been more in need of the protection of which he was so anxious to be rid.

"William!"

Bunter blinked round.

"Coming up to help me finish packing?" asked Captain Reynham, with a smile, taking no notice of the Famous Five.

"Oh, certainly, old chap!" said Bunter.

And he rolled up the staircase after Rupert.

In the oak gallery, over the hall, Mr. Tomkinson was seated with a newspaper, which he was probably not reading. He was ready, if there was any sign of Bunter going in the car. Four members of the Famous Five remained by the fire in the hall. Harry Wharton put on his coat and cap, and went out on the avenue. He was quite puzzled; but if there was, at the very last moment, some unforeseen trickery, the captain of the Remove was there to watch for it.

With one fellow out on the drive, four fellows in the hall, and the detective in the gallery over the hall, his fat lordship was not likely to go unseen—if he went. Never, in fact, had Lord Bunter been so well guarded. And yet—

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Harry Wharton on the Spot!

HARRY WHARTON was deeply perplexed.

He stood on the dusky avenue, under one of the frosty trees, invisible in the winter gloom, but able, from where he stood, to watch the brightly lighted entrance of the castle.

The captain's car had been brought round.

Two or three footmen were carrying out his baggage; several suitcases and a gun-case and a large, heavy trunk.

A luggage grid, at the back of the car, had been let down for the trunk, and the footmen were strapping it on.

There was no sign of Bunter.

Captain Reynham was to be seen, in the lighted doorway, saying good-bye to Sir Peter Lanchester.

When his baggage was on the car he came down the steps.

Wharton watched, puzzled.

Obviously, the scheme was not to get Bunter to drive to the station with him. Bunter was not to be seen at all.

Captain Reynham sat at the wheel and started up. From the deep dusk Wharton watched him in perplexity.

Was he, after all, giving up the game, or had he spotted the fact that he was suspected, and decided to go while the going was good? Or was he, after all, taking his departure in the ordinary way of things?

Wharton could not guess.

The car got into motion, and the headlights flashed down the drive. It rolled past the spot where Harry stood.

In a few more moments it would have been gone.

Harry Wharton glanced again at the lighted doorway.

He saw his friends looking out; but Bunter was not with them. He had, it seemed, remained upstairs, and had not troubled to come down to see his friend Rupert off.

It was rather instinct than thought that caused a sudden, startling suspicion to flash into Wharton's mind—as the car glided by with the big trunk strapped on behind.

His eyes fixed on that big trunk.

He remembered Bunter's remark—that it had arrived at the castle the day before. Why had the captain sent for a special trunk for his baggage? A special trunk—a very large one—and he had asked Bunter to go up and

help him finish packing—Bunter had been alone with him there—and he had not come down to see him off!

As if by a lightning flash, Wharton saw it. And as the car glided by, he ran out from the darkness of the trees, and grasped at the baggage strapped on the grid behind.

He hung on.

It was all he could do on the spur of the moment. It was easy enough to hang on the strapped trunk; and the captain, looking ahead as he drove, had seen nothing of the shadow suddenly fitting from under the trees and darting behind the car.

He drove on fast.

Harry Wharton hung on to the strapped trunk on the grid. He felt—he knew—what was in that big trunk.

That was the scheme.

That trunk had been carried down under the nose of the watching detective, under the eyes of the juniors in the hall—and that trunk, Wharton felt in his very bones, contained the kidnapped fat Owl.

Easy enough when Rupert had had him alone; the rascal who had drugged the detective with a cigarette had something at hand to silence the hapless fat Owl. Drugged, senseless, Bunter was packed in that trunk, and the supposed Lord Reynham was being carried off, unseen and unsuspected, under the eyes of the whole crowded castle.

Left without the aid of the Smiler, the plotter had been compelled to act for himself. This was how he had done it.

Wharton, once the idea was in his mind, was as sure of it as if he could have seen the unconscious fat face of Bunter through the locked lid of the trunk.

The car gathered speed on the drive, and at the gateway it almost flashed past the lodge and turned into the Castlewood road; it roared away down the dark road.

Wharton was sure. But he knew that he would soon know for certain. The captain would not drive to the station if he had a kidnapped schoolboy in the trunk. He would never risk such baggage on the railway—neither did he need to. His confederates were at hand, and his aim would be to hand the kidnapped boy over to them at the earliest possible moment.

Harry did not expect the car to keep on the direct road to Castlewood—and it did not. Half a mile from the castle it turned into a dark lane and bumped on over rutty ground.

Obviously the captain was not going to the station—that was a certainty now.

The car jolted on fast, though the lane was jutting and rugged. Harry Wharton had his arms and shoulders over the strapped trunk; he hung on easily enough. Obviously the captain never dreamed that anyone was hanging on behind the car; he drove steadily on. Wharton could do nothing but wait and watch events; he hung on and waited.

The boom of the sea fell on his ears. The car slowed down on a road that ran by the seashore. Through the gloom white spray glimmered. Far out on the water burned a light. Thick frosty trees and bushes lined the landward side of the road.

The car slowed and slowed. Harry Wharton heard a shrill whistle from

the direction of the sea. The car stopped.

He knew then that this was the rendezvous. He dropped off the strapped trunk and backed quickly into the deep shadow beside the road.

Captain Reynham stepped down. No doubt the headlights on that lonely road were signal enough to the men who waited on the shore.

Two dusky figures came tramping up the sand. Wharton glimpsed their faces in the car's lights and knew Ratty and the Ferret.

He backed deep in cover.

He was powerless to act. Discovery meant that he would share Bunter's unknown fate—and could not help him. He could only watch. Any one of the three rascals could have handled him. But he watched with the knowledge that if he escaped unseen he had proof now—proof that would overwhelm the plotting scoundrel and save the kidnapped schoolboy.

"You got him, gov'nor?" It was the Ferret's voice.

Wharton heard a sarcastic laugh.

"Yes. It was easy, once I had the matter in my own hands. Smiler bungled and bungled; I have not done so. The fat fool is in the trunk."

"By gum!" said Ratty, with a deep breath.

"He came up to help me pack the trunk," went on the captain in the same sarcastic tone. "He did not guess how he was intended to help. The fat fool hardly squeaked when I jammed the chloroform pad on his foolish face. But lose no time; get him down to the boat. The sooner the better—"

"Nobody about here, gov'nor—"

"Lose no time, I tell you!" snapped Captain Reynham.

The two ruffians stepped round behind the car. The trunk was unstrapped, unlocked, and opened. Dimly Harry Wharton saw a fat, insensible figure lifted out, and caught a gleam of spectacles.

"Pack a few rocks in the trunk; it must not weigh less when I return to the castle," said Captain Reynham.

"You're going back, gov'nor?"

"I have forgotten some things, and have to return for them, losing my train," said the captain. "I have that all cut and dried. When I return I shall find that Lord Reynham is missing, and shall, of course, cancel my intended departure, in those painful circumstances."

Wharton heard a chuckle.

The fat Owl was lifted between the two ruffians and carried away down the beach to the unseen boat. Captain Reynham stood watching them as they went. When they were out of sight he sat at the wheel and backed and turned the car.

The big trunk had been strapped on again, locked on the rocks that had been placed in it to give it the necessary weight. Every point had been guarded by the cunning and wary plotter.

The car got into motion, passing the junior who was blotted from sight under the dark trees.

As it passed, Harry Wharton slipped out and caught hold of the trunk and hung on again. Captain Reynham was driving back to the castle—and driving back in a mood of complete and triumphant satisfaction. Probably he would have felt neither so triumphant

nor so satisfied had he been able to guess who was driving back with him.

Not till the car was nearly at the castle door did Harry Wharton drop off behind; then he walked on after the car as it ran up to the castle entrance.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

Denounced!

“YOU cannot find him?”

“No, sir.”

“It is very extraordinary!” Tomlinson—

“It is very extraordinary indeed,” said Mr. Tomlinson between his closed lips.

Sir Peter Lanchester was in the library. The Co. were there with him, and Tomlinson. Sir Peter looked worried and anxious, so did the juniors and the detective.

“But he should not go out alone, especially after dark,” said Sir Peter. “Neither can I understand his having done so. You have looked—”

“We’ve looked everywhere, sir,” said Bob Cherry. “Bunter doesn’t seem to be in the castle at all. I can’t make it out.”

“He never went with Captain Reynham,” said Nugent.

“No. I saw my nephew off at the door,” said Sir Peter. “That was an hour ago. Where is Wharton? He may have seen something of William, and—”

“He hasn’t come in,” said Johnny Bull. “He—he went out just before Captain Reynham started.”

“But if William is not in the castle, where can he be?” exclaimed Sir Peter. “There are a dozen doors by which he may have left. But why should he? He was, in fact, very nervous about going out, especially alone. What do you make of this, Mr. Tomlinson?”

“I cannot understand it,” said the detective. “It appears that the foolish boy has gone out. But why—”

The library door opened, and Captain Reynham stepped in.

All eyes turned on him—Sir Peter’s in surprise mingled with relief.

“Rupert!” he exclaimed. “Then you have not caught your train?”

“No,” said the captain. “I found that an attache-case had been overlooked and came back for it. But I have just heard a very startling thing from Jasmond. He says that William cannot be found.”

“That is so. And I am thankful that you have returned, Rupert; you may be able to help.”

“It is very odd,” said Captain Reynham. “I saw William only ten minutes before I went. He was in the King’s Room. The secret door— But that has been screwed up; it is impossible—”

“That is quite impossible!” said Mr. Tomlinson.

The captain glanced at him.

“Well, it is your task to find him, Mr. Tomlinson,” he said. “I will render any assistance in my power. In the circumstances, uncle, I shall not return to London this evening. Possibly William has only gone out for a stroll—”

“Catch him!” said Bob.

“If it is certain that he is not in the castle—” said Rupert.

“That appears to be certain,” said Sir Peter. “If he has, after all, gone out, Wharton may have seen something of him. Wharton appears to be out of doors—”

“Possibly they have gone together,” suggested Rupert.

“It is possible, of course. But—”

“Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here’s Wharton!”

The library door opened again, and Harry Wharton came in. His face was flushed, and he was breathing hard.

“Harry!” exclaimed Frank Nugent, taking a step towards him. He could see at a glance that something had happened.

Harry Wharton shut the door.

Then he came across to the group by the fireside.

Mr. Tomlinson gave him a rather startled glance.

“Wharton,” exclaimed Sir Peter, a little testily, “it appears that William is missing from the castle! You have been out. Have you seen anything of him?”

“Yes,” answered Harry quietly.

Quietly as he spoke, his voice had the effect of a thunderclap on Captain Reynham.

The young Army man gave a violent start, and made a swift step towards Wharton.

“You have seen him?” he exclaimed.

“Yes!” repeated Harry, looking him steadily in the face. “I have seen him, Captain Reynham, and know where he is now.”

The strange pallor that came over the captain’s face caused even Sir Peter to give him a sharp and curious look.

The blow was so sudden, so unexpected, that it was scarcely possible for the plotter to be on his guard. His look at Harry Wharton was almost wild, his eyes burning from a white face.

“You know?” he gasped.

“Yes, I know.”

The effort that Rupert Reynham made to pull himself together was visible to all eyes. A grim expression came over Mr. Tomlinson’s face.

“Well, if you know, my lad, tell my uncle at once and relieve his anxiety,” said Captain Reynham, in an attempt to speak casually. “From what the boy says, uncle, it appears that there is no cause for alarm.”

“Please tell me at once, Wharton!” said Sir Peter.

“I am going to,” said Harry. “But, first, I had better say that I have proof now of the kidnapper’s identity, and that your handcuffs will be wanted, Mr. Tomlinson.”

“They are ready!” said Mr. Tomlinson grimly.

“Do you mean proof of the identity of the kidnapper’s confederate in the castle?” asked Sir Peter.

“Yes, sir!”

“That is excellent, if correct!” exclaimed the old baronet. “His name?”

“He is here!” said Harry. “You fellows stand ready to collar him, if necessary. You are ready with the handcuffs, Mr. Tomlinson? I tell you that I have proof—as an eye-witness.”

Mr. Tomlinson moved a little nearer to the captain. The Co. watched their leader, in breathless excitement.

All could see that Harry Wharton had made a discovery during his absence from the castle. It was as clear to Rupert Reynham as to the rest, and his face went paler and paler.

He lighted a cigarette, but his hand was shaking so that he could hardly get the match to it. Yet what, he was asking himself, could the boy have seen? What could he know? He could have seen nothing of what had happened on that lonely road by the beach; he had not been absent long enough to cover the distance on foot. What, could he know?

Sir Peter Lanchester started to his feet.

“You say that he is here, Wharton!” he exclaimed blankly. “You do not mean in this room?”

“I mean in this room, sir!” answered Harry.

The old baronet glanced round the spacious library.

“Concealed in this room?” he ejaculated.

“No, sir!”

“Then what do you mean?” exclaimed Sir Peter testily. “You appear to me to be talking in riddles, boy!”

Captain Reynham burst into a laugh. It sounded so cracked, so false, that his uncle turned to look at him.

“Evidently our young friend considers this a matter for jesting!” said Rupert.

But, with all his effrontery, he could not speak in his usual easy drawl. His voice was shaking.

“You must get ready for a shock, sir!” said Harry. “I am sorry! It will be a very painful surprise to you. But I must tell you, if only to get Bunter out of the hands of those scoundrels before they put to sea with him!”

“Where have you seen him?” rapped Mr. Tomlinson.

“On the beach some miles from here, handed over to the two rascals called Ratty and the Ferret by the villain who took him away from this castle!” answered Harry.

The cigarette dropped from Rupert’s fingers.

“And who was it?” exclaimed Sir Peter.

Harry Wharton lifted his hand, and his finger pointed at the white-faced man, who stood stricken, almost stunned.

“That was the man,” he said—“Captain Reynham!”

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

The Game’s Up!

“CAPTAIN REYNHAM!”

“Yes!”

“My nephew!” gasped Sir Peter. “Are you mad?”

“Look at him, sir!” said Harry quietly. “He knows the game is up now!”

Sir Peter Lanchester turned his eyes on his nephew. He stared at the white, stricken face, from which every vestige of colour seemed to have drained.

What he read in that face caused his own to pale.

He made a step towards the young Army man.

“Rupert”—his voice was husky—“deny this! The boy is mistaken—or mad! Why do you not speak, Rupert?”

The captain found his voice.

“It is false—false!” He panted out the words. “Let him prove—”

Sir Peter Lanchester gave him a long, long look, and his old face seemed to grow older and greyer. He turned quietly to Wharton.

“Speak!” he said briefly.

“I am sorry, sir!” said Harry. “I know this must be an awful shock to you. We’ve suspected Captain Reynham for a long time, but there was no proof. We were on the watch to-day, to see if he tried to get Bunter away in his car. I was watching on the drive when he went, and it suddenly flashed into my mind why the big trunk was on the car.”

“Oh!” breathed Mr. Tomlinson.

“That big trunk!” muttered Bob.

“We never thought—”

“I hung on behind the car, holding on to the trunk,” said Harry. “Captain Reynham never knew, of course. I

dropped off when he stopped at a lonely place by the sea. I got into cover. I saw them take Bunter from the trunk—heard what Captain Reynham said to his accomplices. He told them he had chloroformed Bunter and packed him in the trunk, and told them to take him to the boat. They packed rocks in the trunk, in case the servants should notice any difference in weight when he came back here. I hung on behind again when he started; he gave me a lift, without knowing it, almost to the door."

"Then Bunter—" exclaimed Bob. "He has been taken out to some vessel lying off shore in a boat. That vessel can be stopped, Sir Peter, if you telephoned to Mr. Shute. And when Bunter is here again, he can tell you who seized him in the King's Room and put the chloroform pad over his face."

A deep silence followed Wharton's words. It was broken by a clink of metal.

Mr. Tomlinson had taken the handcuffs from his pocket.

Captain Reynham stood as if petrified, the perspiration thick on his brow. "Sir Peter Lanchester waited for him to speak. He did not speak.

"A clear case—at last!" said Mr. Tomlinson. "I could not speak before, Sir Peter; like the boy, I could not speak without proof. But I have known for more than a week that your nephew was the man!"

"My nephew!" breathed the old baronet. "Good heavens! But why—why—"

He could not grasp it yet.

Mr. Tomlinson smiled faintly.

"The next heir to Reynham!" he said.

"Good heavens!" repeated Sir Peter.

"It is for you to say, sir, whether I take this man into custody, to be handed over to the police!" said Mr. Tomlinson.

He made a motion with the handcuffs.

Sir Peter Lanchester shuddered.

"No, no! Even if he is guilty—no!"

Rupert, speak! Have you nothing to say—nothing?"

The captain breathed hard and deep.

He was recovering something of his coolness.

"Yes," he said; "I have something to say."

His voice was even. "You believe what the boy has said. Believe it if you choose; it will not be so easy to prove in a court of law! Lord Reynham is gone. I stand in his place. If you believe what this boy has said, you may believe also that Lord Reynham will never be seen again! If you choose to drag our name through the law courts, I do not think that you will be able to shake my position. I defy this man—a private detective without official authority—to arrest me! If Lord Reynham is not found—and you can take it from me that he will not be found—I am master here!"

He spoke quietly, deliberately.

Sir Peter gazed at him in silent horror, the juniors almost in wonder.

He stood out now, to all eyes, as what he was—the unscrupulous, ruthless adventurer.

"If that vessel is stopped I doubt whether a prisoner will be found on board!" said Captain Reynham, in the same icy tone.

The meaning—the terrible meaning—of his words, was plain.

"William is gone!" he went on. "A

lazy, frowsy, self-indulgent, good-for-nothing fool! Let him go! Dead or disappeared, he is gone, and I stand here as master of Reynham Castle!"

Sir Peter gazed at him, dumb.

"Leave it at that!" said Rupert, with bitter coolness. "This detective is in your pay. Silence him! The boys will keep the secret if you ask them; or they may chatter as they will. I care little! You do not desire futile disgrace to our name, which is all you can achieve now. I am master of Reynham Castle."

Sir Peter found his voice.

"And now," he said, "I know you as you are—rascal, villain, plotting villain! Now, I will tell you where you stand, master of Reynham Castle, as you fancy yourself. Traitor and dastard, the boy you have kidnapped is not Lord Reynham. You have heard these lads call him Bunter, and fancied that it was the name under which my ward passed at Greyfriars School. Fool, as well as villain, it was his own name, and he was not Lord Reynham!"

"Hardly!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"He was brought here," said Sir Peter, "to draw the attacks of the kidnappers, in my ward's name. To draw the scoundrels, of whom I never dreamed that my own nephew was one, into the trap! The plan has succeeded perfectly, chiefly owing to these Greyfriars boys. Scoundrel! The boy you have kidnapped has no connection whatever with the Reynham family! His name is Bunter; these boys know his parents and other relatives! Lord Reynham, my dear ward, is safe from you. Do you understand? Safe!"

Captain Reynham stood quite still.

For a moment or two, perhaps, he did not believe it. But he looked from face to face, and knew!

"Not Lord Reynham!" he said at last, in a gasping voice.

"Not quite!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"You wouldn't think so if you knew his sister Bessie, and his brother Sammy, and his people at Bunter Villa."

"The boy," said Sir Peter, "is Bunter! If he is kept a prisoner it will not serve you. Do you understand now, scoundrel?"

"I understand," said Captain Reynham, in a low voice. "I have been fooled all along the line! I knew you were hiding something, though I never knew what. So it was this! Taken in—by an old fool and a set of school-boys. If that fat fool goes to an island in the Pacific, or if they throw him overboard, Lord Reynham remains! And, after this, I have no chance!"

He burst into a harsh, bitter laugh. "The game's up! I give in!"

He shrugged his shoulders with an air of indifference, and lighted a cigarette.

"Yes," said Sir Peter, "the game is up, Rupert Reynham! Now that I know who my ward's enemy is I shall know how to guard him, and to-morrow he will resume his own name, and his rightful place. And you—"

He paused for a moment.

"You," he said, "will leave England this very night. First you will bring Bunter here, safe and sound; then you will go. If you are in this country at noon to-morrow you will be arrested, on my charge, and prosecuted for kidnapping, and sent to the prison you deserve. If you ever return to England

the handcuffs will be on your wrists the same day. Now go!"

Mr. Tomlinson, with obvious reluctance, slipped the handcuffs back into his pocket. Rupert Reynham cast one look of bitter malice at the Greyfriars juniors and walked out of the library.

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Hallo, old bean!"

"I've got a bit of a headache!"

"How's that?"

"Blessed if I know! Have I been asleep?" Billy Bunter sat up, groped for his spectacles, jammed them on his fat little nose, and blinked at the juniors round the canopied bed.

"What's the time?"

"Nearly nine!"

"Why, we're late for dinner!" exclaimed Billy Bunter. He sat up. "I say, you fellows, I seem to have been asleep a jolly long time! Funny thing is, I don't remember lying down—Oh!" Bunter gave a yell as a rush of recollection came. "I say, you fellows, stick to me! Keep him off—that beast Rupert! I say, he stuck something over my face. He got me! I say—keep him off!"

"All right now, old chap!" said Bob Cherry soothingly. "The rotter brought you back before he went—and he's gone now for good! You won't see him any more."

"Sure he's gone?" gasped Bunter. "Gone for good—order of the boot-catching the Channel boat to-night, and never coming back again!" said Harry Wharton.

"Oh, good!" gasped Bunter. "I say, you fellows, he got me! It jolly well looks to me, now, as if he had a hand in that kidnapping business—"

"Think so?" grinned Johnny Bull. "Well, it looks like it to me, now," said Bunter. "You fellows mayn't be able to see it—you're not very bright—but that's what it looks like to me—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I say, you fellows, we shall be late for dinner at this rate! Ring for James—I mean Frederick! I say, you can stay on in my castle—"

"Really and truly?" chuckled Nugent.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, don't cackle at everything a fellow says!" yapped Bunter. "I'm inviting you to stay on in my castle for the rest of the hols—"

"We'll see what Lord Reynham says to-morrow!" chuckled Bob.

"Eh? Who? How—"

"Lord Reynham will be here to-morrow—the genuine article!" grinned Bob.

Bunter blinked at him.

"Oh crikey!" he said.

That was all he could say. That unexpected—and apparently unwelcome news seemed to have taken Lord Bunter's breath away. The jackdaw was going to lose his borrowed plumes. It was the last of Lord Bunter!

THE END.

(Frank Richards commences the New Year well with the finest yarn he's ever written. It's entitled: "BUNTER'S BIG BLUNDER." Watch out for it in next Saturday's MAGNET.)

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