

"THE MAN WITH THE HIDDEN FACE!" Thrilling Wild West Story of **Harry Wharton & Co.**

The Magnet ^{2^D}

*Billy Hunter's
Own Paper*



The
RIO KID TO THE RESCUE!

THE GREAT "ARMAMENTS" RACE!

15 First Prizes of Hercules Bikes **6,000 Other TIP-TOP PRIZES**

FIRST PRIZE GIVING THIS WEEK!

STOP! LOOK! LISTEN! This is the end of the first lap in the Great Stamp Race. I am now going to give away Five of the "Hercules" Bicycles and up to 2,000 of the other Super Prizes—they are waiting to be sent off to the readers who, during the first four weeks, have collected the highest number of two kinds of stamps—BOMBERS and SUBMARINES. So, lose no time! Get out all the stamps you have been collecting each week, and add to them those given in this issue (twelve on this page, and eight more on Page 28). Sort them out carefully and then count up how many Bomber and Submarine Stamps you have altogether. For instance, if you have nine Bombers and eleven Submarines, your grand total will be 20. No other stamps are wanted this month!

Having found your total, write it clearly in ink on the coupon given here, remembering that no allowance will be made for incorrect totals. Add your name and full address also, and fill in at the foot of the coupon which of the following Prizes you would like in the event of your being a second-prize winner—

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| FOOTBALL | CRICKET BAT | FOUNTAIN PEN |
| WRIST WATCH | PEN AND PENCIL SET | PROPELLING PENCIL |
| DART BOARD | CAMERA | A FAMOUS BOY'S BOOK |

When you have completed the coupon in full, pin or clip your Bomber and Submarine Stamps only together, and attach them to the coupon. Post, in a 1½d. stamped envelope, to:

MAGNET "Armaments" No. 1, 1, Tallis House, London, E.C.4 (Comp.).

This Month's Closing Date for Home Readers is WEDNESDAY, JUNE 1st, 1938. OVERSEAS READERS! Remember that you, too, are included in this scheme, and special awards are to be given for the highest collections from overseas readers. Send in your stamps according to the directions for Home readers, but note that in your case, the closing date is extended to Wednesday, September 14th, 1938.

N.B.—As you know, this great gift scheme is also appearing in other boys' papers like "Modern Boy" and "Gem," and you will find more stamps in them.

And here's a good tip, pals—this week's MODERN BOY (issue dated May 28th) contains FOUR BONUS Submarine Stamps, making twenty-four stamps in all in that issue.

When you have sent in your Bomber and Submarine Stamps, keep all the other stamps you have collected safely. There are still Ten More Bikes and 4,000 other Prizes to be given away in the next two months. More stamps will be given next week, and at the end of next month you will again be told how and where to send in for the second month's prizes. So keep at it, and accumulate all the stamps you can.

RULES.—Five First Prizes of £4 7s. 6d. "Hercules" Cycles and up to 2,000 other prizes will be awarded in order of merit each month during the contest to the readers declaring and sending the largest collections of the stamps called for. Cash value of any of the first prizes may be divided in case of a tie or ties for such prizes. Ties for any other prizes will be decided by the Editor.

All claims for prizes to be sent on the proper coupon (as given here); no allowance made for any coupon or stamps mutilated or lost or delayed in the post or otherwise. No correspondence! No one connected with this paper may enter, and the Editor's decision will be final and legally binding throughout.

N.B.—You can also collect or swap Armaments Stamps with pals who read "Gem," "Modern Boy," "Detective Weekly," "Triumph," "Thriller," "Sports Budget," "Champion," and "Boy's Cinema."

The "Magnet"

ARMAMENTS RACE No. 1

Herewith I enter..... stamps of

BOMBERS and SUBMARINES

In entering this competition I agree to accept the Editor's decision as final and binding.

Your Name.....

Address.....

Prize you would like if a second prizewinner.

NOTE: The total of stamps to be given above is the combined total (that is, your grand total of the two kinds). See that your total is correct—no allowance made for error.

12 Stamps Here . . . and 8 more on Page 28

 BATTLESHIP	 TANK	 SUBMARINE	 DESTROYER	 BOMBER	 BATTLESHIP
 SUBMARINE	 ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUN	 BATTLESHIP	 SUBMARINE	 HOWITZER	 SUBMARINE

ONE GOOD TURN DESERVES ANOTHER! There's a price of 1,000 dollars on the head of the Rio Kid, the Boy Outlaw of the Rio Grande, and a deadly six-shooter stands between him and captivity. But he's found firm friends in Harry Wharton & Co.

The MAN with the HIDDEN FACE!



"Pay up—pronto—or——" The words came in a hiss from the man in the flour bag as he held up his gun menacingly. With set teeth, Vernon-Smith dropped the "roll" of dollars and put up his hands.

THE FIRST CHAPTER.

Whop!

"WHAT on earth," asked Bob Cherry, "is that game?"

The Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove gazed at Billy Bunter with surprise and interest.

They were sitting in a row on the rail of the veranda at Kicking Cayuse Ranch; there they were waiting for Bill Buck, the foreman of the ranch, with whom they were to ride after cows that afternoon.

Bill was busy at the corral, so they waited; and while they waited Billy Bunter happened.

The fat junior rolled out of the living-room into the veranda and blinked round him through his big spectacles.

Then he shut the door after him.

As that door was always left wide open in the daytime, that alone was an unusual proceeding; but that was not all. Having shut the door, Billy Bunter stationed himself close to it and raised his fat right hand. In that fat hand was a quirt.

The Famous Five stared at him across the veranda.

Bunter apparently expected somebody to follow him out. He had the cow-whip all ready for that somebody.

His eyes and his spectacles were fixed on the door; there was a fierce gleam in the little round eyes behind the big round spectacles. His back being partly turned towards the juniors at the rail, they could observe a large patch of dust on the seat of his trousers. It

looked as if a boot had recently landed there. No doubt it was the owner of the boot for whom the fat Owl was now waiting with uplifted quirt.

"What the dickens are you up to, you fat ass?" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "Are you waiting for Smithy?"

"Eh? No! Blow Smithy!" answered Bunter, over a fat shoulder. "That beast Chick is after me!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle!" said Bunter

'Way out in Texas, HARRY WHARTON & CO., of GREY-FRIARS, meet with thrills at every bend in the road!

warmly. "But if that beast thinks he can kick a fellow——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Remove chortled. Ever since the Greyfriars party had been at the Texas ranch Billy Bunter had been in a state of deadly feud with Chick, the choreman.

Chick was the entire household staff at Kicking Cayuse—which was a sad change from the hordes of menials who, according to Bunter, waited on him hand and foot at Bunter Court.

So far from waiting on Bunter hand and foot, Chick did not wait on him at all. Instead of addressing him respectfully as "Sir," he would address him

disrespectfully as a fat goob, or a big stiff, or a piecan. He objected to Bunter's presence in the kitchen—which, to Bunter, was naturally the most attractive spot on the ranch. He had been known to chase Bunter out of the kitchen with a brandished frying pan. Now it seemed that he had chased him out at the end of a boot.

"Oh, cackle!" said Bunter scornfully. "I came out here for a holiday with Smithy, not to be cheeked by a rotten choreman. Making out that a fellow was after a pie! I never even saw the pie! Besides, he came in behind me before I could touch it and kicked me."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I called up to Smithy!" hooted Bunter. "He's in his room, and I called up to him; and he called down to Chick to kick me again! What do you fellows think of that?"

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

"That's the way Smithy treats a guest!" said Bunter bitterly. "After pressing me to come out here with him, you know."

"Was the pressfulness terrific?" asked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "Or was it a boot on the other leg, my esteemed Bunter?"

"Yah! He actually called out to that cheeky choreman to kick me again!" said Billy Bunter, breathing wrath. "Well, I'm ready for him. I'll give him such a whop when he opens that door——"

"Fathead!" said Johnny Bull. "Chick won't come after you——"

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"I say, you fellows, shut up! I can hear him coming!"

"Chuck it, you ass!" said Frank Nugent.

Billy Bunter did not heed.

He could hear footsteps within crossing the living-room from the hallway to the door on the veranda.

He gripped the quirt with a business-like grip, his eyes gleaming through his spectacles.

One kick on the pants was enough for Bunter. Herbert Vernon-Smith, instead of sacking the cheeky choreman on the spot, had only told him to give his fat guest another. Bunter was ready for Chick when he came to do it. And he could hear him coming.

Bob Cherry slipped from the rail. Bunter on the trail of vengeance might be funny, but Bob's idea was that that quirt had better be grabbed away before the fat Owl had time to deliver a "whop" with it.

But he was too late.

Even as he jumped down from the rail the footsteps from within reached the door, and the door was pulled open.

A head emerged.

Whop!

Down came the quirt in Bunter's fat hand with a terrific swipe.

"Look out!" yelled Johnny Bull.

"Bunter—"

"Stop—"

"Oh, my hat!"

The Famous Five could see what Bunter was in too great a hurry to notice—that it was not Chick, the choreman, who was stepping out.

Bunter swiped before he looked.

He was expecting Chick, he had no doubt that it was Chick who was going to appear when the door opened, and he swiped with all the force of his fat arm the instant the newcomer appeared.

The yells of warning from the Famous Five came too late. That swipe landed on startled shoulders with a crack like a pistol shot.

There was a yell of surprise and rage from Herbert Vernon-Smith as he staggered under that unexpected, terrific swipe. It was the Bounder of Greyfriars who was coming out.

"Got the beast!" gasped Bunter.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"You mad ass!"

Bunter jumped back.

His idea was to dodge behind the Famous Five if Chick cut up rusty after getting that whop—which was, indeed, probable.

But as he saw Vernon-Smith he stopped and stared. It dawned on his fat brain that he had got the wrong man.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Is—is—is that Smithy? Oh crumbs! I—I say, Smithy, old chap, I—I—I—"

"Oh! Ow! Oh gad!" gasped Vernon-Smith. "What—who-what—Ow! Wow! Why, you potty idiot, I'll smash you up into little pieces! I'll—I'll—"

Why Bunter had done it the Bounder did not know; neither did he give the dismayed fat Owl time to explain. He jumped at him, red with fury.

Bunter did not stop to explain.

He flew!

After him flew the enraged Bounder. "Smithy—" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Hold on, Smithy! That fat chump never meant—" stuttered Bob.

Vernon-Smith did not heed; he rushed at Bunter like a tiger at its prey.

Bunter rushed for the veranda steps to escape.

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But he had no more chance of escaping the infuriated Bounder than a tortoise of beating a hare in a race. He reached the top of the steps and felt a clutching hand behind.

In sheer terror the fat Owl threw himself down on the pinewood planks. Perhaps he thought that his pursuer might pitch over him and give him another chance to dodge; perhaps he did not think at all. Anyhow, he went down right under the Bounder's feet, and Vernon-Smith pitched headlong over him.

"Look out!" shrieked Bob.

But it was futile to tell a fellow to look out when he was pitching head first down the veranda steps. No amount of looking out would have saved Smithy.

He shot over Bunter and went down the steps in a nose-dive. There was a yell of rage and anguish as he landed in a crashing heap at the bottom.

Billy Bunter sat up spluttering.

"Oooh! I say, you fellows—Grooogh! I say, keep him off! Owl! Wooh!"

The Famous Five rushed along to the steps.

Bob Cherry grabbed the fat Owl by the shoulder and jerked him up.

"Cut, you fat chump!" he gasped.

"Oh crikey!"

That advice was too good not to be taken. Billy Bunter bolted into the rancho and vanished. And Harry Wharton & Co. went down the steps, to pick up the hapless Bounder and render first-aid!

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

Crocked!

"I'll tell a man!" gasped Bill Buck. Bill was coming over to the rancho to call the Famous Five, when Smithy did his sudden and startling nose-dive down the veranda steps. He landed almost at Bill's feet, sprawling and roaring.

The foreman of Kicking Cayuse stared at him. Then he reached at Smithy, grasped him in a mighty hand, and set him on his feet.

"You sure did take a tumble, Mr. Vernon-Smith, sir," said Bill.

Vernon-Smith leaned heavily on the foreman, panting for breath. He was in natty riding clothes, ready to ride over to Packsaddle, where he had business that afternoon. That natty clobber was now smothered with dust from head to foot. He rested his weight on one leg as he leaned on Bill. The other knee had had a terrific bang on the pinewood stairs. And Smithy's elbow had hit Texas very hard.

It was no wonder, perhaps, that the Bounder was enraged. That plunge headlong down the steps had damaged him rather severely.

"I—I—I'll smash him!" gasped the Bounder. "Oh gad! My leg's crocked! Ow! I'll smash that fat fool—Ow!"

"Hurt, old chap?" asked Johnny Bull, as the Famous Five came hurrying down from the veranda.

Smithy gave him a glare.

"Hurt! Think I could bang down like that without getting hurt, fathead? Idiot!"

"No need to lose your temper—" said Johnny.

"Dummy!"

"Well, look here—"

"Shut up, Johnny, old man!" said Bob Cherry. "Let's help you in, Smithy, old bean."

"I'll smash that fat fool!" hissed the Bounder. "What the thunder did he cut at me with that quirt for?"

"He was laying for Chick, and he thought—"

"The fat idiot! I'll smash him! I—I'll—Ow!" The Bounder gave a yelp as his knee twinged. "Ow! I've had a knock! Ow!"

"I guess you better get in and rest a few, sir!" said Bill.

"I've got to get over to Packsaddle!" snapped the Bounder. "Has Cactus got my horse ready?"

"Sure! But—"

"I'm all right," growled Vernon-Smith. "One of you fellows might give me a brush-down. When you see Bunter tell him I'm going to break him up into small pieces when I get back from Packsaddle."

Bob brushed the Bounder down, brushing off clouds of dust. Smithy uttered no more yelps, but his lips were set hard. The Bounder was not the fellow to make a fuss over a little pain—or a lot, for that matter. He shut his teeth on it. But all the fellows could see that he was in pain, and they doubted very much whether he was in a state to ride a bronco fifteen miles and back. In fact, it was quite plain that he was not.

He moved away, limping painfully. Bill eyed him dubiously. The Famous Five followed him, as he limped away to the corral, where Cactus, the horse-wrangler, had his bronco ready saddled and bridled.

"Look here, Smithy, you'd better cut out Packsaddle," said Harry Wharton uneasily. "You can't ride with a game leg and a game arm."

The Bounder snorted angrily.

"I've got to get over to Packsaddle," he snapped. "There's a man going to wait for me at the Pack Hotel on business. Think I can keep him hanging about all day, to go home without seeing me?"

"Well, no; but—"

"I can manage all right! I'm not made of putty!" snarled the Bounder. But as he spoke his damaged knee bent under him, and he caught at Harry Wharton for support. "Oh gad! Ow!"

The chums of the Remove exchanged glances. Only too well they knew the Bounder's obstinacy and how useless it was to argue with him. But Wharton made another attempt.

"Can't you let some other chap go, Smithy? One of us would ride over, if we could do the business for you. Could we?"

"No, you couldn't!" snapped Vernon-Smith.

But he paused. It was painful for him to walk as far as his horse, and even the headstrong Bounder had to realize that he could not undertake a long ride.

"By gad! I'll smash him!" he breathed, evidently referring to Bunter. "The blithering idiot—to crock me like this!" He glanced round at the chums of the Remove. "You're going out with Bill?"

"That's all right," said Bob at once. "I'd ride over to the town for you, Smithy, if a message would do."

"It will have to do," said the Bounder, wincing with pain. "I'll smash Bunter while you're gone. I've got to see Blake; you've heard me talking it over with Bill—"

"Chap who's got a ranch to sell," said Nugent.

"That's it! He's selling the Circle-O. that joins on to Kicking Cayuse near Squaw Mountain. Bill knows the place, and thinks that it's a bargain at the price Blake is asking. He's in a hurry to sell, from what I hear," added the Bounder, with a sneer. "From what they say, Blake's lost the money ahead at the Red Flare at poker. Anyhow, he's selling and I want to bag the place—Ow!"

"Knee bad?" asked Johnny.

"Oh, no, fine!" said the Bounder sarcastically, and Johnny gave a grunt. "Look here, Bob, if you'll go—"

"Like a bird!" said Bob. Bob Cherry was keen on riding with his friends and Bill on the range that afternoon, but he was always good-natured.

"Ask for Jad Blake at the Pack Hotel," said Smithy. "Or you can ask for Poker Blake if you like," he added, with another sneer. "I've heard that that's what they call him in Packsaddle, from the game he loses his money at."

"I'll ask for Mr. Blake," said Bob, with a cheery grin. "What's the chap like, Smithy, if I see him?"

"How should I know when I've never set eyes on him?" growled Vernon-Smith.

Bob gave his friends a wink, and they smiled. Smithy's damages had evidently not improved either his temper or his manners.

"I've heard about the place through Bill," went on Vernon-Smith, "and as Blake will be in Packsaddle to-day I was going to ride over and make his acquaintance and talk the thing over with him. He sent word that he would wait at the Pack. He's got to be told that I can't come—Ow!"

"I'll find him all right," said Bob. "Leave it to me."

"Ow!" Smithy tried to suppress a yelp in vain as his knee gave another fearful twinge. "When you see him say—Ow! Wow!"

"What?"

"I mean, say that I'm sorry I can't come and I'll ride over to the Circle-O to see him to-morrow. Wow!"

"Right-ho!" said Bob.

Bob Cherry went for his horse, to ride away on the Packsaddle trail. The other fellows turned back to the rancho with Vernon-Smith. The Bounder had to lean heavily on Wharton to reach it, and two of the juniors helped him up the steps.

He dropped into a rocker in the veranda. Nugent fetched out a bottle of embrocation for the damaged knee. Chick, the choreman, looked out of the living-room doorway.

"Anything the matter, sir?" he asked.

"Only your face!" yapped Vernon-Smith. "Take it away!"

"Search me!" said Chick, and he took it away, with a snort.

"You 'uns coming?" roared Bill, who had gone back to the corral.

"Like one of us to stay with you, Smithy?" asked Harry Wharton.

"No!"

"Don't you think you'd feel better?" asked Johnny Bull.

"No; worse."

There really was nothing to be said in reply to that. The four juniors, without making any further sympathetic remarks, went down the steps and walked across to the corral to join Bill.

Herbert Vernon-Smith grunted, scowled, and bared his knee to rub on the soothing embrocation. Then, spotting the quirt Bunter had dropped, he limped to it and picked it up and limped back to his chair. That quirt was ready for Bunter when he turned up! With his game leg twinging with incessant pangs, Smithy could not go in search of him. He hoped that Bunter would come!

It was the first time since the Greyfriars fellows had been on holiday in America that he had desired the fat Owl's presence! But now he desired it very much—very much indeed.

There was a clatter of hoofs on the sun-baked prairie. Bob Cherry had already ridden off towards the distant cow town; now the other fellows were

riding away, in another direction, with Bill.

The Bounder, over the veranda rail, watched the stetson hats disappear in the distance, across the prairie. Then he resumed rubbing his knee, till there was a footstep in the doorway from the living-room.

Then his eyes gleamed round at a fat face that looked cautiously out, with watchful eyes, behind a big pair of spectacles.

Smithy's grasp closed on the quirt in the chair beside him. He wanted Billy Bunter within reach of that quirt! But he had no chance in a chase now. His game knee would have collapsed at the first stride.

"Oh! That you, Smithy?" Bunter blinked at the Bounder—without approaching. He did not see the quirt, but he was wary. "I say, ain't you going to Packsaddle this afternoon? I thought you were going to see a man."

"I've crooked my leg, you fat ass!"

"He, he, he!"

Vernon-Smith looked at the fat Owl of the Remove as if he could have bitten him. Bunter, apparently, saw something amusing in the circumstance that Smithy had crooked his leg, and could not ride over to Packsaddle.

"You gurgling fat octopus—" he hissed.

"He, he, he!"

"If I could get out of this chair I'd burst you all over the ranch!" hissed the Bounder.

"Oh, can't you get out of that chair?"

asked Bunter cheerfully. "All right!"

He rolled out into the veranda, reassured.

But he did not draw near the Bounder. He selected a chair at a safe distance, and grinned at him cheerfully.

"Did you drop that ten-dollar bill, Bunter?" asked Vernon-Smith, with a gesture towards the floor beside his chair.

He made that gesture with his left hand. The quirt was gripped in his right.

"Eh? Yes," said Bunter promptly.

"That—that's what I came back for, really! Where is it, Smithy?"

"Can't you see it, fathead?"

Billy Bunter rolled up, and bent over to peer at the pinewood planks beside Smithy's chair.

He was beautifully placed for Vernon-Smith's purpose.

The Bounder's right hand went up, with the quirt in it.

"I say, I can't see it!" said Bunter, blinking at the floor. "Where—Oh! Ow! Yarooooop!"

Swipe!

"Yurrrrooop!" roared Bunter, bounding.

Billy Bunter had a lot of weight to lift. But that bound carried him at least six feet. Smithy just missed with a second swipe.

"Ow! Beast! Wow!" yelled Bunter.

"Oh crikey! Wow! Why, you rotter—ow! Wow! You beast, pulling my leg—wow! Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter disappeared into the house again, yelling.

Herbert Vernon-Smith settled down in his rocker, feeling better! Bunter, to judge by the fiendish yells that floated back, was feeling worse!

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

The Trail-thief!

"HALT!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Hands up, Mr. Vernon-Smith!"

Bob Cherry blinked.

He was half-way to Packsaddle, and riding through a timber-land, through which the trail ran, when that sudden command fell on his ears.

He pulled in his horse, and halted at once. The Greyfriars fellows had not been very long in the "wild and woolly" West, but they had been there long enough to have learned not to argue with a levelled six-gun.

From the thick timber beside the trail a man had suddenly stepped out, and the revolver in his hand was lifted, and aimed at the schoolboy rider. Over the man's head was drawn a flour bag, upside down, completely concealing his face, from the stetson hat to the chin.

Slits were cut in the bag for breathing, and for sight. Through the eye-holes a pair of very sharp and keen eyes gleamed, over the barrel of the levelled revolver. His figure was hidden in the folds of a horseman's cloak.

Bob stared at him.

He was quite surprised. Since Barney Stone and his rustlers of Squaw Mountain had been rounded up by the Texas Rangers there had been no danger in riding Packsaddle trails. But there was no doubting what this man was—a trail-thief, who covered his face with a flour bag to hide his identity. From which Bob guessed that he was probably a man whose face would have been known in the vicinity.

It was a surprising encounter, but Bob was most surprised of all, at being addressed by the Bounder's name. Why the trail-thief should suppose that he was Vernon-Smith, the son of the owner of Kicking Cayuse Ranch, was a mystery to Bob. He was, like Smithy, a schoolboy, and about the same age, but in their looks there was not the slightest resemblance.

However, he put up his hands, sitting his bronco in the trail. The levelled six-gun enforced obedience.

The man in the flour bag cast a swift glance up and down the trail, and then stepped nearer to the rider.

It was not a well-frequented trail, seldom used, except by Kicking Cayuse men going to and from the cow town. Still, there was always a chance of someone coming along, and the trail-thief was in haste to get through.

He was on foot, but Bob could hear the sound of a horse tethered in the thickets.

"Keep 'em up!" snapped the voice from the flour bag.

"Oh, certainly!" said Bob cheerily.

"But may I mention that you're making a little mistake? My name's not Vernon-Smith."

"Can it!" said the man in the flour bag briefly.

"Honest Injun!" said Bob. "I'm not in the least like him, either! If you'd ever seen Smithy, you'd know! Frightfully sorry that I'm not a millionaire's son—but there it is!"

"Get off'n that cayuse!"

"Anything to oblige!" said Bob politely.

A glance had shown the trail-thief that Bob was not armed. So he was allowed to put his hands down. He dropped from the bronco, and stood facing the masked man with a cheery grin on his face.

He was not greatly alarmed. His worldly wealth, just then, amounted to a dollar and a quarter, which was not a large sum to lose. Certainly, he was not thinking of arguing with a six-gun to save that small sum.

The trail-thief's mistake rather amused him. Evidently, the man had

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never seen Herbert Vernon-Smith, or he could not have taken Bob for the millionaire's son. But a moment's thought told Bob how the mistake had arisen. Smithy had been going to ride into Packsaddle that afternoon to see Jad Blake at the Pack Hotel, and this man, whoever he was, had heard about it, and laid wait for him on the trail!

Smithy, who was packed with cash, would have been a rich prize for the trail-thief! Bob had probably saved the Bounder a thousand dollars or so by riding to the cow town in his place that afternoon!

He might, indeed, have saved his life, for Smithy, ever since he had been at Kicking Cayuse, had "packed" a gun, and he was not the fellow to be robbed if he had a chance to resist. It was quite probable that there would have been "gun-play" on the Packsaddle trail had it been Herbert Vernon-Smith who was held up by the man in the flour bag.

"You ain't heeled!" said the masked man. "I guess I heard that you always went heeled, Mister Vernon-Smith."

"Heeled?" repeated Bob. "Oh, you mean armed! Yes, Smithy always packs a gun. But I'm not Vernon-Smith."

"You can pack that up, and turn out your dust!" snapped the masked man, evidently not believing that statement.

Bob Cherry turned out the dollar and the quarter.

"All I've got!" he explained.

The eyes, through the slits in the flour bag, glittered at him. The Colt, which had been lowered, was raised again.

"I guess you don't want to try that game with the Rio Kid!" said the voice from the flour bag. "Pony up the dust pronto!"

Bob Cherry fairly jumped.

"The Rio Kid!" he gasped.

He stared blankly at the trail-thief.

Bob had heard of that celebrated Texan outlaw, and he had not only heard of him, but had seen him. Outlaw as he was, hunted by the Texas Rangers, the Kid had "horned in" and helped the Famous Five out of a bad scrape when they had been cornered on Squaw Mountain, under the gun of a rustler.

For which reason Harry Wharton & Co. remembered him with kindness, and in spite of the uncomfortable fact that he was on the wrong side of the law, they had been relieved to hear that he had escaped the pursuit of Mule-Kick Hall and his Rangers.

The last they had heard of him was a rumour that he had escaped into the wilds of the Stake Plain and that Hall and his men had gone in pursuit. It was, at all events, more than a week since the Texas Rangers had left the Frio valley, and nothing had been heard from them since.

Bob's face clouded over.

He knew that the boy outlaw, who was known all over Texas as the Rio Kid, had a wild reputation. Yet, from that one meeting, Bob and his friends had had a favourable impression of him.

That he was capable of such a miserable crime as holding up a traveller on the trail and robbing him was a surprise to Bob, and a blow to him.

The Kid—if this was the Kid—seemed to have forgotten that meeting on the Squaw Mountain; but, as the juniors had not told him their names, he could not have known whether Vernon-Smith was the name of one of the party or not.

Anyhow, it was plain that he fully believed that the schoolboy he was

threatening with his six-gun was Vernon-Smith.

There was a deadly gleam in the eyes from the flour-bag, as he aimed the revolver full at Bob's face.

"I guess I ain't waiting!" he said, in a low tone of menace. "You got the dust on you, Mister Vernon-Smith—I'm wise to that. Pony up, or by the great horned toad I'll let daylight through you, and take it out of your rags!"

Bob breathed hard.

"I've told you that I'm not Vernon-Smith," he answered quietly. "If you knew that Smithy was riding into Packsaddle this afternoon, as I suppose you did, I can understand why you've taken me for him; but I'm one of his friends, riding into town with a message for him, because he's crooked and can't ride."

"I guess that don't go down, Mister Vernon-Smith!" came a snarl from the flour-bag.

"It's the truth," said Bob. "My name's Cherry—Bob Cherry. I've got letters in my pocket to prove it, if you want to see them. Smithy crooked his leg, falling down the veranda steps at Kicking Cayuse, and I'm taking a message for him to Mr. Blake at the Pack Hotel in town."

A muttered curse came through the gash in the flour-bag.

Suspicious as the trail-thief was, he could see in Bob's face that he was telling the truth. By chance—quite a natural chance, but one that could not possibly have been foreseen—he had missed his intended victim.

"Turn out your pockets!" he snarled.

Bob quietly turned out his pockets to the lining. Among the articles he turned out was an envelope addressed to him. There was another muttered curse from the trail-thief.

He knew now, beyond doubt, that Bob was not the man he wanted. He did not touch the dollar and a quarter, which was all that Bob had to hand over. Thief as he was, he disdained such small game.

"You doggoned geek!" he snarled. "I guess you're not my bird. Git!"

Bob leaped on his bronco and rode down the trail. He was glad enough to get away, for the trail-thief was evidently bitterly disappointed and chagrined, and in a dangerous mood.

The Greyfriars junior did not look back; but he heard, as he went, a rustle in the brush, and guessed that the masked man was going back to his horse. It was useless for him to watch the trail longer, now that he knew that Herbert Vernon-Smith would not be riding to Packsaddle that day.

Bob gave his bronco a touch of the quirt, anxious to get out of the dangerous locality.

But his cheery face was clouded as he galloped on to Packsaddle. Somehow, outlaw as the Kid was, desperado as he was said to be, Bob had never thought of him as capable of trail-thievery. But the man he had left behind him in the timber island was plainly a desperate rascal, and Bob had to revise the good impression the Texan outlaw had made on him that day weeks ago on Squaw Mountain.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

The Man on the Mustang!

"MR. BLAKE?"

"Yes."

"He ain't here."

"Oh!" said Bob.

Having reached the cow town, Bob had tied up his bronco outside the Pack

Hotel at the hitching-rail, and entered to deliver his message. But Pop Stork, the plump landlord of the Pack, shook his head.

"You know him?" asked Bob.

Mr. Stork grinned.

"I guess," he answered, "that every guy to Packsaddle knows Poker Blake. Sure thing! If he was around I'd sure know; but he ain't been here."

"He was to meet Vernon-Smith, from the Kicking Cayuse," explained Bob. "I've got a message for him, as Vernon-Smith can't ride over to-day, I'd better wait, I suppose."

"Sure!" assented Pop Stork. "Wait as long as you like. If that guy's got into a poker game I guess you got to wait till he's lost his last continental red cent!"

"Oh!" said Bob.

Mr. Stork went about his business, and Bob waited in the piazza of the timber hotel, looking out over the dusty plaza of Packsaddle.

He was rather wondering what Jad Blake—alias "Poker" Blake—was like.

According to Smithy, the young rancher was selling the Circle-O on account of gambling debts, and Pop Stork's remarks seemed to bear out what Smithy had said of him.

A desperate gamester, who was throwing away his substance on the gaming-tables at the Red Flare, was not exactly the kind of character that Bob was anxious to meet. Still, he had to deliver the message from Smithy, and he waited rather impatiently for Mr. Blake to turn up.

If he was, as Pop Stork seemed to think, detained by a poker game, Bob hoped that he would not be long in losing his last "continental red cent."

From the piazza Bob had a view of a long-limbed, rugged-featured "guy" in a ten-gallon hat, coming along the plaza, and he recognised Mr. Lick, the sheriff of Packsaddle.

The sheriff came to a halt to stare at a bill that was posted on a board nailed to a post in front of the cow town hotel.

Bob had noticed that bill as he entered. It announced tersely that a reward of one thousand dollars was offered for the Rio Kid, outlaw.

It had been posted there ever since the outlaw of the Rio Grande had been known to have ridden into the Frio valley, weeks ago.

Bob, as he saw the sheriff, debated in his mind whether he ought to report to him what had happened on the timber island on the trail.

Mr. Lick, as sheriff, was entitled to hear the latest news of the outlaw; but Bob, on the other hand, could not forget that the hunted man had done him and his friends a good turn that day on Squaw Mountain.

He was thinking it over when a horseman rode up the rugged street of Packsaddle into the plaza.

Bob glanced at him, wondering whether it might be Mr. Blake arriving. Then he gave the rider a second glance.

The horseman looked like a young puncher, in stetson hat and goatskin chaps, with two guns in low-slung holsters.

He rode a grey Indian mustang.

Bob's eyes fixed on him, startled.

Under the wide brim of the stetson, which was pulled rather low, he could not see the face of the rider beyond a well-shaped and smooth, boyish chin.

But in the outlines of the slim, yet muscular figure, in the graceful posture on the horse, something familiar struck his eyes.

He had seen the Rio Kid only once.



Billy Bunter bent over to peer at the pinewood planks for the ten-dollar bill. Vernon-Smith's right hand went up, with the quirt in it. "I say, I can't see it!" said Bunter, blinking round. "Where—oh! Ow! Yaroooooop!" he yelled, as the quirt swiped.

unless the man in the flour-bag and the cloak was the Rio Kid.

Was this the man? Bob stepped nearer the piazza rail, leaned over it, and fixed his eyes intently on the rider, who pulled in in front of the hotel, a few yards behind the sheriff, and stared at the reward notice.

The junior's heart was beating fast. He could still not see the rider's face. It seemed as if the horseman was intentionally keeping it screened from view with the brim of the hat.

But he was almost sure that the man who sat the grey mustang in the plaza of Packsaddle was the boy outlaw who had come to the aid of the Famous Five that day on Squaw Mountain.

Bob's brain was almost in a whirl at the thought.

It was in keeping with what he had heard of the wild and reckless character of the Rio Kid, to ride boldly into a cow town, where a reward bill was posted for his apprehension, and where a hundred guns would have leaped from their holsters had he been known.

But if this was the Rio Kid, he was not the man who had stopped Bob in the timber island on the trail.

Bob had ridden on to Packsaddle at a gallop, and he knew that the trail-thief had not followed. That trail-thief, if he came to Packsaddle, could not possibly have reached the town yet.

Why the rascal should have announced himself as the Rio Kid, when he was not the Kid, was a mystery to Bob. But it was certain that he had lied, if this was the Kid.

And that this was the Kid, Bob very soon had startling proof.

The horseman pushed his mustang a little nearer to the sheriff. The two guns in the low-slung holsters leaped into his hands. Under Bob's staring

eyes one of them touched the sheriff's brawny neck.

Sheriff Lick gave a startled gasp and spun round.

Then he jumped almost clear of the ground.

His eyes almost popped from his face as he stared up at the horseman's face under the stetson.

Bob heard his gasping ejaculation.

"The Kid!"

It was the Rio Kid! The trail-thief in the timber island, for some unknown reason, had borrowed his name. This was the Kid! And the Kid was not the man with the hidden face!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

"Shooting Up" the Town!

THE Rio Kid grinned.

Sitting his grey mustang, with his gun on the sheriff, he grinned cheerfully.

Sheriff Lick stared at him with bulging eyes.

His hand made a move towards his belt—but stopped! The Kid was grinning, good-humouredly; but the sheriff of Packsaddle knew that, if he grasped the butt of a gun, he would not live long enough to draw it from the holster.

"The Kid!" breathed Mr. Lick.

"The Rio Kid!"

"You said it, feller!" drawled the Kid.

"Carry me home to die!" gasped the sheriff.

The Kid's eyes flashed for a second round the dusty plaza. There were a dozen men in sight, though none close at hand.

Across the plaza, Red Kelly was standing in the doorway of the Red Flare saloon, talking to a couple of punchers standing by their horses.

Three or four riders were passing at a little distance. The sheriff's deputy, Mike Hilligan, was smoking a cigar on the step of the sheriff's office, within sound of a shout.

But Mr. Lick did not think of shouting. He did not want to utter his last shout in the world.

The Kid's glance, flashing round the plaza, dropped on Bob Cherry, staring from the hotel piazza.

He gave the schoolboy a nod, evidently recognising him again as one of the party he had seen on Squaw Mountain.

Bob could only gaze at him.

The outlaw's utter recklessness in riding into Packsaddle, took his breath away. For the moment the Kid was in no danger. But the moment attention was drawn to him, he would be in the midst of the deadliest perils. It seemed to Bob impossible that he could get out of the cow town alive.

"Jest fancy meeting up with you hyer, Lick!" drawled the Kid.

"Search me!" breathed Sheriff Lick.

"Sorta surprise?" asked the Kid amiably. "Mebbe you figured I was on the other side of the Staked Plain by this time, hombre. I sure did leave a trail for the Rangers to follow that-a-way, sheriff—and I guess they're welcome to cinch the Rio Kid, if they root him out in the Staked Plain."

He laughed.

"You goldarned firebug!" breathed the sheriff. "Your best guess is to git down off'n that cayuse, and walk to the calaboose with me. You won't get out of Packsaddle, Kid."

"I guess you won't be stopping me, feller!" drawled the Kid. "You sure are honing to pull that gun, sheriff! Pull it, and drop it! Don't lift it, big boy, or something sudden will happen to you."

Sheriff Lick breathed hard. But there was no help for it. He drew the gun from his belt, by the butt, and let it fall to the ground.

"You sure are a good little man, sheriff, and know how to do as you're told!" said the Kid. "I guess I heard that this here bill was posted up for me, feller, and I sorta figured I'd horn in and put you guys wise how much it worries me. Git!"

The sheriff was glad to "git."

He made an active bound to get away; and the moment he was no longer under the Kid's gun, he roared: "The Rio Kid!"

Bang, bang!

The Kid was firing.

But his target was only the reward bill. His six-guns roared, spattering the bill, and the board it was pasted on, with lead.

Bang, bang!

Then the Kid was riding.

The grey mustang leaped into speed, the Kid riding with his knees, a gun in either hand waved in reckless defiance as he galloped down the plaza, and down the rugged street to the prairie trail.

Bang, bang, bang, bang! roared the six-guns as he rode—smashing into windows on either side of the street.

Bob Cherry gasped, gazing like a fellow in a dream.

The Kid was "shooting up" the town!

Bang, bang, bang! mingled with the wild clatter of thundering hoofs.

There were shouts and yells all over the plaza. Men rushed to their horses—others pulled six-guns, and fired after the galloping outlaw.

Sheriff Lick was raving.

He waved his hands, gesticulated, and roared at the top of his voice. Men on foot, men on horseback, tore in pursuit of the outlaw. But "guys" in the street down which the Kid was galloping hunted cover as he came, dodging into doorways and round corners. The thundering horse, the roaring six-guns, the name of the Rio Kid, cleared the way.

Hurried shots rang amid the roar of alarmed voices.

But the Kid was going full gallop, spattering bullets on either side as he went; it was only a matter of seconds before he was at the end of the street, and dashing out on the prairie.

Bob, from the hotel piazza, could still see him. He saw him half-turn for a moment, on the trail outside the town, and wave his stelson hat in mocking defiance.

Then he was going again at a wild gallop across the prairie; and thirty or forty enraged pursuers were pouring out of the cow town in fierce chase.

More and more pursuers joined up, till half Packsaddle was mounted and riding. The thunder of hoofs, the roaring of guns, died away across the prairie.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Bob.

There was a roar of excited voices in the plaza. The name of the Rio Kid was on every tongue.

"I'll say he's got gall!" Bob heard Pop Stork's voice beside him in the piazza. "That Kid sure has got gall!"

"He's got a nerve!" gasped Bob.

"And then some!" grinned Mr. Stork.

Bob Cherry watched eagerly. Packsaddle had its "mad" up at the daring and reckless defiance of the outlaw of the Rio Grande. But Bob could not help hoping that the boy outlaw would ride clear.

He knew now that the Kid was not the masked man of the timber island—he was not that dastardly trail-thief. And it came into his mind, too, that that trail-thief was probably not the only rascal who found safety in landing his misdeeds on another man. It was very likely that the Kid's wild reputation was founded largely on deeds that he had never done.

In his keen interest in the Kid, Bob Cherry almost forgot why he was in Packsaddle. But he remembered Mr. Blake as a horseman, about an hour later, rode up to the Pack hotel, and dismounted there.

"Too late for the fun, Mr. Blake!" grinned Pop Stork, as the newcomer

threw his reins over a post and came up the steps on the piazza.

Bob realised that this was the man he was waiting for.

He looked at him with some interest. Jad Blake was a young man, hardly over thirty, with a rather handsome face, and very keen eyes.

But even a schoolboy could see in that handsome face the signs of hard and wild living and late hours.

"Poker" Blake was known up and down the Packsaddle country as a desperate gambler, and a most unlucky one. Nobody was surprised to hear that he was, at last, driven to selling the Circle O.

He had long since sold every cow, and almost every horse, off his ranch, and "fired" the last of his outfit. All that remained to him was the land; and now that was going after the rest.

Bob could not help feeling a spot of compassion, mingled with contempt, for a man who went straight to his ruin for no reason but a lack of self-restraint.

Blake glanced at Bob as he came up the steps, and it seemed to the junior that there was recognition in his glance. But, so far as he knew, he had never come across Jad Blake since he had been in Texas.

The young rancher gave him only that one glance, however, and gave his attention to the landlord of the Pack.

"How come?" he asked.

"The Kid's been here!" grinned Pop Stork. "He sure has been shooting up the town, the goldarned firebug!"

"The Rio Kid?"

"Sure! The sheriff's gone after him, with a bunch—but I guess they'll come back without that cuss!" said Mr. Stork. "He sure was going like greased lightning, on that mustang of his'n."

Jad Blake gave a shrug of the shoulders.

"I guess, if I'd been around, I'd have put in for that thousand dollars!" he said.

"The guy that gets that reward for cinching the Rio Kid will sure earn it, and then some!" said Mr. Stork.

"Aw, that firebug has got the whole country scared stiff!" said Blake. "He don't scare me a lot. How long's he been gone?"

"An hour ago—"

"I guess he's at Squaw Mountain by this time, then." Blake gave another shrug. "I sure wish I'd been around. I could use a thousand dollars."

"I'll say you could," said Pop Stork, with a grin. "Say, Mr. Blake, this here young guy is waiting with a message for you."

Bob Cherry stepped forward as the young rancher's glance turned on him again. That glance was neither pleasant nor friendly.

"You can spill it!" said Blake.

"It's a message from Vernon-Smith at the Kicking Cayuse, Mr. Blake," explained Bob. "He's had a bit of an accident, and can't ride over to-day."

Blake gave a grunt.

"That the whole heap?" he asked.

"He will ride over to the Circle-O, and see you to-morrow, if that suits," said Bob.

"O.K.!" said Blake.

And he went into the hotel, leaving Bob staring. His manner was abrupt, not to say disagreeable. Bob had not liked "Poker" Blake, from what he had heard of him, and he liked him still less on acquaintance.

However, he had delivered his message, and was done with him now.

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But he did not go back to his horse at once. He was anxious to hear news of the Rio Kid before he rode out of Packsaddle.

It was about an hour later that the sheriff came trailing in, with a weary and dusty crowd. Bob did not need to hear their sulphurous remarks to learn that the Kid had escaped—their looks told as much.

Sheriff Lick was wild with rage, and all Packsaddle was fuming. But Bob, as he mounted his bronco to ride back to Kicking Cayuse, could not help feeling relieved.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Booting the Bounder!

"Ow!" Herbert Vernon-Smith made that remark—not for the first time—the following morning.

Smithy's game knee was still very painful.

His temper was far from good.

Billy Bunter was keeping at a safe distance from him.

This, as Bunter indignantly explained to the Famous Five, was not the sort of thing a fellow expected when he was staying with a fellow for a holiday. A guest was really not generally supposed to have to keep a wary eye on his host, and dodge establishing contact with him.

Contact had been established several times—rather painfully for Bunter. Twice Vernon-Smith had got near enough to kick him—with his sound leg!

Billy Bunter had to be very wary.

Indeed, he was strongly tempted to shake the dust of Kicking Cayuse from his feet, and depart in indignant scorn. He had, as he told the grinning five, a dozen of the stately homes of England to choose from for his school holidays.

But the school holidays were now up. The headmaster of Greyfriars had granted the Texas party an extension of time. But a fellow who went home, had to join up at school. Kicking Cayuse Ranch, even with his host's boot thrown in, was better than grinding Latin in the Form-room with Mr. Quelch.

So Bunter did not think of departing, but he grew more and more indignant. Even at breakfast he had to keep an eye on the Bounder, instead of devoting his whole and sole attention to the foodstuffs as naturally he wanted to do. And at dinner, with all his watchfulness, the Bounder succeeded in delivering a hack under the table—with his uninjured leg.

Smithy was absolutely savage, which was, perhaps, not surprising, in the state of his painful knee. Bunter was indignant and wrathful. The Famous Five were chiefly amused.

Indeed, they seemed to find something quite entertaining in the sight of Bunter incessantly watching and dodging the Bounder. It was not entertaining at all to Bunter.

After dinner the Bounder intended to ride over to the Circle-O for his postponed interview with Jad Blake. He was, or at least he declared he was quite fit for the ride, after resting his damaged leg for twenty-four hours.

But he was limping as he went down to the corral with the Famous Five, who were going to ride over with him.

Smithy's company, in his present temper, was neither grateful nor comforting; but the chums of the Remove

did not think that he was fit to undertake a long ride on his own. A hint that they were looking after him, would have roused his temper to its most unpleasant pitch. So they tactfully expressed a desire to see the ranch he was negotiating to purchase, and arranged to ride to the Circle-O to give it the once-over.

Billy Bunter, from the veranda, blinked after them with an indignant blink through his big spectacles. Bunter apparently was going to be left on his own, while the fellows were away all the afternoon.

He rolled after them to the corral, a little comforted by the painful "Ow!" from Vernon-Smith.

"I say, you fellows, where are you going?" demanded Bunter, with a wary eye on the scowling Bounder. "Leaving a fellow on his own!"

"You can't ride twenty miles, fat-head!" said Harry.

"I could ride your head off!"

The Famous Five looked at Smithy. Smithy, the son of the owner of Kicking Cayuse, was host. It was for him to say.

Bunter certainly was not equal to the ride. And though Bill had provided him with a quiet and tractable horse, he was more likely to fall off it than to keep on it. Still, the chums of the Remove did not want to leave Bunter behind, if he wanted to ride with them. He was sure, of course, to be a worry, but there was such a thing as good manners.

Good manners, however, seemed to have lost their appeal to the Bounder. The ache in his game knee had completely obliterated Smithy's good manners—towards William George Bunter, at all events.

"Like me to come, Smithy?" asked Bunter.

"I'd like you to come within reach of my quirt," answered Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

"Come on, you men!" snapped the Bounder.

Cactus, at the corral gate, was holding his horse and his quirt for him. Smithy wanted to get hold of that quirt now Bunter was in the offing.

"I say, Smithy—" squeaked Bunter.

"Shut up, you fat fool!"

"Shan't!" retorted Bunter. "Who are you, I'd like to know?"

Vernon-Smith turned round on him, glaring.

The Famous Five suppressed a desire to chuckle.

Bunter backed away a pace or two, watching the Bounder warily through his big spectacles.

In his normal state, Smithy would have jumped at the fat Owl and colared him; and Bunter would not have had the remotest chance of escape. But Smithy was not in his normal state. He was limping painfully, and Bunter could have dodged him with ease.

Evidently Billy Bunter was going to take full advantage of that circumstance. Safe out of reach, he blinked defiance at the exasperated Bounder.

"Low cad!" went on Bunter.

"Shut up, you fat ass!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Low rotter!" said Bunter, unheeding. "You ask a fellow out here for a holiday, and this is how you treat him. I turned down an invitation from Lord Mauleverer to come out here with you, Smithy. That chap D'Arcy of St. Jim's was very pressing, too. And what thanks do I get?"

Vernon-Smith limped a step towards Bunter.

Bunter backed another pace from Vernon-Smith.

The Famous Five looked on, considerably entertained.

"I've been treated rottenly," went on Bunter. "You bring me to a rotten ranch, where there's only one servant, and he's a cheeky choreman, who chucks potatoes at a fellow who calls him a servant!" Bunter snorted with indignation. "Not like what I'm used to at Bunter Court, I can tell you! But it's my own fault—letting myself be diddled into this. I always was good-natured. Pushing cads stick on to me. All very well for you, Smithy, making out to the people here that you know fellows like me at school. But where do I come in?"

"Will one of you fellows kick him?" asked the Bounder.

"I've a jolly good mind to kick you!" said Bunter contemptuously. "Soft ass, making all that fuss about a bit of a bump on the knee! You're soft, Smithy—that's what's the matter with you. I've a jolly good mind to boot you all round the ranch! For two pins, I'd do it!"

"Chuck over that quirt, Cactus!" yelled the Bounder.

The horse-wrangler grinned, and chucked over the quirt.

Billy Bunter made an active backward jump as the Bounder caught it.

"Come on, Smithy!" urged Bob.

"The come onfulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamest Ram Singh.

"Oh, take him away!" jeered Bunter.

"I've had enough of the low cad, if you fellows haven't! I've a jolly good mind to pull your ear before you go, Smithy!"

The Bounder, gasping with rage, made a jump at Bunter, forgetting his knee.

Swipe!

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, dodging too late. He had not expected that active jump from a fellow with a "bandy" leg.

But Smithy got in only one lick. He was reminded very rapidly of his "bandy" leg. It crumpled under him, and he went over, with a howl of anguish.

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Harry Wharton & Co. gave Smithy helping hands up. He was pale with pain.

"Come on, old chap!" said Harry.

The Bounder shook off the helping hands as soon as he was on his feet. But he did not give Bunter any more attention. That fearful pang in his injured knee was enough for him. He limped on towards the corral.

Behind him Billy Bunter's little round eyes glittered with rage through his big round spectacles. He had had only one swipe—but it was a hefty swipe.

He made a sudden rush after Vernon-Smith.

Thud!

Bunter's foot shot out and landed on Vernon-Smith's riding-breeches. The Bounder gave a yell, and stumbled over.

"He, he, he!" gasped Bunter.

He was in full flight the next second. He had booted the Bounder—a thing he had often longed to do, but never ventured to attempt. Now he had done it. Circumstances had been favourable, and the egregious fat Owl had got away with it. Now he got away with himself as fast as his fat little legs could whisk.

"He, he, he!" floated back.

And Bunter was gone.

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Herbert Vernon-Smith scrambled up, and glared round with a face of fury. But all he saw of Bunter was a last glimpse as the fat Owl of the Remove bolted into the rancho.

"I—I—I—" gasped Smithy.

He made one step in pursuit, and stopped.

The Famous Five, with great difficulty, but with great care, suppressed their smiles.

For a moment or two Vernon-Smith stood panting with rage. Then, with a black brow, he limped on to the corral. Bunter had to wait!

The Famous Five were glad enough to get into the saddle and ride. Smithy rode with them, with a brow of thunder.

From the veranda, a grinning fat face looked after them, and Bunter chuckled. He had booted the Bounder! Probably there would be trouble to follow; but, really, Smithy could not make himself much more unpleasant than he had done already. Anyhow, he had booted the beast, and that happy recollection caused the fat Owl to emit chuckle after chuckle.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

On the Mountain Trail!

CLATTER, clatter!

"Some trail!" remarked Bob Cherry.

The hoofs of the broncos rang on hard rock.

Vernon-Smith, in the lead, rode fast, rocky and dangerous as the way was. The Famous Five were strung out behind him.

The Circle-O lay on the south side of Squaw Mountain, a good many long miles from Kicking Cayuse, though its ranges joined those of the latter. It was possible to reach it by prairie trails round the base of the mountain, but that was twice as long a route as by cutting across the southern slopes of Squaw. The Bounder had chosen the shorter way, rough and rocky as it was.

Harry Wharton & Co. had ridden far and wide during their stay at Kicking Cayuse, and they knew their way about the country by this time. They had been on the Circle-O ranges more than once, though they had never so far visited the ranch-house itself or seen it. Since "Poker" Blake had ceased to run herds on the Circle-O, the ranges had been let to the Kicking Cayuse, and Bill pastured bunches of cows there.

The Greyfriars party were now riding along the Squaw River, where it was a mountain torrent, splashing down the rocky slopes. Down on the prairie the Squaw was wide and swampy; here it was narrow and swift, with many cascades.

On the left of the riders ran the Squaw, deep in its rocky bed; on their right rose a steep slope of rugged rock, almost like a wall.

Between the river-bank and the rocky wall was a space not more than six or seven feet wide, narrowing at places to hardly more than half that width.

It was a ride that needed nerve—with which, fortunately, all the Greyfriars fellows were well provided, though it was probable that, had Bunter been in the party, the fat Owl would have been sorry that he had come.

With every wind of the stream the trail turned, so that sometimes they could not see more than a dozen yards ahead.

The juniors behind Smithy noticed that every now and then, when he turned a bulging corner of rock, his

hand went to the butt of the six-gun in his belt.

What had happened to Bob Cherry the day before had put Smithy on his guard. If there was some "hoodlum" who had heard that a millionaire's son was around, and who was looking for a chance to relieve him of some of his wealth, Smithy was on the watch for him.

The lonely trail over Squaw Mountain was a very favourable spot for a hold-up if the trail-thief happened to learn that the son of the owner of Kicking Cayuse was riding that way.

The Famous Five had also brought their rifles, in leather cases on the broncos. But it did not seem to them likely that the man in the flour-bag was in the offing.

Whoever he was—and they did not believe that he was the Rio Kid—he might have heard in the cow town of Smithy's appointment with Mr. Blake the previous day; but they did not see how he could possibly have learned that Smithy was going over to the Circle-O this afternoon. So they had no expectation of anything like a hold-up on the trail.

"Some trail!" repeated Bob, checking the speed of his bronco. "Smithy, old man, no need to stamp on the gas."

The Bounder did not heed. He was always reckless, and he liked perhaps to show his nerve. Instead of checking speed, he gave his bronco a touch of the quirt and dashed on.

"Silly ass!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Oh, come on!" said Bob. "Smithy's setting the pace! If he rolls down into the Squaw, we shall have to fish him out. Rather a pity we didn't bring our lessos in that case!"

Harry Wharton frowned.

"Hold in," he said. "If Smithy plays the fool, no reason why we should. I don't want to be fished out."

And he checked his horse.

"That's sense!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"The sensefulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

On a narrow ledge with a slope to it, between a mountain wall and a deep river canyon, it was folly to put on speed at the incessant risk of a slip or a stumble, especially when there was no occasion for hurry.

It was like the Bounder to display his nerve, and the other fellows, naturally did not want to appear to be lacking in the same by falling behind. But the captain of the Greyfriars Remove sensibly set the example of slowing down the pace, and his friends followed it.

Vernon-Smith, some distance ahead, looked back.

There was a visible sneer on his face, which had a considerably irritating effect on the chums of the Remove. But it was not uncommon for the Bounder of Greyfriars to produce that effect.

"Are you coming?" called out Smithy. "Getting nery, or what?"

"The nerviness is not terrific, my esteemed and idiotic Smithy!" called back Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "But more hastefulness is less speedfulness, as the English proverb remarks; likewise, the lookfulness before the leapfulness is the cracked pitcher that goes longest to the bird in the bush!"

"Hear, hear!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "Some English proverb!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, come on!" exclaimed the Bounder impatiently. "Do you want to get down and walk? I'm going on, anyhow!"

"Don't be a silly, swanky ass,

Smithy!" called out Johnny Bull.

"What?"

"Silly, swanky ass!"

The Bounder gave him a look, gave his bronco a lash, and dashed on at a gallop.

Johnny shrugged his shoulders.

Herbert Vernon-Smith disappeared ahead round the next wind of the trail, and the Famous Five lost sight of him.

They would not have been surprised to hear the crash of a falling horse. The Bounder was a first-class horseman, but he was taking reckless chances—partly from sheer headstrong arrogance, but partly, no doubt, owing to the irritation caused by his "game" leg.

The bunch of riders continued at the same pace. When they rode round the turn the Bounder was still out of sight ahead. He had passed the next bend, and probably the next, for the ringing of his horse's hoofs came very faintly back to their ears.

Harry Wharton set his lips. The Bounder was making all the Famous Five feel disposed to boot him. But the captain of the Remove could be obstinate as well as Vernon-Smith, and he did not put on the slightest acceleration of pace. If Smithy chose to make a fool of himself, he could do so—and that was that!

"Smithy will be at Circle-O a good bit before us at this rate," remarked Frank Nugent.

"Let him!" said Wharton curtly.

"More likely to land in the river than at the ranch!" said Bob. "I dare say we shall hear him yelling to be pulled out soon."

"A ducking may do him good!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Hark!" exclaimed Bob suddenly.

"Oh, my hat!"

Crack!

It was the sharp report of a firearm, ringing from the distance ahead. They could no longer hear the hoof-beats of the Bounder's horse. But they heard that sharp crack, as it rang through the clear mountain air.

"By gum!" exclaimed Nugent.

"Smithy—"

"That blighter in the flour-bag, perhaps—" breathed Bob.

"Come on!" said Harry.

The Famous Five grabbed their rifles from the leather cases. Then they dashed on. That shot ahead, on the trail, told that Herbert Vernon-Smith had landed in trouble—and the Famous Five, no longer cautious, rode as recklessly as the Bounder—dashing at a gallop to the rescue.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

The Hold-Up!

"HANDS up!"

Vernon-Smith was riding fast—recklessly fast. But he pulled in his bronco as the sharp command fell on his ears.

He had no choice in the matter, reckless as he was. From a fissure in the rocky wall on the right of the trail, a man stepped out, and his revolver was aimed at the Bounder of Greyfriars.

Smithy had to halt or be halted by a whizzing bullet; and he dragged on the reins so sharply that the bronco stumbled and almost fell. There was a wild clatter of hoofs.

The Bounder controlled the horse. He set his teeth, his eyes gleaming at the man on the mountain trail.

Who the man was it would have been hard to guess. The flour-bag drawn

over his face hid it completely; and the horseman's cloak folded round him showed no more than his riding-boots below.

But Smithy did not need telling that it was the trail-thief who had stopped Bob Cherry on the Packsaddle trail the day before. It was the man in the flour-bag who had falsely called himself the Rio Kid.

Evidently he knew that the millionaire's son would be riding to the Circle-O that day, as he had known that he would be riding to Packsaddle the previous day. How, it was hard to guess. But clearly he knew, for here he was, waiting and watching for him on the mountain trail.

The keen eyes glittered at Smithy through the slits in the flour-bag.

"Put 'em up!" came the snarling voice. "Pronto!"

The Bounder panted with rage.

The man in the flour-bag had him cornered. His gun was ready—but he had no chance to pull it. But he did not put up his hands. On that narrow path his horse needed control.

"You asking for it?" came a snarl from the flour-bag. "I guess you'll see how the Rio Kid shoots if you don't reach for the sky, Mr. Vernon-Smith."

"Can't you see that I've got to hold my horse, you fool?" snarled the Bounder. "You can pick my pockets if you like! You've got a gun on me, you sneaking, thieving scoundrel!"

The defiance was utterly reckless, under the levelled six-gun. But the Bounder of Greyfriars was in his most reckless mood; and he was deeply, intensely enraged by being caught like this.

But for his own folly, his friends would have been with him, and the masked man would hardly have ventured to "hold up" a party of six, all armed.

From sheer swank and irritable temper, he had left them behind; and fallen in with the trail-thief alone; the rascal had the "drop" on him, and he was helpless.

And there was a very handsome sum in bills in the Bounder's pockets, which he was extremely unwilling to lose.

"Git off'n that hoss and put up your hands, you young geek!" came the command.

The man in the flour-bag appeared to concede that Vernon-Smith could not sit a restive horse in such a place with his hands over his head.

Gritting his teeth, the Bounder dismounted. How far were his friends behind him, he wondered. He could not hear their horses.

The masked man evidently did not know that he was not alone. He was watching for a schoolboy riding the trail; and as Vernon-Smith had appeared alone, he was naturally unaware that Smithy had companions on the ride. He could not see more than a distance of thirty feet along the winding trail; but, if Smithy had his friends with him, he would naturally have expected to see them or hear them.

He was not on his guard against anyone coming along the mountain trail. But he was watching Smithy like a cat.

Plainly, he had heard about the Bounder, who had picked up many of the ways of the cow-country since he had been at Kicking Cayuse. Smithy's exploits at "gun-play" had been the talk of Packsaddle. The trail-thief was not giving him a chance to handle the gun which he had shown that he could handle promptly and effectively.

The eyes through the slits in the flour-bag were as keen as a hawk's, and

they never left Vernon-Smith for a second.

"I guess I got the right bird this time!" he sneered. "You sure are heeled, Mr. Vernon-Smith! Drop that gun!" His voice came hard and deep. "Drop it—and if you try to handle it, by the great horned toad, you get yours."

Trembling with rage, the Bounder drew the six-gun from the holster in his belt. Mad as the attempt would have been, he was tempted to grip it and lift it. But it was instant death to do so; and he did not.

Keeping the gun down, he flung it to the ground—but he contrived, as he flung it, to twitch the trigger. The revolver rang out sharply as it struck the ground, the bullet whizzing away across the Squaw.

That loud, sharp crack of the revolver must, he knew, reach the ears of the juniors, however far they had fallen behind him. It was enough to warn them of a hold-up on the trail.

"Stick 'em up!" rapped the masked man.

He did not heed the explosion of the revolver as it fell. It was likely enough to occur, when a loaded firearm was flung to the ground, and he certainly did not guess that the Bounder had given a signal.

Vernon-Smith raised his hands above his head, his eyes burning at the man in the flour-bag.

"O.K.," said the trail-thief, "I guess I got you where I want you now, Mr. Vernon-Smith! I ain't honing to spill your juice, and you a schoolboy—but you sure want to talk turkey when you're talking to the Rio Kid."

The Bounder's lips curved in a bitter sneer.

He had not, like the Famous Five, met the celebrated Texan outlaw. He had a glimpse of the Kid from a distance, that was all.

But he knew that the man in the flour-bag was lying; from what Bob Cherry had told him of his adventure on the Packsaddle trail.

He would have given much to penetrate the identity that was hidden by the flour-bag! He was quite certain that the hidden face was not the Kid's.

No doubt the rascal in the flour-bag, when he had robbed the millionaire's son, would be glad enough to leave pursuit to follow another man's trail.

From the fact that he hid his identity so carefully, Smithy had not the slightest doubt that he was well known in the vicinity. But the Kid, whose face was known all over Texas, had no use for masks.

Still keeping the revolver up, the masked man advanced towards the Bounder, standing with his hands over his head. Possibly he doubted whether the schoolboy might not have another weapon about him, beside the one he had thrown down on the rocks.

"Keep 'em up, Mr. Vernon-Smith!" he said grimly. "I guess I've heard that you're some gunman; but I reckon I've got you dead to rights! Where do you pack your roll?"

The Bounder trembled with rage. He had a thousand dollars in a "roll" in his breast pocket. It was at the mercy of the trail-thief, unless—

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

Distant, but rapidly approaching, sounded the crash of hoofs on hard rock. The masked man half-turned, staring down the mountain trail, with startled eyes, through the eye-holes in the flour-bag.

"Search me!" he breathed. "That's a bunch—what the thunder is a bunch riding this trail for?"

Vernon-Smith breathed hard.

His friends were coming—at a gallop. Any moment they might come sweeping round the last bend of the winding trail—rifle in hand. The signal shot had warned them.

Gallop, gallop!

They were coming on hard and fast. For a few moments the startled trail-thief stood undecided. He did not, and could not know that it was the party of schoolboys coming—more likely, he pictured a bunch of punchers, riding across from the Kicking Cayuse to Circle-O. He had no time to lose.

But he would not give up his prey. He stepped swiftly to the Bounder, jamming the revolver almost into his face.

"Pony up—pronto—or—"

The words came in a hiss. The trigger half-rose—the man was savage and desperate, and Vernon-Smith's life hung on a thread. With set teeth, the Bounder lowered a hand and drew the "roll" from his pocket. It dropped to the ground. With his free hand the man in the flour-bag grabbed it.

He did not stay for more, if there was more. The crash of galloping hoofs was too close.

He leaped back, thrust the revolver into his belt, and ran for the fissure in the rocky wall from which he had emerged.

At the same moment, Harry Wharton came into sight, sweeping round the bend of the trail. Another second and his comrades swept into sight after him.

"Shoot!" shrieked the Bounder.

Wharton had his reins bunched in his left, a rifle in his right. As he saw the man in the flour-bag, he dropped his reins, guiding the horse with his knees—and lifted the rifle to his shoulder.

Bang!

The man in the flour-bag was leaping into the fissure as the rifle roared. As the report crashed out, waking the echoes of Squaw Mountain, he disappeared—but a loud, sharp yell that floated back told that he had been touched. But he was gone—and the Bounder heard a sound of wild scrambling.

He rushed to his revolver, lying where he had thrown it. He clutched it up, and tore along to the fissure, forgetful for the moment of his damaged leg, regardless of the pang of pain that went through his knee. He had a second's glimpse of a cloak disappearing over a high rocky ridge at the back of the fissure in the cliff, and fired instantly.

The bullet spattered on hard rock. The man in the flour-bag was gone—vanishing among the wild and rugged rocks of the steep hillside. Even then the Bounder would have pursued—but his leg sagged under him, and he leaned on the rock, panting, while the Famous Five rode up and clattered to a halt.

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

In the Jaws of Death!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH gritted his teeth.

The man was gone—gone with a roll of a thousand dollars. A minute earlier, and the Famous Five would have saved him from that loss.

They had saved him a good deal, for the Bounder had valuables about him, worth quite as much as the roll of bills he had had to hand to the hold-up man. But he was thinking only of his rage and disappointment. In his bitter rage he would have given thrice as much to see the man in the flour-bag roll over under his Colt.

"That was the chap!" gasped Bob

Cherry. All the juniors had glimpsed the man in the flour-bag as he disappeared. "That's the blighter who stopped me on the trail yesterday."

"He's gone!" said Harry. He reined in his horse opposite the fissure in the cliff, and stared into it. There was no sign of the masked man—only, from higher up the hill, came the clink of a falling stone, doubtless dislodged in his flight.

"Did he get anything from you, Smithy?" asked Bob.

The Bounder gave a snarl.

"Only a thousand dollars!" he yapped.

Bob whistled.

"If you hadn't cleared off ahead of us, Smithy—" began Johnny Bull.

"Oh, shut up!"

Johnny Bull looked grim.

"Your own fault!" he said coolly. "The brute wouldn't have tackled the lot of us—he cleared off fast enough when we came up! If you hadn't—"

"Will you shut up?"

"Not unless I choose!" answered Johnny Bull stolidly. "Do you think any fellow here cares for your silly temper?"

"Hem!" murmured Nugent.

"My esteemed Johnny—"

"I've said it was his own fault, and so it was!" said Johnny calmly. "That scoundrel caught him alone and bagged his dollars—but if he hadn't cleared off ahead—"

"Nuff's as good as a feast, old man!" said Bob Cherry. "The man's gone—let's get on."

The Bounder gave Johnny Bull a black and bitter look. Every word that Johnny uttered was perfectly true: but Smithy had no use, just then, for plain truths.

He made a movement to scramble into the rugged fissure of the cliff. Even yet he seemed to be thinking of getting after the man in the flour-bag, and getting back that roll of bills.

"Nothing doing, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton, quietly. "We could never find him, scrambling over the mountain—there's cover enough for a hundred men. Ten to one he's got his horse not far away, too."

"I'd get after him, if it wasn't for my leg!" said Vernon-Smith, between his teeth. "By gad—to let that thief walk off with a thousand dollars! Why couldn't you come along? I banged off my Colt to warn you—you should have come—"

"We came full tilt!" said Bob.

"Looks like it!" snapped the Bounder. "You've let him get away with my roll of bills! Afraid of falling off your horses, like Bunter?"

Four members of the Co. made no reply to that. They could feel for Smithy, exasperated by a heavy loss, and tormented by the pain in his "bandy" leg. But Johnny Bull, less blessed with tact than his friends, answered in his calm and stolid way. Johnny saw no reason for giving the Bounder his head, when he had one of his tantrums. Johnny despised tantrums. Johnny's idea was that a fellow ought to be able to keep his temper: and no doubt he was right.

"We came at top speed, Smithy!" he said. "And you know we did, too! You're just blowing off your silly temper! And it wouldn't have happened if you hadn't been swanking, like a silly ass! Best thing you can do now is to keep with us, in case there are any more hold-up men knocking about."

Herbert Vernon-Smith opened his lips—and closed them again. Perhaps he remembered that Johnny was his guest at Kicking Cayuse. Perhaps words were

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inadequate to express his feelings: and even the Bounder didn't want to get as far as the punching of heads.

He limped to his horse, and dragged himself into the saddle again. Without a word, he rode on down the rugged winding trail.

The Famous Five exchanged a glance. Wharton frowned—Johnny shrugged his shoulders—and Bob Cherry grinned faintly.

"Come on!" said Nugent.

And they remounted and followed the Bounder.

"The silly ass!" said Johnny Bull.

If Vernon-Smith had ridden recklessly before, he was riding doubly recklessly now. In his bitter anger and resentment he seemed to enjoy annoying and alarming his friends behind.

He dashed away at a gallop, quirted the bronco. Even an experienced puncher would never have galloped on such a path. It was simply asking for trouble.

Harry Wharton & Co. rode after him, faster than they desired to ride, only anxious to keep the reckless fellow in sight.

Ahead, the path between the river and the mountain wall narrowed. It was less than five feet wide, and it sloped to the edge of the deep rocky channel at the bottom of which foamed the Squaw.

The Bounder took that bottle-neck at the same speed.

"The fool!" breathed Wharton.

But the next moment, all anger and annoyance vanished in alarm. The Bounder's bronco stumbled, a hoof slipping on a loose stone.

The horse pitched forward, so suddenly, that Vernon-Smith had not the slightest chance of saving himself.

He shot from the saddle, almost like a stone from a catapult.

"Oh!" panted Wharton: and his face went white.

The horse scrambled and sprawled and squealed, struggling to get away from the perilous verge, where the rocky bank dropped sheer to the water ten feet below.

But the Bounder had fallen on the very edge.

In a wider space he would have got off with a bump on the ground. But there was no space.

The Famous Five, in horror, saw him roll over the edge of rock, make one wild clutch with desperate hands, and disappear.

There was a splash in the water below.

"Smithy!" gasped Bob.

They dragged in their horses. Leaving the broncos bunched on the narrow trail, they ran forward to the spot where Vernon-Smith had fallen, and where his horse stood trembling against the rocky wall.

"Smithy!" shouted Harry.

They threw themselves down on the edge of the rocky path. The rock dropped like a wall to the water. Smithy was a good swimmer—they would not and could not believe that in his angry arrogance he had gone to his death.

But the current of the upper Squaw was swift and strong. They sighted Vernon-Smith—already swept fifty yards away.

He was swimming strongly, in spite of his damaged leg: fighting for his life in the foaming Squaw.

But the current tore him away: and the juniors scrambled along the top of the rocky bank, to keep pace with him, to help him if they could.

Harry Wharton gave a sudden cry of sheer horror. The roar of a waterfall—one of the many falls of the Squaw—

came along the river-course. The Bounder, fighting hard, swept down to the line of white foam that marked the fall.

Rugged rocks jutted up from the river-bed, and among them, the Squaw roared and foamed, in clouds of spray. The horrified juniors on the bank dreaded for a second to see the Bounder crash on the rocks—though if he missed them, it was to shoot over the fall, to death in the deep below.

They saw him clutch, and hold. On the very edge of the fall, his desperate grasp closed on a rock that jutted from the water, and he held.

Deafened by the roar, blinded with foam, he clung on, the torrent roaring and raging round him, eager to drag him away to death.

"Hold on, Smithy!" roared Bob.

His voice did not reach the Bounder in the roar of falling water. But Smithy was holding on for his life. The rock jutted hardly a foot from the water; he dragged his chest on it and clung with both desperate hands, the torrent dragging at him. Through the foam and spray the juniors could see his face, white and set.

"We've got to save him!" panted Harry desperately.

The Bounder was ten feet below, twenty feet out. To reach him was impossible. To enter the water was to be swept helplessly over the fall, as the clinging Bounder might be swept at any moment.

He was within reach of a lasso—cast by a skilful hand. But the juniors had not taken their lassos on a visit to a neighbouring ranch. They had no means of reaching the hapless schoolboy who clung wildly to the rock in the midst of the foaming torrent.

Harry Wharton cast a wild, desperate look round him. Some means of reaching the Bounder—any means; there was not even a tree to be seen, from which a branch might have been snapped. He thought of joining up the reins of the horses into a rope, but he knew—only too well he knew—that there was no time.

And then, at the sight of a stetson hat on the rocky trail, he gave a shout of joy and relief. A puncher in stetson and chaps, with a coiled lasso on his saddle-horn, was riding towards them on a grey mustang, and Harry Wharton waved and shouted to him.

"Help! Help here! For mercy's sake help!"

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Saved By An Outlaw!

THE Rio Kid pulled in the grey mustang.

Perhaps the sound of firing, a short while ago, on the mountain had reached the ears of the Kid and warned him that others were on the trail. He was, at all events, watchful and wary as he came, and his hand was very near the walnut butt of a Colt. He grasped it at the sight of the figures bunched by the bank of the Squaw.

But he relinquished it again at once as he recognised the schoolboys and heard Harry Wharton's frantic appeal.

From where he rode he could not see down into the deep river-channel, but the Kid was quick on the uptake. He jumped from the grey mustang. Five fellows, their faces white with horror, bunched on the high bank over the river told the Kid all he needed to know. He grabbed the coiled lasso from his saddle-horn and ran to the spot with the swiftness of an antelope.

"Save him!" Wharton's voice came



"It's the Rio Kid!" roared Sheriff Lick. Bang, bang! The boy outlaw's guns roared, spattering the bill and the board it was pasted on, with lead.

in a husky gasp. "The lasso—that's the only way! Oh, save him!"

"I should smile!" said the Kid.

He stood on the edge of the high bank, his clear blue eyes fixed on the figure that clung to the rock in the river, tossing in the foaming water. The coiled lasso circled in his hand and flew.

Whether any of the juniors could have made that cast with success was doubtful. But the rope, in the hand of the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande, was as unerring as his six-gun.

Breathlessly the juniors watched.

They saw the loop drop with amazing accuracy exactly over the head and shoulders of the Bounder as his chest rested on the rugged jut of rock.

They saw the sudden start that the clinging junior gave as he felt the impact of the rope.

They watched, with their hearts in their mouths. The noose was over Smithy's head, over his shoulders, but above his arms, outstretched and gripping the rough, wet surface of the rock. They saw him release first one arm and slip it through the loop, and grip again; then they saw him release the other and slip it through.

The loop was under his arms now.

The Kid gave a nod of approval.

"I'll say that young guy has got his wits about him," he remarked. "I'll tell the world he's got sand, and he sure is some cool cuss! I got him now."

The Kid drew the rope taut.

The slip-noose of the lasso tightened round Herbert Vernon-Smith, gripping him under the arms. At the pull of the rope he let go the rock.

It needed all his nerve to release his hold with the fierce torrent rushing him to the fall. But it had to be done, and the Bounder did it—trusting himself to the rope.

The Kid drew it in. Harry Wharton &

Co. grasped the slack of the rope to lend aid; but it was not needed.

With a strong and steady hand the Kid drew, and the Bounder, at the end of the riata, was drawn to the bank below the spot where the juniors stood. Under the pull on the rope he swung clear of the swirling water, and was drawn up.

The Kid swung him up the bank with ease. But as he drew level, the juniors all reached out and grasped him.

Vernon-Smith was pulled on the bank in many hands and carried across to the safe side of the mountain path.

The Kid unhooked the lasso and coiled it.

Vernon-Smith sat leaning back against the wall of rock beside the path, dripping, in a pool of water, panting and panting.

He had been at the very point of exhaustion when the Kid's lasso drew him away from death. His friends surrounded him, with anxious faces. The Bounder for the moment could not speak. He could only pant for breath.

The Kid hooked the lasso on his saddle-horn again. Then he went along the bank to a point below the fall. The Bounder's hat had been swept away in the water and had caught on a spur of rock some distance down, and the good-natured Kid went after it.

He disappeared down the steep bank, leaving the grey mustang standing by the other horses.

"Smithy, old man—" murmured Bob.

Smithy smiled faintly.

At that moment the chums of the Remove were not likely to remember that Smithy owed his deadly peril to his own arrogant recklessness. That was quite forgotten in their joy and relief at his rescue.

"My own fault!" Smithy found his voice at last. "By gad! That was a

close shave, you fellows! I thought I was gone."

"So did we!" said Harry, with a shiver. "If that chap hadn't turned up I—"

"Thank goodness he did!" said Nugent.

"The thankfulness is terrific."

"Who is he?" asked Vernon-Smith. "Some puncher. I think I've seen him before."

"It's the Rio Kid!" said Harry. "The outlaw that the Texas Rangers were after a week or two ago. The fellow who got us out of that scrape when Barney Stone had us cornered under his gun—"

"Oh gad! I thought I'd seen him. I saw him that day at the ranch, but only from a distance. I don't care what he is—he's saved my life!" said Vernon-Smith.

"He can't be a bad chap, outlaw or not!" said Bob. "I saw him shooting up Packsaddle yesterday. He seems to be a lively sort of card; but I don't believe there's any harm in him."

Vernon-Smith nodded. His strength was returning now and the colour coming back into his cheeks. He made a movement to rise, and Bob gave him a hand up. He leaned on the rocky wall, breathing hard.

"That rotten rascal in the flour-bag used his name!" he said. "But this is proof that it was a lie, if we hadn't known it already. Where is the chap gone—he's left his horse—"

"Gone after your stetson, I think," said Bob. "It went over the fall."

"And I should have gone after it—by way of the fall—but for him!" said Smithy. "Well, I asked for it, and I jolly nearly got it." Evidently the Bounder was in a chastened mood. "My own fault."

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(Continued from page 13.)

"Chap shouldn't lose his temper!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Shut up, old man!" murmured Bob. The Bounder laughed.

"Oh, let Johnny run on!" he said. "He can't call me a bigger fool than I call myself. Hallo! Who the dickens is that?"

There was a thud of hoofbeats on the mountain trail, the way the juniors had come. A horseman rode into sight, and slowed down as he saw the bunch of horses blocking the way.

He was a stranger to the juniors—with one exception. Bob Cherry knew the handsome, dissipated face of the rider.

"That's Mr. Blake," he said.

"Jad Blako?" asked the Bounder.

"Yes; the man I took the message to yesterday at Packsaddle."

All the juniors looked with interest at Poker Blake. As they were riding over to the Circle-O to see him they were rather surprised to see him coming on behind them.

The young rancher dismounted, and led his horse by the bridle past the group of broncos on the narrow path. He stared at the schoolboys as he reached the spot where they stood.

"You from Kicking Cayuse?" he asked.

"Yes; riding over to Circle-O to see you, Mr. Blake," answered Bob. "This is Vernon-Smith."

Blake gave the Bounder a nod and held out his hand.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Vernon-Smith," he said civilly enough, though his manner was not cordial. "I'll ride on to the ranch with you. What's been happening here—been in the water?"

"Yes, and nearly stayed there!" answered Vernon-Smith. "But—"

There was a tramp of riding-boots on the steep bank. The Rio Kid was coming back—with the Bounder's drenched stetson in his hand.

The bank of the Squaw sloped steeply, by the fall, and the Kid was on a lower level than the Greyfriars fellows. They saw the top of his hat as he came back, before his face was visible.

The juniors exchanged a quick look. The Kid naturally did not know that another person had joined the party during his brief absence. He was coming back, quite unaware that there was now another on the scene.

Harry Wharton & Co. were feeling extremely friendly towards the outlaw who had saved Vernon-Smith from a terrible death. But it was not to be expected that Jad Blake would feel the same if he knew the Kid. Any man in the Frio valley who sighted the Rio Kid was likely to reach for his gun at sight.

But before the juniors had time to speak, the Kid's sunburnt face rose into view under his hat as he came up the bank.

Poker Blake glanced at him as he came—and then his glance became fixed. The look on his face showed that he knew the Kid.

Instantly he whipped out his Colt. His eyes gleamed over the barrel levelled at the outlaw. His voice rang sharply.

"The Rio Kid, by thunder! Hands up!"

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

Turning the Tables!

THE Kid gave a start—ever so slight.

For once, the wary outlaw had been caught napping.

It was only five minutes since he had left the juniors to go down the steep bank and recover the hat below the fall. He had come back unsuspecting—to find himself looking into the muzzle of a levelled six-gun.

He dropped the wet stetson, and put up his hands.

The rancher's revolver, not ten feet away, was aimed full at his handsome, sunburnt face, the finger on the trigger, and the Kid had not the remotest chance of pulling a gun before the shot sped. It was surrender or sudden death—and the Kid knew what he had to do when he was at the wrong end of the gun.

"Sure!" he said amiably. "I'll say you hold the cards, feller! But what's the game? What you pulling a gun for?"

Blake smiled grimly.

"Keep them up!" he said. "I know you, Kid! I've seen your picture posted up at Prairie Bend often enough. By thunder, I've got you, Kid! Keep 'em up—I'll shoot you dead if you try to get at a gun!"

"Feller," said the Kid calmly, "I never was the guy to argue with a six-gun when the other galoot was holding it! You got me dead to rights, and I ain't got no kick coming."

Harry Wharton & Co. stood in utter dismay. The Bounder's eyes gleamed. Blake gave them a quick glance.

"Get his guns off him while I keep him covered!" he rapped.

The schoolboys did not stir.

Exactly how to deal with this, they hardly knew; but it was quite certain that they were not going to lend any aid in the arrest of the man who had saved Vernon-Smith from the river.

"Hold on, Mr. Blake!" said the Bounder. "That's the man who got me out of the river and saved my life not ten minutes ago!"

"I guess that cuts no ice!" answered the rancher. "That's the Rio Kid, with a reward of a thousand dollars on him. Keep them up, Kid!" He was watching the outlaw like a cat.

The Bounder's lip curled. It was the reward for the taking of the outlaw that the rancher was thinking of. No doubt a thousand dollars would have been very useful to a man who had gambled away almost all he had.

"Look here, Mr. Blake—" began Bob Cherry.

"Talk's no use!" said Blake. "I've got the Rio Kid under my gun—I'm taking him! Get his guns off him!"

"Nobody here will lift a finger against the man who has saved our pal's life!" said Harry Wharton.

"No jolly fear!" said Johnny Bull emphatically.

"And you're not going to take him, Mr. Blake!" said the Bounder, between his teeth. "Do you fancy that we're standing by while you run in the man who saved me from going over the fall?"

"You won't buck against the law, I guess!" said the rancher. "Stand

clear! Kid, I'm coming for your guns—and if you stir a finger, you get yours. I guess they'll pay for you dead or alive! You got it coming if you lift a finger."

"You're talking, feller!" answered the Kid cheerfully.

Blake made a step towards him, watching him keenly over the levelled revolver.

But if the Famous Five were non-plussed, the Bounder was prompt to act.

He made a swift step forward, and, before the rancher could realise his intention, grasped Blake's arm and dragged it down.

Blake, with a gasp of rage, dragged at his arm to free it.

But for the moment his gun was no longer covering the Kid! A moment was more than enough for the outlaw of the Rio Grande.

The Kid's hands had been up over his stetson, but in the space of a flash of lightning they were down; a walnut-butted gun was in his right, and aimed at the rancher of the Circle-O.

"Go slow, feller!" came the Kid's voice, sharp and clear. "Keep that gun down, or you're a dead hombre."

"Oh crumbs!" breathed Bob.

Blake, his face contorted with rage, wrenched his arm away from the Bounder's grip.

But he did not raise the gun.

His chance was gone!

It was the Kid now who held the "drop"—his eyes gleaming over the Colt at the rancher, his finger on the trigger. An upward motion of the rancher's gun spelled instant death. The tables had been turned completely.

Blake, panting with rage, kept his hand down, with the gun in it.

"Drop that gun!"

The Kid rapped out the words.

For a fraction of a second the enraged rancher hesitated. Then the Colt clattered down on the rock.

Vernon-Smith kicked it off the bank into the river, and it splashed and disappeared.

The Kid laughed.

"I'll say I'm obliged to you, feller!" he remarked. "That lobo-wolf sure had me dead to rights!"

"One good turn deserves another!" said the Bounder.

"Sure!" agreed the Kid. "You honing for some more trouble, Mr. Blake? I guess the poker sharps at the Red Flare will miss you at their game if you don't put your hands up."

Blake's hands went over his head. His face was almost white with rage, but he obeyed promptly.

"I guess," remarked the Kid, "that you won't cinch that thousand dollars, Mr. Blake—not by a whole jugful! Jest walk back along the trail, keeping on reaching for the sky, till you turn the next corner, hombre! And don't forget that my gun will be looking at you."

In silence, grinding his teeth, the rancher turned and walked back along the trail the way he had come.

He passed the bunch of horses and tramped on, his hands still over his head, till he disappeared round the next bend of the trail.

Then the Kid, grinning, holstered his gun.

He stepped to the grey mustang and vaulted lightly into the saddle.

"I guess I'll be hitting the horizon!" he remarked. "I'll say, jest once more, that I'm obliged to you, feller. That guy sure had me by the short hairs, if you hadn't horned in that-a-way."

"Hold on!" said the Bounder.

"Shoot!" said the Kid.

"Look here, you know what you did

for me," said Vernon-Smith quietly and earnestly. "You saved my life—"

"I guess you put that level, feller."

"Can't I do anything more?" asked Vernon-Smith. "You're an outlaw, and they tell a lot of tales about you—most of them lies, as I know jolly well—"

"How'd you know that?" asked the Kid, with a grin.

"There's a trail-thief in this very district who calls himself by your name," said Vernon-Smith. "I was held up not an hour ago by a man in a flour-bag who called himself the Rio Kid."

"Search me!" The Kid's eyes gleamed. "I guess that's no new game, feller—that's been played before! They sure do crowd a heap of shootings and hold-ups on to me that I never heard of."

"Can't it be set right?" asked the Bounder. "Can't you get square with the law? Money talks in this country—my father's a millionaire, and he would do anything that I asked him. Couldn't you—"

The Kid's face clouded, and he shook his head.

"Too late, feller!" he answered. "Heaps too late! But I'll tell you this, seeing that I'd like to leave you thinking of me as well as you can! I was made an outlaw on a false charge—and when it came out, it was too late to set it right—I guess I'd had to handle my gun to keep clear! But don't you believe what they tell you about the Rio Kid—that hombre never rustled a cow, nor blotted a brand, nor held up a pilgrim on the trail, not in his life! I guess that hombre is jest as white as the sheriffs and rangers will let him be! You keep that in mind when they tell you that the Rio Kid is the goldarnest firebug between the Rio Grande and the Staked Plain."

Then he smiled.

"S'long, feller!"

And he dashed away down the rocky trail, wheeled past a bend of the mountain path, and was gone.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

At the Circle-O!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. were left standing in silence, looking the way the Kid had gone.

The silence was broken by a tramping footstep on the rock, and they looked round at Jad Blake.

Doubtless he had heard the Kid ride away. He came tramping back, with a black scowl on his face, to his horse. Evidently Mr. Blake was feeling very sore at having lost his capture and the thousand dollars reward.

On that point the Greyfriars fellows had no concern to waste on him. They had no respect for a man who wanted to handle blood-money.

But it was a fact that the rancher had been on the right side of the law and the Kid on the wrong side of it, so the position was far from a comfortable one. They could guess what view the sheriff of Packsaddle would have taken of an action that had prevented the "roping-in" of the Rio Kid.

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders.

Certainly he was not likely to regret what he had done, and he did not care what the consequences might be—if any.

"Are we going on?" asked Harry in a low voice, with a glance at the rancher's scowling face as he took his horse.

"Why not?" asked the Bounder, with a sarcastic grin. "I don't suppose that spot of trouble will make any difference

to Blake; he wants to do business. I've no doubt that he fancies he will make a better bargain with a schoolboy tenderfoot than with a hard-boiled Packsaddle guy."

Harry Wharton laughed.

It was quite possible that that was Jad Blake's idea, but, if so, it was a mistake. Herbert Vernon-Smith was a chip of the old block, and quite as capable of driving a good bargain as Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith, the millionaire, himself.

Mr. Vernon-Smith was going to cable the cash to pay for the Circle-O if his son decided on adding it to the Kicking Cayuse, with the happy knowledge that every dollar would produce a dollar's worth—or, perhaps, a little more.

"Better speak to him," said Bob. "He doesn't look quite like a chap prepared to entertain visitors—even nice fellows like us."

The Bounder nodded and went across to the rancher.

Blake's eyes gleamed at him.

"Sorry, Mr. Blake," said Vernon-Smith politely, "but I guess I couldn't stand for roping-in the man who hooked me out of the river—outlaw, or not!"

"And what about the law?" snapped Blake.

The Bounder snapped his fingers.

"That for it!" he answered coolly.

Blake stared at him, and then a faint grin came over his face. Perhaps there was something in the Bounder's words that found an echo in his own heart.

"Aw, forget it!" he said. "If the guy saved your life, mebber you'd feel like that. But I reckon Sheriff Lick would talk to you a few if he heard. But the pesky firebug's gone now; let's get on."

And he mounted his horse.

"You said it!" agreed the Bounder.

It was a relief to the Famous Five for the angry dispute to have ended thus amicably. If Mr. Blake was still feeling sore—as no doubt he was—he was not going, at all events, to allow that soreness to interfere with business.

The rancher rode on, and the Greyfriars fellows mounted and rode after him.

The Rio Kid had disappeared, and they had no doubt that he had left the trail and taken to the mountain; at all events, they saw no sign of him as they rode on, and left Squaw Mountain behind them at last, and loosed the broncos to a gallop on the prairie ranges of the Circle-O.

Herds were feeding on those ranges, but they bore the brand of Kicking Cayuse. Yuba Dick and Fric Pete, of Bill's outfit, were riding range there. The juniors knew that Mr. Blake, who had inherited a prosperous ranch, no longer had a cow or a calf to call his own. And the rent he received for pasture rights on the ranges no doubt went the same way—on the poker tables at the Red Flare, in Packsaddle.

A well-worn trail led to the ranch-house. There was little sign of life about the place when the juniors reached it.

A dismantled gate hung by a single hinge. The corral fence was broken in several places—the corral empty. The bunkhouse was deserted. Nobody appeared in sight among the outbuildings.

Neglect and decay were visible on all sides at a casual glance. Since the rancher had "fired" his outfit, having no further use for them, the Circle-O Ranch was rapidly going to ruin.

The ranch-house itself, a timber

building, looked as neglected as the rest of the place.

A half-breed Mexican choreman, who seemed to be the only man on the place, opened the door to the new arrivals when they dismounted at the battered porch.

"Step in," said Poker Blake, with a sardonic smile on his face. "I guess I ain't got much to offer visitors—but you're welcome, at any rate. You, Diego!"

"Si, senor?" said the Mexican, whose swarthy, unshaven face looked as if soap was an unknown luxury to him.

"Get a fire going in my room; the senor has fallen in the Squaw and got wet."

"Si, senor."

The Mexican shuffled away. The Famous Five were taken into the living-room of the ranch-house, where Mr. Blake left them.

Vernon-Smith was glad enough to be taken up to the room where there was a fire and he could dry his clothes.

Mr. Blake left him there, but he did not return to the other visitors in the living-room.

From the window the juniors saw him leading his horse away to a shed. Their own broncos remained hitched at the porch.

Bob Cherry gave his friends a cheery grin.

"If you ask me," he remarked, "that sportsman isn't fearfully bucked at getting a bunch of visitors. I suppose he expected Smithy to ride over on his own."

"He doesn't seem to be enjoying our company," admitted Frank Nugent. "I can't say I like his a fearful lot."

"The enjoyfulness is not terrific on either side," remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Well, we're not exactly paying an afternoon call," said Harry. "We can trot round the place while Smithy's talking business to Mr. Blake."

"No need to stick in here at all, that I can see," said Johnny Bull. "What about getting out?"

"Oh, hang on a bit!" said Bob. "We're getting a rest."

The juniors remained where they were, but Jad Blake did not come in. They noticed him leave the shed where he had left his horse; but, having done so, he lighted a cigarette and strolled down an unkept path, and they lost sight of him. It was clear that he was not keen on enjoying the delights of conversation with his visitors.

Still, the juniors were glad to sit and rest after their ride before going round the Circle-O to give it the once-over. They waited till Vernon-Smith came down.

The Bounder looked at them and glanced round the room.

"Where's Blake?" he asked.

"Outside somewhere," answered Bob. "I'm afraid he didn't expect you to bring your pals with you, Smithy, and he's got no use for them."

The Bounder grunted.

Blake, however, came in in a few minutes with a cigarette in his mouth.

"If you're ready, Mr. Vernon-Smith, I guess we can talk business," he said. "Mebber your friends would like to ride around. I guess we don't want more'n half an hour."

"Will you fellows come back in half an hour or so?" asked Smithy.

"Right-ho!"

The Famous Five were not sorry to get out. The Bounder sat down, and when the juniors went out he had accepted one of Blake's cigarettes, and

was smoking also. Leaving them in talk, the Famous Five left the rancho and went back to their horses.

For the next half-hour they trotted round the Circle-O, looking over the place. The signs of careless neglect on every side met their eyes. Evidently Jad Blake gave no attention whatever to his property, his thoughts being concentrated on games of chance at the Red Mare, in Packsaddle.

Yet, neglected and dismantled as the place looked, it was doubtless all he had left; and it was difficult for the juniors to understand how any man, presumably in his right senses, could think of parting with all he had to tempt fickle fortune again on the card table.

Having allowed a good half-hour to elapse, the juniors came back to the rancho, more than willing to ride away from the Circle-O if Smithy had got through his business with the rancher.

Harry Wharton went through the hallway and looked into the living-room.

He gave a start at what he saw there.

Vernon-Smith and Jad Blake had evidently finished talking business. But they were still busy. They were seated on either side of a small table, and both had cards in their hands and cigarettes in their mouths. They were playing poker.

Harry Wharton compressed his lips.

What the Bounder of Greyfriars chose to do was no business of his, but it was not for this that he had come over to Circle-O.

"We're ready, Smithy," he said, very quietly, "if you are."

The Bounder looked round. He had the grace to look uncomfortable for a moment. Blake stared at Wharton, with a curl to his lip.

"Oh!" said Smithy. "Look here, don't you fellows wait for me. I'll come back later."

Harry Wharton shut the door without another word, and went out of the rancho.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

The Feud at Kicking Cayuse!

"I SAY, you fellows!" yelled Billy Bunter.

Sunset had deepened to dark.

In the veranda at Kicking Cayuse, William George Bunter sat and watched, like a fat Sister Anne, to see if anyone was coming.

The sound of clattering hoofs coming up the trail at last was a glad sound to the fat ears of the Owl of the Remove.

He heard the deep voice of Bill Buck from the direction of the gate.

"I'll tell a man! You're late back, you young gecks! I reckoned I'd have to come out and pick you up."

"O.K., Bill!" answered Bob Cherry. "We had to wait while Smithy got through some awfully important business with Mr. Blake."

"You needn't have waited!" snapped the Bounder's voice.

"Waal, here you are!" said Bill. "I guess you'll be wanting supper?"

"Hungry as a hunter, or a Bunter!" said Bob.

"I say, you fellows!" roared Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Is that Bunter's dulcet voice or a hinge that wants oiling?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! Will you come in, now you're back?" howled Bunter. "That beast Chick won't serve supper till you come! I've asked him a million times! He won't!"

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"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Greyfriars fellows came up the steps of the veranda. Billy Bunter met them with an indignant blink. The Bounder, still limping, followed the Famous Five up, and Bunter kept a wary eye on him.

Smithy had left Kicking Cayuse that afternoon in a bad temper, and he seemed to have returned in another!

The Bounder was, perhaps, feeling a little ashamed of himself—which feeling also made him feel annoyed and resentful.

The Famous Five had waited more than an hour, kicking their heels about the Circle-O, while Smithy played poker in the ranch with Poker Blake. Harry Wharton had been strongly tempted to take him at his word and ride home without him. But the juniors had gone with Vernon-Smith chiefly because he had a game leg, and they did not like the idea of leaving him to ride back alone, especially as he was quite reckless enough to leave it till after dark.

So they waited, not in the best of tempers. Hardly a word had been spoken during the return ride. The juniors had been glad enough to get off Squaw Mountain trails before the last light was gone, but the rest of the ride was after dark. They were all tired, all hungry, and one, at least, in a very bad temper.

"If this is what you call decent, keeping a fellow waiting hours for his supper——" said Billy Bunter wrathfully.

"You had enough dinner to last you a week, old fat man!" said Bob.

"Beast! Look here, Smithy, that pig Chick ought to be sacked! He refused to serve supper till you came back! He shied a saucepan at me when I looked into the kitchen!" hooted Bunter.

"I hope it hit you!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "Stuffing at Blake's place, and leaving a fellow waiting for supper——"

"The stuff-fulness was not terrific!" grinned Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Hospitality strictly limited!" said Bob. "Lucky you never came, Bunter! There was nothing to eat!"

"Well, I can jolly well say—— Yaroooooooop!" howled Bunter, as the Bounder got near enough to use his sound leg. "Wow! Beast! Wow!"

Bunter bolted into the living-room, the juniors following him in. He sat at the end of the table farthest from Vernon-Smith.

Chick, grinning, brought in the supper. It was quite a nice supper, and an ample one, and all hot and ready. Chick really was quite an obliging choreman, though he never seemed keen on obliging Billy Bunter. Perhaps Bunter's manners and customs had something to do with that.

"You're late back, fellers!" said Chick. "But I guess I kept it hot—and I'll say that's some pie!"

"The somefulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh—at which Chick chortled.

"I say, you fellows, for goodness' sake pass a fellow some grub!" wailed Bunter. "I say, I'm famished! I've had nothing since dinner!"

"Same here!" said Bob.

"Oh, don't jaw! Shove the grub along!"

Grub was shoved along, and Billy Bunter was comforted. For a long, long time there was an incessant sound of gobbling. Harry Wharton & Co. made quite a good supper, but when they were finished Billy Bunter was still going strong.

When Herbert Vernon-Smith rose from his chair, he made a movement, apparently with the intention of limping along the table to Bunter's end.

The Famous Five gathered round him, and walked him out into the veranda.

Bunter, too busy with the foodstuffs to heed, was unaware of his narrow escape.

Gobble, gobble, gobble! followed the juniors as they went out.

But a few minutes later Chick's voice was heard:

"Carry me home to Jane! Ain't you done yet, you fat gink?"

Gobble, gobble!

"Well, I'm clearing this here table!" said Chick.

Bunter found his voice:

"Beast! Don't you take the grub away! I haven't finished yet! I shan't be finished for some time! Get out!"

"I got to clear up!" said Chick. "Nor I ain't going to clean up if you burst all over this here room!"

The juniors in the veranda grinned. If Billy Bunter was, as he stated, accustomed to a stately butler and a horde of menials at Bunter Court, this must have been a sad change for him.

Not only was Chick the only servant at the ranch, but he was quite unconscious of being a servant at all; he was a "hired" man, and as good—in his own estimation, at least—as any other citizen of the great United States. Chick was civil to a guy if a guy was civil to Chick—but not otherwise.

As Bunter had never had any civility to waste on Chick, Chick had none to waste on Bunter. So far from realising that he was a mere menial, and Bunter an extremely superior person, Chick regarded the fat Owl with disdain as a fat, greedy, objectionable gink! There was a deadly feud between Bunter and Chick!

The other fellows were tactful with Chick. He was quite nice and obliging if treated with the consideration due to a free and independent citizen. But Bunter had his own system with servants. His idea was to give as many orders as possible, and make 'em work.

Bunter had never found this system very successful. But it had never been so conspicuously unsuccessful as it was with Chick.

From the veranda Chick was heard clearing the table. Really, he was entitled to get through, as his work was supposed to be done when he had washed up after supper; and supper that evening was a couple of hours late.

"Leave that pudding alone!" came Bunter's hoot. "I shall be ready for that pudding when I've finished this pie!"

"Where you going to put it?" asked Chick.

"Don't be cheeky! Put that pudding here, and get out!"

"Sez you!" snorted Chick.

"Beast! Gimme that pudding!"

"You get on with that pie!" said Chick. "If you ain't finished that pie by the time I've tuck away this pudding, I'm going to take away what's left of it!"

"Beast!"

Chick snorted, and tramped away with the pudding.

Gobble gobble, gobble! came faster than before. Bunter evidently was in haste to travel through the remains of the pie before it followed the pudding.

Chick's heavy tramp was heard again. A yell from Bunter indicated that he had annexed the pie-dish.

"Beast! Gimme that pie!" yelled Bunter.

(Continued on page 20.)



THE ADVENTURES of HARRY and his HERCULES CYCLE

Episode 3.

FILM FAME

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By Hercules

IT'S THE BIKE TO BUY!

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say, you fellows, that beast is taking away my pie——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The juniors looked in from the veranda, chuckling.

Billy Bunter jumped up from his chair, and grabbed at the pie as Chick lifted it away from the table.

It was a large—a very large—pie-dish, and there was still a lot of pie in it. Bunter got hold of it with both fat hands and tugged.

"Say, you fat geck, you leggo that dish!" roared Chick.

"Beast!" hooted Bunter. "Gimme that pie!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Got it!" chortled Bob Cherry.

"Pull devil, pull baker!"

"Tug-of-war!" chuckled Johnny Bull. "Go it, Bunter! Go it, Chick!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Leggo, you beast!" roared Bunter. Chick let go—suddenly!

The tug-of-war came to a sudden end—too sudden for Bunter's comfort. As Chick released the pie-dish, Bunter staggered back, and sat down on the floor, with a bump! The pie was deposited on his fat waistcoat.

"Oooogh!" gasped Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the juniors.

"Ow! Oh crikey! Oooogh!"

"Haw, haw!" roared Chick. "Waal, you wanted it, and you sure got it! I'll tell a one-eyed man from Missouri, you sure got it!"

Bunter had got it—there was no doubt about that.

He sat and gurgled, with the pie streaming down his waistcoat, and spreading over his trousers! Bunter had wanted that pie; but now that he had got it, he seemed far from satisfied.

The fat Owl tottered up, streaming with pie.

Chick, chuckling, went on clearing the table, without any more bother from Bunter. Bunter was busy, for a long time, cleaning off pie.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Bunter, Too!

"BUZZ off!"

"Shan't!"

Harry Wharton & Co. smiled. For a host and a guest there was no doubt that Smithy and Bunter were on rather remarkable terms.

Smithy's "game" leg had not been improved by the long ride over to Circle-O and back. For two or three days afterwards it remained painful and uncomfortable, and during those days the Bounder's temper was acid, and his manners and customs, especially towards Bunter, anything but like those of Lord Chesterfield.

Bunter had to put in quite a lot of dodging, which certainly was not the sort of thing that a distinguished guest had to do in the best circles.

Smithy's knee was mending now, and his temper seemed to mend at about the same rate. But he still had a few twinges in the knee, and, apparently, still a few in his temper.

For two or three days he had kicked Bunter whenever he could get within reach. But that, to Bunter's relief, had ceased at last. He could now approach his hospitable host without getting kicked.

But Smithy still seemed to have no use for his fascinating company. Not till his damaged knee was quite right

again, was Smithy likely to be agreeable—not that he had ever been very agreeable to his fattest and most fascinating guest at Kicking Cayuse.

Now, in a bright and sunny morning, the Greyfriars fellows were saddling up for a ride over to Packsaddle. They were going to meet the hack that came up the stage-trail from Hard Tack and Prairie Bend.

On that hack was a consignment of cash—the sum of twenty thousand dollars, the purchase price of Circle-O.

Smithy had completed his bargain with Mr. Jad Blake. The telegraph had talked between the millionaire's son and his pater across the "pond." Mr. Samuel Vernon-Smith had approved and endorsed the bargain, and he had cabled over the needed cash—as far as Prairie Bend, the railroad town, which was as far as the wire extended.

From the bank at Prairie Bend a packet of cash was coming on, by the hack, to the bank at Packsaddle.

That afternoon Mr. Blake and the Bounder were to meet in the lawyer's office at Packsaddle, and put it through. Circle-O would then become a part of Kicking Cayuse, and Poker Blake would have twenty thousand dollars to lose at the Red Flare.

The Famous Five were riding over to the cow town with Smithy—partly for a ride, partly on account of the mysterious man in the flour-bag, who might be haunting the trails again, with an eye open for the millionaire's son.

Smithy wanted their company, but he did not want the company of William George Bunter. He made that clear with a distinctness that was really deplorable, from the point of view of manners.

Bunter rolled down to the corral after the other fellows. He was dressed for the ride, almost bursting out of riding-breeches that belonged to Frank Nugent, a waistcoat that belonged to Harry Wharton, and a jacket that belonged to Bob Cherry.

Bunter patronised the Famous Five impartially, in the way of borrowing clobber. Some painful experience had induced him to leave the Bounder's wardrobe unraided.

Cactus brought out the horses, and, seeing Bunter in the party, he brought out that specially quiet cayuse that the good-natured Bill had carefully picked out for Bunter's use.

At which Vernon-Smith snapped to the fat Owl to "Buzz off!" which was a remark seldom made by a host to a guest. And Billy Bunter retorted with "Shan't!" which was equally uncommon, as a reply from a guest to a host.

The Famous Five smiled, and said nothing. It was not for them to intervene between Smithy and his happy visitor.

They mounted their horses, and moved out on the trail.

Vernon-Smith mounted and followed them, with a final glare at Bunter.

Bunter clambered on his horse which the grinning Cactus held for him.

The Owl of the Remove was not going to be left behind. Leaving a fellow on his own in this way was, Bunter considered, altogether too thick.

Moreover, Packsaddle had its attractions for him. There was candy to be had at the store, and other things of a sticky nature.

Harry Wharton & Co. were going to do some shopping at Wash's store, while Smithy was busy in the lawyer's office. Bunter was going to do some

shopping, too, if he could contrive to land the cost thereof on the Famous Five; and he hoped that he could.

Anyhow, he was going, and he went. With a grim and determined frown on his fat brow, Bunter rode out of the gateway after the bunch of juniors.

Bunter had had some practice by this time at horsemanship—most of it consisting of falling off a horse. Now, however, owing to Bill's care, he had a steed that he could stick on.

Sticking on, the fat Owl cantered after the Greyfriars party.

So long as they went at an easy pace, Bunter was all right. If they went at a gallop, the result was rather more doubtful.

They started at an easy trot, so it was all right. Bunter cantered on and joined up.

The Famous Five smiled as he came. Vernon-Smith scowled.

Harry Wharton & Co. had no objection—in fact, they were accustomed to making allowances for Bunter, and they were quite willing to make it a leisurely ride, to give the fat Owl a chance.

But the Bounder's temper, never very reliable at the best, was far from being at its best now. So long as he had sharp twinges in his knee, Smithy was likely to be thoroughly unpleasant to the cause of the same.

"You fat idiot, get out!" he snapped.

"Beast!" retorted Bunter.

"If you want my quirt across your fat back, you podgy piffler——"

"Yah!"

Vernon-Smith swerved a little nearer to Bunter, his quirt gripped in his hand.

Bob Cherry hurriedly pushed in his horse between.

"Hold on, Smithy!" he said. "Chuck it, old bean!"

The Bounder gave him a glare. "I'm fed-up with that fat pig!" he snapped. "You don't want him any more than I do."

"Who wants you, I'd like to know?" demanded Bunter. "Think any of the fellows want your company, Smithy—scowling like a demon in a pantomime? I can tell you they'd rather have my company than yours."

"Shut up, old fat man!" said Bob.

"Shan't!"

"My esteemed idiotic Bunter——" murmured Harree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"I'm coming," said Bunter. "I've got some shopping to do at Packsaddle. Look here, Smithy, you ride on ahead. Nobody wants your scowling face about. Take it out of a fellow's sight!"

Herbert Vernon-Smith breathed hard and deep. But he rode on without speaking again.

The Famous Five rather expected him to break into a gallop; for if he had set a fast pace, Bunter would certainly have come to grief, unless he had made up his fat mind to drop behind and lose the party.

The Bounder, however, rather to their relief, rode at the same pace as before, and the fat Owl rode on with the rest.

Billy Bunter grinned triumphantly. He had gained his point, and he was satisfied. Miles glided under the thudding hoofs.

Half-way to Packsaddle, Vernon-Smith, who was in the lead, turned off from the well-marked beaten track.

The other fellows followed him, rather puzzled.

It was about fifteen miles to the cow town, if they kept to the direct trail,

and that was quite a good distance for a ride—especially for Billy Bunter.

There was no reason, so far as the Famous Five could see, for quitting the trail, unless the Bounder's idea was to lengthen the ride, with a view to Bunter's discomfort.

"I say, you fellows, you're missing the way!" squeaked Bunter.

"What's the big idea, Smithy?" asked Bob Cherry. "Aren't we going to Packsaddle to meet the hack?"

"Tons of time for that," answered Smithy. "The hack doesn't get in till the afternoon."

"That's all very well," exclaimed Billy Bunter warmly, "but we're having dinner at the Pack Hotel, ain't we? We don't want to be late for dinner, Smithy. That's important."

"Why not keep to the trail, Smithy?" asked Nugent.

Smithy shrugged his shoulders.

"You can keep to the trail if you like," he answered. "I'm not stopping you. Do as you please."

The Famous Five made no reply to that. They rode after the Bounder, and Bunter, with a discontented grunt, did the same. The Packsaddle trail disappeared behind them as they rode over the rugged prairie, making a wide sweep south-eastward towards the Frio River.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

Too Bad of Smithy!

BILLY BUNTER grunted.

He grunted again.

He continued to grunt.

The hot sun of noon was blazing down on the Texas prairies. Likewise it was blazing down on William George Bunter.

Bunter was tired. He was peeved. He was getting hungry. And Packsaddle was nowhere in the offing.

The juniors had done a good ten miles on the trail—since then they had done a good five across rugged prairie.

By that time they might have been in the cow town, had that unspeakable beast, Herbert Vernon-Smith, kept to the regular trail.

Instead of which, the cow-town lay far away to the north; and Smithy was still riding south-east, as if he was heading for Hard Tack, which lay many miles below Packsaddle on the Rio Frio.

Dinner at the Pack Hotel was a more and more distant vision.

The Famous Five did not mind an extra ride—in fact, they rather liked it. But Billy Bunter minded very much. He minded very much indeed.

He grunted, and grunted, and grunted.

But his angry grunts had no effect on the Bounder, who rode on cheerfully, evidently enjoying the ride.

"I say, you fellows," hooted Bunter at last—"I say if that silly idiot wants to ride all over Texas, let's leave him to it, and get in, see? I don't want to be late for dinner."

"It's a ripping ride, old fat bean!" said Bob.

"I'm tired!" roared Bunter.

Vernon-Smith glanced round, a sardonic grin on his face.

"Tired?" he asked.

"Yes, you beast!"

"Pity you came, then! Why did you?"

"Beast!" howled Bunter. "You're jolly well going a long way round, just to pull my leg, you rotter!"

"Bunter's guessed it!" ejaculated the Bounder. "What a brain!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Look here, I'm fed up with this, you fellows!" yelled the indignant fat Owl. "I'm going to Packsaddle, see?"

"Nobody's stopping you!" remarked the Bounder. "Hike off!"

Billy Bunter gave him a glare that almost cracked his spectacles. On his own, in the midst of the trackless prairie, the fat Owl was as likely to arrive in Mexico or California, as in Packsaddle. Once off the beaten trail, Bunter had not the remotest idea how to find his way.

The Bounder was at no loss; neither were the Famous Five. But Billy Bunter was at a hopeless loss.

"You jolly well know I don't know the way, you beast!" roared Bunter.

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Look here, Smithy, 'nuff's as good as a feast!" he said. "What about hitting for Packsaddle now?"

"I'm going on!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

"Another mile, and we shall hit the stage-trail, half-way from Hard Tack to Packsaddle," drawled the Bounder.

"Then it's about ten to the town—"

"Oh crikey!" wailed Bunter.

The hapless fat Owl was almost falling off his horse with weariness already. The prospect of a further dozen miles or so was simply harrowing.

"Oh, you beast!" moaned Bunter.

From the bottom of his fat heart the Owl of the Remove wished that he had never joined up for that ride. He had not expected this! Really, knowing the Bounder, he might have expected something of the kind. But he hadn't!

"Give it a miss, Smithy," urged Bob Cherry, laughing. "It's not that distance if we make direct for Packsaddle—"

"Bunter will fall down dead before we've gone a dozen more miles," said Nugent.

"No such luck!"

"Beast!" howled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, I'm tired! It's beastly hot! I'm getting hungry! Oh dear!"

Billy Bunter's grunts and groans might have touched a heart of stone. The Bounder glanced at him.

"Like a rest in the shade for a bit?" he asked, rather to the surprise of the Famous Five.

The juniors were skirting a patch of chaparral—about an acre of scrubby thickets, post-oaks, and pecans, a spot of shade on the prairie, amid the sea of waving grass.

Bunter's eyes and spectacles turned on it longingly.

On the open prairie the sun was blazing down with semi-tropical fervour. Bunter would have been very glad to stop and rest in that cool and grateful shade. Indeed, only the thought of dinner at Packsaddle urged him on.

"Yes, you beast!" said the fat Owl. "And when we've had a rest, we're going straight on to Packsaddle, see? I say, you fellows, one of you can come with me and show me the way—you don't want to stick to that cad, I suppose."

"Oh, you'll be all right when you've had a rest!" said Bob.

"What about dinner?" yelled Bunter.

"Think how you'll enjoy it, if you get it a few hours late!"

"Beast!"

Vernon-Smith wheeled his horse towards the belt of shrubs. The trees were too low to be ridden under, and

the juniors dismounted to lead their horses into the shade.

All the party, as a matter of fact, were glad, as well as Bunter, to get out of the fierce glare of the sun for a while. The Famous Five and Smithy looped their reins over their arms, and fanned their faces with their stotsons. Bunter plumped down in the shade, and rested his weary fat back against the trunk of a tree, leaving his horse to its own devices.

There were flies in the bush. About a myriad of them settled on Billy Bunter at once. He smacked at them wearily.

Vernon-Smith twirled his quirt in the air to drive off the brush flies. Perhaps it was by accident that he landed a sharp cut on Bunter's horse. Perhaps it was not.

Anyhow, that was exactly what he did, and the startled bronco, with a squeal, threw up its heels, tossed its head, and galloped away.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Look out!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

He made a rush at the horse, but he had no chance of reaching it. With stirrups dangling, and reins hanging over its neck, the bronco dashed away over the prairie.

"Well, you ass, Smithy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "We shall have to get that horse back somehow—"

"I say, you fellows, go after it!" said Bunter. "I'll wait here while you're gone. I don't mind waiting a bit—I'm tired."

Harry Wharton made a move to remount his horse—and stopped. He gave the Bounder an expressive look.

The juniors, naturally, were not taking lassos with them on a ride into town—and without a lasso there was little chance of catching a runaway bronco. Wharton quite understood the sarcastic grin on the Bounder's face.

Smithy was well aware that the bronco could not be recaptured. That was why he had set it galloping off. And that, again, was why he had proposed a halt in the shade of the chaparral—to get Bunter out of the saddle while he deprived him of his mount!

The chums of the Remove could guess now that that little scheme had been in Smithy's mind ever since Bunter had joined up for the ride. But they guessed it rather too late.

"That's rather thick, Smithy!" said Harry Wharton quietly.

"Think so?" drawled the Bounder. "Accidents will happen, won't they? Look at that accident Bunter had the other day—getting me with a quirt in mistake for Chick! Bunter can't expect to put up all the accidents, and not get one or two coming home to roost."

"I say, you fellows, why don't you go and catch my horse?" asked Bunter. "I'll sit here while you're gone."

"The catchfulness is not the absurd possibility, my esteemed Bunter," said Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"We can't get the bronco without a rope, fathead!" said Johnny Bull. "We might have to chase it for miles, even with one."

"But I've got to have a horse, haven't I?" yapped Bunter. "How am I going to get to Packsaddle without a horse?"

"The answer to that one," said Johnny Bull, "is that you're not going to get to Packsaddle, old fat bean."

"Oh, don't be an ass!" said Bunter. "We're having dinner there! If it wasn't for that, I'd wait here until you

fellows came back. But I can't miss dinner, I suppose!"

The Bounder laughed. It looked to him as if Bunter not only could miss dinner, but that he was going to!

The Famous Five exchanged glances. There was, obviously, nothing for it, but to leave Bunter where he was and borrow a horse for him in Packsaddle, and pick him up on their return.

That was what the Bounder had intended—and that was what had to be done. The five were frowning—Vernon-Smith was grinning—but whether they frowned, or whether they grinned, that was that!

"You'll have to wait here, Bunter," said Harry. "We'll get back as soon as we can with a horse for you—"

"Shan't!" roared Bunter.

"Like to walk?" asked Smithy.

"Beast!"

"Look here, we can put on a gallop, without that fat duffer," said Johnny Bull. "We can do it in half the time, if we don't have to crawl as we've been doing. We'll bring you back some sandwiches, Bunter."

"Oh, you beast, Smithy!" groaned Bunter. "You jolly well did that on purpose, you rotter!"

"Bunter's getting quite bright!" remarked the Bounder.

"Rotter!" remarked Bunter. "Cad! Swab! I'd jolly well get up and boot you, if I wasn't so jolly tired."

"How lucky for you you're so jolly tired!"

"Yah! Cad! I say, you fellows, if I've got to wait for you, don't be all day about it! Start now. And look here, don't crawl. Ride as if you knew how to ride; see?"

"Why, you cheeky fat slug!" roared Johnny Bull. "We've been crawling because you can't ride at more than a crawl—"

"And don't forget the sandwiches," said Bunter. "Don't you get waiting in Packsaddle for Smithy! Come straight back for me. And mind you don't forget the sandwiches. Bring a cake, too! You can get a cake at Wash's store."

"Come on!" said Harry, and the juniors remounted their broncos.

There was a yell from Bunter as they started.

"I say, you fellows—"

Wharton drew rein and looked back. "What—"

"Bring some candy, too!"

"You fat ass—"

"You can get boxes of candy at the store! Bring two—no, three! You might bring half a dozen. And don't forget the cake."

Harry Wharton rode on after the others. They disappeared from the view of Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles, letting out the broncos to a gallop—glad to put on a spot of speed.

Billy Bunter grunted, rolled over in search of a comfortable and very shady spot, and settled down to rest. He was glad, at least, to rest. He would rather have had his dinner—still, he could do with a lot of rest. And there was consolation in thinking of the sandwiches, the cake, and the candy!

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Holding Up the Hack!

ANDY JONES, who drove the two-horse hack from Prairie Bend, by way of Hard Tack, to Packsaddle, slowed down.

Andy had been going at a steady jog-trot. He was still many miles or so short of Packsaddle, and he was anxious

to get in and wash the dust of the trail away with some of the fluids that were sold at the Pack Hotel. But as a horseman pushed out of a belt of mesquite by the trail, Andy slowed down, without waiting for the command to halt which he guessed was coming.

The horseman had a flour-bag drawn over his face, and the rest of him was hidden under an ample cloak belted round him. What he was like, under the flour-bag and the cloak, the keenest eye could not have told. Harry Wharton & Co., had they seen him, would have known that he was the trail-thief who had held up Bob Cherry in the timber-land, and Herbert Vernon-Smith on Squaw Mountain. But that was all they would have known of him—except that he was not the Rio Kid, as he falsely called himself.

There was a Colt in the rider's right hand. A gesture from it was enough for Andy Jones.

"Halt!"

"You said it!" agreed Andy.

He halted, and the masked man rode to the side of the hack. A fat and startled face looked out—belonging to Mr. Wash, the storekeeper of Packsaddle. There were two passengers in the hack. One was Mr. Wash, coming back from a trip to Hard Tack. The other was the bank messenger from Prairie Bend, with twenty thousand dollars from the Packsaddle bank.

"Light down!" rapped the horseman, his eyes gleaming from the slits in the flour-bag over the raised revolver.

"Sure!" gasped Mr. Wash.

The fat storekeeper jumped down from the hack with the activity of a prairie rabbit. Mr. Wash was not the "guy" to argue with a masked road-rider and a levelled six-gun.

The other passenger followed him more slowly. He was a younger and much more active man than Mr. Wash, but he did not jump nearly so actively.

Andy, sitting up in his driving-seat, watched with cool interest.

Andy knew that the younger passenger, Bud Carter, was a messenger from the bank at Prairie Bend. He knew that Carter packed a gun, though it was not visible. So Andy was wondering whether he was, perhaps, going to witness a spot of gun-play, on the stage trail by the winding Frio. If so, Andy was going to be wholly and solely a witness of the same! Andy had no hunch for mixing it with road-agents.

"I guess I ain't got much about me—" began Job Wash anxiously—an untruthful statement, for the fat storekeeper had several hundred dollars on his plump person. He was, however, extremely reluctant to see them pass into the keeping of the man in the flour-bag.

"Stand aside!"

Mr. Wash blinked at him—and gladly stood aside. If Mr. Wash was going to be left out of this picture, nobody was going to be better pleased than Mr. Wash!

"Hands up!" snapped the trail-thief.

Bud Carter, of Prairie Bend, hesitated a fraction of a second. But so far as he knew, this thief of the trails could know nothing of the packet of dollars packed under a rug in the hack. His hands went up.

"You're the doctor!" he said.

"Keep 'em up!" said the horseman grimly. "I guess I'd rather not spill your juice—that never was the way of the Rio Kid—but I sure want the dough."

The three men gave a start as that well-known name was mentioned.

Carter stared hard at the masked face. Mr. Wash felt his plump knees

knock together. Andy Jones, breathing hard, bent over a little to see what he could of the road-agent who gave himself the name that was famous all over Texas.

Andy had been held up in his time, more than once; but never by so celebrated a character as the boy outlaw of the Rio Grande. Andy's face was full of excitement as he thought of the tale he would have to tell at the bar of the Pack in Packsaddle!

"The Rio Kid!" breathed Andy.

"The Rio Kid!" repeated Carter.

"The Rio Kid!" mumbled Mr. Wash.

"I guess you've heard of me!" sneered the man in the flour-bag. "Mebbe you've heard how the Rio Kid can handle a gun—and you want to push him to it! Where's the dollars, you?"

"I guess I got a ten-dollar-bill in my pocket, feller!" said the man from Prairie Bend. "It ain't hardly worth your while, Kid."

"I'll say it ain't!" sneered the masked horseman. "I ain't gunning after your candy money, bo! I'm after the dollars from the bank."

Carter's eyes narrowed.

"You've got me guessing!" he said.

"I guess I'll put you wise, then! You're taking twenty thousand dollars from the bank at Prairie Bend to the bank at Packsaddle. That's my game! I guess I ain't waiting! Where's the dollars?"

Carter's face hardened, and his eyes glinted.

For his own ten-dollar bill he would not have set his life on a cast. But as the bank's messenger he had his duty to do.

Somehow—he could not begin to guess how—the Rio Kid had learned that the dollars were being sent to Packsaddle by the hack, and had waylaid him for them. He had no idea whatever of handing over twenty thousand dollars to this thief of the trails.

"Forget it!" said the masked rider grimly, as if he read the thoughts of the bank messenger. "I got you covered, hombre! Where's the dust?"

Carter breathed hard.

"It's packed in the hack!" he muttered. "I guess I can't stop you, Kid!"

"You sure cannot!" sneered the man in the flour-bag. "Stand back and keep reaching for the sky! You, Mister Wash, I guess you'll sort that packet out of the hearse for me."

"Sure, if you want, Kid!" gasped Mr. Wash.

"Pronto!" snapped the trail-thief.

Mr. Wash stepped towards the hack. The eyes that gleamed from the slits in the flour-bag were on him, and, for a second, off the bank manager.

In that second Carter's right hand whipped down to his hip.

Bang!

He was quick—but not quick enough. The masked man fired, even as he whipped out his gun.

There was a sharp and terrible cry, and the bank messenger crashed down in the trail, his Colt falling from his hand. He stretched on the rugged earth with a bullet through his body.

"Aw, wake snakes!" breathed Andy Jones.

"Search me!" stuttered Job Wash, and the fat store-keeper leaned on the hack in sheer terror.

The masked man stared down at the fallen man in the trail, his eyes glittering over his smoking gun. But he had no more danger to fear from the hapless bank messenger. Carter was already unconscious.

"I guess he howled for it!" snarled the man in the flour-sack. "I'll say I warned him that the Rio Kid could shoot! You, Wash"—he made a

gesture with the revolver at the shuddering store-keeper—"pronto!"

"Sure!" gasped Mr. Wash.

He scrambled into the hack. With a trembling hand he handed out the packet that belonged to the bank messenger. The masked man grasped it with his left hand.

He seemed about to tear it open, to examine the contents. But at that moment there came a crash of galloping hoofs on the trail, and he turned his head, with a startled and enraged glare through the eye-holes of the flour-bag.

In hot haste he thrust the packet under his cloak, grasped his reins, and put spurs to his horse. In a flash he was gone, at a frantic gallop—riding for his plunder, and riding for his life.

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Hard Pressed!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH pulled in his bronco, girth-deep in grass, beside the stage-trail, and glanced to and fro on the trail. Then he pointed with his quirt.

"There's the hack!" he remarked.

At a distance up the stage-trail towards distant Packsaddle, there was a glimpse of the hack from Prairie Bend, showing over the thicket of mesquite that grew round the spot where it was halted.

Harry Wharton & Co. glanced in the direction the Bounder pointed. They could see the top of the hack, with baggage piled on it, in the distance.

Evidently Andy Jones had already passed the spot where they struck the stage-trail; but why he had halted farther on they did not know. But they could see that the hack was at a halt.

"We shall get in first, after all!" said Smithy. "We can easily beat the hack to Packsaddle. And we've had a jolly ride round."

"Bunter hasn't!" said Nugent, rather dryly.

"Bunter can take what comes to him!" said the Bounder. "We shall pick him up again before dark."

"We shall pick him up a good deal earlier than that, Smithy," said Harry. "We can't leave him roosting there all the afternoon."

"Rot!"

"We'll go back with a horse, and roll him in, while you're chin-wagging in the lawyer's office, Smithy," said Bob.

"More fool you!"

"Hem! Let's go on, shall we?" murmured Bob.

The juniors pushed on from the grassy plain into the hard-beaten stage-trail.

Their way to Packsaddle, by that trail, lay past the halted hack, and they wheeled in that direction.

From that spot, hidden by mesquite thickets ahead, where the top of the hack showed over the bushes, came a sudden ringing shot, and a loud and terrible cry.

The six juniors fairly jumped in their saddles.

"What the thump—" exclaimed Bob.

"By gum!" The Bounder's eyes flashed, and he grasped his revolver. "I wondered why the hack had stopped there. It's a hold-up!" He gave his horse the spur. "Follow on!"

Vernon-Smith dashed up the trail at a furious gallop. The Famous Five were not slow to follow him.

All of them knew that twenty thousand dollars, destined to pay for the purchase of the Circle-O, were carried on the hack that day. In any case, they would have intervened, if they could, to prevent a robbery; but they were



Vernon-Smith's bronco stumbled, a hoof slipping on a loose stone, and the Bounder shot from the saddle. The Famous Five, in horror, saw him roll over the edge of the rock. The Bounder made one wild clutch with desperate hands, and then disappeared. "Smithy!" gasped Bob Cherry.

very keen to save Smithy's father from so heavy a loss.

With a clatter and thunder of hoofs, the bunch of riders swept up the trail, Smithy with the six-gun in his hand, the Famous Five grabbing at their rifles.

They came on the scene with a rush. It was only a matter of moments before they reached the spot and reined in round the halted hack.

"Good heavens!" gasped Harry Wharton, at the sight of the bank messenger lying in the trail, wounded and senseless.

Andy Jones stared at them; Mr. Wash blinked at them from the hack. The Bounder's eyes flashed after a horseman, disappearing up the trail at a fierce gallop.

"That's the man!" he panted. "After him!"

"Say, you hold in your hosses!" yelled Andy. "I'm telling you that's

the Rio Kid, and he's shot up Bud Carter—"

"Did he get the dollars?" panted the Bounder.

"He sure did!"

"Follow on!" yelled Smithy.

He tore on in pursuit of the man in the flour-bag.

Harry Wharton & Co. galloped fast after him, leaving Andy and Mr. Wash staring.

Andy shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess," he remarked, "that them young guys will be sorry they horned in if they get in front of the Rio Kid's gun. I'm telling you, Mr. Wash."

And Andy Jones descended from his seat, to get the wounded man into the hack, with Mr. Wash's assistance, and drive on to the cow-town.

The Greyfriars fellows were out of sight long before he got the hack into motion.

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Bang, bang! roared the six-gun in the Bounder's hand as he urged his bronco at a mad speed after the man in the flour-bag.

So suddenly had the Greyfriars party come on the scene, and so swift was their pursuit, that the trail-thief was hardly a hundred yards ahead. But that distance was long for pistol practice, especially with the horses in rapid motion. Still, the Bounder threw his lead close.

The trail-thief spurred on fiercely.

For some minutes he held to the stage-trail, where the going was easier than on the open prairie. But very soon he swung off the trail to the left—the westward. On the right flowed the Rio Frio, and there was no escape that way, and ahead, though at a great distance, lay the town of Packsaddle.

With quirt and spur the hold-up man urged his horse over the grassy ranges of Kicking Cayuse.

The Bounder shot off the stage-trail after him, the Famous Five after the Bounder. They were riding like the wind, and keeping paco with the desperate fugitive.

The hold-up man stared back, his eyes blazing through the eye-holes in the flour-bag.

He was hard and desperately pressed. His pursuers were schoolboys, but they were armed and determined, and he had no chance whatever in a conflict. It was an unlucky chance for the man in the flour-bag that the party had been so near the scene of the hold-up; but it was a chance that he had had to take. A bunch of punchers might have come up the trail. Probably he was glad to see that the pursuers were schoolboys, and not a bunch of hard-bitten, gun-sliding cowmen. But the odds were too heavy for him, if it came to a show-down, boys as they were, and after that fierce glare back he urged on his horse again to desperate speed.

Bang, bang! roared the Bounder's six-gun.

"We'll get him!" said Vernon-Smith between his teeth. "By gad, we'll get the villain! Put it on!"

"You bet!" panted Bob. "That's the same villain—the man called himself the Rio Kid. You heard what the stage-driver said—"

"We'll prove that he's not, when we get him!" said Vernon-Smith. "The dastardly hound! Once he gets clear and gets that bag off his face he's as safe as houses, and all Packsaddle believing that it was the Rio Kid who did the trick! We've got to get him!"

He fired again.

The stage-trail and the winding Frio were left far behind. The man in the flour-bag was swerving away to the south. Westward lay the Kicking Cayuse, and no doubt he was aware of it, and wanted to keep clear of the home ranges of the ranch, where stetson hats would have bobbed into sight. But by changing his direction he lost ground, the pursuers cutting across and gaining on him.

The Bounder's bullet grazed the stetson on his head, jammed down over the flour-bag.

"Shoot, you fools, shoot!" hissed the Bounder; and the juniors blazed away with their rifles as they rode.

Then suddenly, the hold-up man's horse rose to a leap.

For a moment or two the pursuers did not see the reason. Then they saw the dark line across the prairie ahead—a wide, deep barranca, that split the plain for the length of a mile on either side.

Then they knew why the desperate fugitive had turned to the south. He

knew the ground, and had been heading for the barranca.

Wide and deep it split the plain, in a yawning gulf of unknown depth—such a leap as the most daring rider might have balked it.

But it was the hold-up man's only chance: for even if the pursuers had not gained on him, there was no doubt that the whizzing bullets from behind would have pitched him out of the saddle, sooner or later. Desperately as that leap was, the man in the flour-bag made it: and the juniors, reining in at the sight of the yawning chasm, saw him crash on the farther bank.

For a second his horse scrambled there, and seemed to be slipping back into the barranca. But it scrambled to a safe landing: and with quirt and spur, the trail-thief urged it onward in its flight.

"Hold on, Smithy!" gasped Harry Wharton.

The Bounder, furious, fired his last shot after the vanishing horseman. Then he wheeled to ride back, evidently to get a distance for following in the leap. But the Famous Five gathered round him, and Harry caught his rein.

"We're going after him!" yelled the Bounder.

Wharton shook his head. The desperate fugitive, with capture or death behind him, had made that mad leap, and succeeded. But he had gone within a hairbreadth of destruction.

"Not good enough, Smithy!" said Wharton, decidedly. "It's ten to one against getting across—don't be a mad ass!"

And the Bounder, excited and enraged as he was, realised that the captain of the Remove was right. The juniors rode along the edge of the barranca, looking for a narrower place, where it was possible to make the leap. But the gulf widened farther on—and they had to make up their minds to it—the trail-thief was gone, and with him was gone the packet of twenty thousand dollars.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

What Bunter Saw!

BILLY BUNTER sat up, and listened, at the sound of hoofbeats on the prairie.

Sitting in the shade of the dusky patch of chaparral, the fat Owl of Greyfriars rested his weary fat limbs, and thought of the dinner he had missed at the Pack Hotel, of the iniquitous trickery of that unspeakable beast, Herbert Vernon-Smith, and of the time that must elapse before the juniors got back with the grub he so sorely needed.

It would be just like the beasts, Bunter thought bitterly, to keep him waiting for hours. But it was less than an hour after they had left him that the welcome sound of hoofbeats reached his ears, and told him that a rider was approaching the chaparral.

Bunter sat up and took notice at once.

From the sound, he could tell that only one horse was coming: and he could tell that it was coming at a rapid gallop. Which looked, to Bunter, as if one of the fellows had cut back at top speed.

He heaved himself to his feet, and blinked out of the brush, to spot the approaching rider. But as he saw him, he jumped nearly clear of the ground.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

His eyes almost popped through his spectacles, at the sight of the rider who was coming at a gallop, spurring his sweating horse.

That rider's face was hidden by a flour-bag, his figure enveloped by a belted cloak.

Bunter blinked at him in terror.

He had heard about the man in the flour-bag—the man who called himself the Rio Kid. Whether he was the Rio Kid or not, Bunter did not know, or care: but he knew that he was a desperate rascal—about the last man in Texas that Bunter wanted to meet in that solitary spot.

"Oh jiminy!" gurgled Bunter.

He backed swiftly into the brush.

For some reason—he could not begin to imagine the reason—the man in the flour-bag was heading direct for that clump of small timber and brush. In about a minute more he would reach it.

Billy Bunter's fat heart almost ceased to beat!

One thought was in his mind—to keep out of sight. Fortunately, that was not difficult, in the thick chaparral.

Bunter backed hurriedly into the heart of the chaparral and halted, panting, in the midst of a mass of thick brush, tangled with lianas and hanging Spanish moss.

There he was completely hidden from sight, unless the man in the flour-bag hunted him out: which even the terrified Owl realised was not likely, as the man could not possibly know that he was there.

Hidden in the dusky vegetation, his fat face brushed by hanging clumps of Spaniard's-beard, the fat junior palpitated and panted. But he suppressed his panting breath, as a brushing, rustling sound warned him that the man in the flour-bag had dismounted, and was leading his horse into the thickets.

The heavy brushing sound approached Bunter. The man, for whatever reason, was pushing deep into the chaparral, out of sight from the plain.

It dawned on Bunter that the trail-thief, like himself, was hunting cover, though doubtless from a different reason.

The fat Owl hardly suppressed a squeak of terror, as the Spanish moss that screened him, stirred, brushed by the passing shoulder of a horse.

The horse passed on, however: and at a distance of a few yards, Bunter heard the unseen man tethering him.

He could hear the deep breathing of the hard-driven horse: and the panting breath of the man in the flour-bag. The man was not six feet from him.

Bunter remained very still. He dared not even tremble. He had only one comfort: it was clear that that desperate villain did not know that anyone but himself was in the cover of the chaparral.

The petrified fat Owl could hear—and suddenly he found that he could see. A narrow slit in the hanging moss was before his face—and it gave him a glimpse of what was beyond his cover.

Six feet from him—no more than that—he saw a shoulder, and the side of a head. From the head, a hand was taking a stetson hat.

Bunter was too terrified to be surprised, or to wonder what the man's game was. He stood petrified, staring through his spectacles, paralysed and dumb with terror.

Having removed the hat, the man lifted the flour-bag from his head.

Then Bunter understood.

No doubt the rascal had been on some lawless trail, disguised in the flour-bag and cloak! Now he had penetrated into the nearest cover, to get rid of that tell-tale disguise.

Then he would be free to ride 't prairie in his own proper pers

unsuspected as the man who had worn the flour-bag.

As that dawned on Bunter's fat brain, his terror, if possible, intensified. The man's face was revealed to his eyes.

Whatever the trail-thief might have done, had he found Bunter there, while he was disguised, there was no doubt about what he would do if he found him after his face was revealed.

Dumb, transfixed, hardly breathing, Bunter gazed.

The face he saw was that of a young man, about thirty—handsome in its outlines, but reckless and dissipated in its expression. It was red with heat and haste, and the man wiped clots of perspiration away, after removing the flour-bag.

It was a face that Billy Bunter had never seen before. But he had seen the Rio Kid, and he knew that this was not the Kid.

It was a man more than ten years older than the Kid, and nothing like him in feature or expression.

For a long, endless minute, as it seemed to Bunter, the man stood there, wiping the perspiration from his face, and panting for breath—happily unaware of the eyes that were fixed on him from the depths of the mass of Spanish moss.

Then, to Bunter's intense relief, he stirred, and passed out of view.

But he was not gone. Bunter heard brushing sounds—and understood that the man was divesting himself of the long horseman's cloak that hid him from neck to feet.

Then there came a movement of the thick screen of lianas and moss that concealed Bunter. For a dreadful moment, the unhappy Owl thought that he was discovered. But it was not that.

Something was thrust into the moss, and left within a few inches of Bunter's feet. It was a folded cloak!

The trail-thief had hidden his disguise there: having, evidently, selected that spot for the same reason as Bunter, because it was thickly hidden by the undergrowths and hanging creepers.

Bunter breathed again, as the movement ceased, and the unseen man receded.

Sweat was streaming down the fat junior's face, dimming his spectacles, and tickling his fat little nose. But he did not stir.

The man was still moving. Bunter did not think of peering at him—he was too horribly frightened for curiosity. But the trail-thief's movements brought him again opposite that slit in the Spaniard's beard, and Bunter saw him again—part of him! What he saw now would have startled him, had he been capable of taking heed of anything but deep fear.

The trail-thief had a packet in his hands, which he was tearing open.

From the interior he drew a bundle of papers, which Bunter realised was a wad of banknotes. He turned the edges, counting them. Bunter could see that they were United States banknotes, but he could not see the denominations. A moment or two more, and the wad of bills disappeared from his sight, and he could hear the man thrusting them into a pocket.

He knew now that the man in the flour-bag was fresh from a successful robbery. Little enough the hapless Owl cared about that, or anything else, so long as the man would go and leave him undiscovered. If only he would go—

He was going!

Bunter heard him leading the horse back to the edge of the chaparral. The

sound ceased, and he longed to hear hoofbeats.

But the trail-thief was scanning the prairie before he emerged from the cover where he had removed his disguise and hidden it. Long, long minutes passed, and then, to Bunter's unspeakable relief, he heard the jingle of a stirrup, followed by the sound of hoofs.

He was going!

He was gone!

The hoofbeats died away on the prairie.

Bunter did not stir. Even yet he dared not stir. He remained motionless, perspiring, paralysed, for long minutes after silence was restored. At last he moved, his fat face white as chalk, his fat knees sagging under him. He tottered out of his hiding-place, blinking round him with terrified eyes, listening with strained ears.

But he was alone in the chaparral. The trail-thief was gone—a mile away, probably, by that time. Half-fainting, the fat junior sank down, and sat leaning feebly against a tree.

"Oh crikey!" moaned Bunter.

It was long before he could even pull himself together sufficiently to blink out on the prairie to see whether the Greyfriars fellows were coming. But they were not coming; they were not likely to come yet. In deep anxiety the fat junior continued to watch, forgetting even that he was hungry—only longing for the sight of the faces of the Famous Five.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

The Hunt for the Kid!

HARRY WHARTON & CO. rode out into the stage-trail and turned their horses towards Packsaddle.

The Bounder's face was dark with angry disappointment.

Twenty thousand dollars had gone with the trail-thief—a serious loss, even for a millionaire like Mr. Vernon-Smith. Smithy's deal with Mr. Jad Blake in the lawyer's office at Packsaddle had to be postponed. The price of the Circle-O, which was to have been paid over in Lawyer Shank's office that afternoon was now plunder for the disguised trail-thief.

But the Bounder was thinking less of that than of the disappointment of the rascal's escape. By sheer luck, owing to his trick on Bunter, the juniors had arrived on the scene of the hold-up in time to give chase to the man in the flour-bag. They had nearly had him, but that desperate leap over the barranca had saved him.

By the time the juniors reached the end of the barranca even the Bounder realised that too much time had been lost for further pursuit to be possible. Long before that the man in the flour-bag had reached some cover where he could get rid of his disguise unseen, and had they sighted him afterwards they would not have known him from any other man in the Frio valley. He might have been a citizen of Packsaddle—a lawless puncher from one of the many ranches in the valley—anybody, in fact. Once he got out of sight, and got rid of his disguise, he was safe.

All the juniors shared the Bounder's disappointment, though they were not perhaps feeling so savage about it. It could not be helped, and that was that! Still, it was a bitter disappointment, for they had been very keen to rope in the disguised rascal, and prove that he

was not the Rio Kid, as he pretended to be.

They rode on to the cow town, where Smithy had to call at the lawyer's office and tell him that the deal was off for the time being. They were drawing near Packsaddle, when there was a thudding of hoofs on the trail behind them, and they glanced round and recognised the young rancher of Circle-O.

"Here's Blake!" grunted the Bounder. "May as well tell him that the deal's off."

Jad Blake gave the juniors a curt nod as he joined them on the trail. His keen glance lingered curiously on the Bounder's clouded face.

"Jest riding in to meet you at the lawyer's office, Mr. Vernon-Smith," he remarked.

The Bounder grunted.

"No use now," he said.

"How come? You ain't aiming to call off the deal?"

"No; but the price can't be paid over to-day, because—"

"Popper over the pond changed his mind at the last minute?" asked Blake, with a sneer. "Or you been stringing me along?"

"No!" snapped the Bounder. "The hack's been held up, and a dirty thief has got away with the packet of money from the bank."

"You ain't telling me!" exclaimed Blake, with a whistle. "You see the hold-up?"

"We got on the spot just after it, and got after the hold-up man, too, but he got clear," grunted the Bounder.

"The Rio Kid, I reckon," said Blake. "I guess you had this coming, hombre, after stopping me from roping in that doggoned young fire-bug on Squaw Mountain last week. You sure did ask for this, I'm telling you."

"That man was not the Rio Kid, Mr. Blake," said Harry Wharton quietly. "We are all quite certain of that."

Blake shrugged his shoulders.

"I ain't heard of any other doggoned hold-up man in this section," he said, "not since the rangers cleaned up the rustlers of Squaw Mountain. I'll say it was the Kid."

"Well, it was not!" snapped the Bounder. "It's some hard-up scoundrel who's taken to the trails to raise the wind, and he's cur enough to use the Kid's name to keep himself safe. I'll bet that his face would be well known in Packsaddle if it was seen with that flour-bag off it."

"You reckon?" asked Blake, giving the Bounder a very curious look.

"I know it!" grunted the Bounder.

"So do we all," said Bob Cherry. "And we're going to tell the sheriff of Packsaddle so, too."

"You know a whole heap, you sure do!" said Blake sarcastically. "You sure learned the whole caboodle at that school of yours in the old country, and mebbe the sheriff'll be glad for you to teach him his business."

With that, the young rancher gave his bronco a touch of the spur and rode on, leaving the Greyfriars party.

"That chap's rather a sneering beast," remarked Johnny Bull, with a grim look after the rancher of Circle-O. Smithy gave a contemptuous grunt.

"I guess he's disappointed at not touching the money for his ranch to-day. He will have to wait a few days now before he chucks it away on the poker-table at the Red Flare," he said, with a sneer.

The juniors arrived in Packsaddle soon after Blake. They found the cow

town in a buzz of excitement from end to end.

Wash's store was crowded with citizens, hearing the storekeeper's account of the hold-up on the stage-trail, and another crowd surrounded Andy Jones at the Pack Hotel. A swarm of men buzzed and shouted in the plaza, and the juniors heard the name of the Rio Kid on all sides.

Evidently the report had been made that the Rio Kid had held up the hack and shot the bank messenger—a report that the man in the flour-bag was very glad to spread to keep suspicion from other quarters—and, as the juniors knew, it was very likely that the rascal himself was there, listening to the excited talk and the fierce threats uttered against the outlaw whose name he had used.

A number of horsemen were parading outside the sheriff's office. Mr. Lick appeared to have called up his deputies to take up the pursuit of the hold-up man—quite a hopeless business after the lapse of time, as the juniors could have told him.

Poker Blake had halted at the sheriff's office, and the juniors saw him in talk with Mr. Lick, who was about to mount his horse. They rode up at once. They had information for the sheriff.

Blake gave them one of his unpleasant, sarcastic glances as they came up, but the sheriff bestowed a nod on the party.

"I guess you lose a hatful, Mr. Vernon-Smith," he said. "But we're sure getting arter that fire-bug from the Rio Grande, and mebbe we'll get back that packet of dollars." Then he gave the juniors a curious look. "Andy Jones allows that you got after that fire-bug when he beat it with the dollars. I guess you had luck not to catch him."

He grinned.

"We nearly had him!" snapped Vernon-Smith. "He risked his neck to get clear. How's the man he shot?"

"Purty bad," said the sheriff. "The doc's got him. He figures that he will pull through, but he sure is hard hit. That doggoned Kid is going up on a rope for shooting him up if we get a holt on him. I'll say we won't worry much about a trial. A rope and a branch will be good enough for the doggoned scallawag that shot up Bud Carter."

"It was not the Rio Kid," said Vernon-Smith.

The sheriff stared.

"What you giving me?" he ejaculated. "Why, the god-darned fire-bug handed over his name to Andy Jones, and Job Wash heard him; he wasn't making any secret of it that he was the Kid!"

"But it wasn't, Mr. Lick!" said Harry Wharton. "It's some rogue who is using his name to keep himself clear—"

Jad Blake gave a laugh, and shrugged his shoulders. Evidently the rancher of Circle-O had no use for that theory. Neither had the sheriff of Packsaddle. He snorted, and did not trouble to make any other answer.

"I guess we're starting now," he said. "You riding with my bunch, Mr. Blake?"

"Sure!" said Blake. "I'd give a hatful of dollars to get a gun on that fire-bug! I guess he's hitting for Squaw Mountain. He's got his hideout there."

"You said it!" agreed the sheriff.

He mounted his horse and rode away with his men, Jad Blake riding with him.

The Bounder looked after them, with a sneer.

"They've bitten on it that it's the Rio Kid!" he said. "Exactly what that hound, whoever he is, wants! They may find the Kid on Squaw Mountain, but they won't find the blighter who's got the dollars. I guess he's in this very town this very minute—likely as not riding in the sheriff's own party! If we passed him on the street we shouldn't know."

"Better get back to Bunter," said Bob. "We can borrow a horse at the Pack."

"Blow Bunter!" grunted Vernon-Smith.

But there was nothing to keep the party in Packsaddle now. Smithy's business at the lawyer's office was off, and they certainly had no desire to join in the hunt for the Rio Kid. So they went into the cow town hotel for a hasty meal, packed a parcel of "eats" for Bunter, and rode out of town again, leading a horse for Bunter, and leaving Packsaddle in a roar behind them, the name of the Rio Kid on every lip.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Something Like a Surprise!

"I SAY, you fellows!" groaned Billy Bunter.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Here we are again, old fat man!"

"Still alive after missing your dinner?"

Billy Bunter blinked at the Greyfriars fellows, as they dismounted at the chaparral on the prairie, with a lack-lustre blink.

As he had missed his dinner, and had to wait for eats, they did not expect to find Billy Bunter looking very cheerful. But they were a little surprised by his dismal, dolorous, almost ghastly look. Even missing a meal was not quite calculated to produce such an effect on the fat Owl.

"We've got the grub, old porpoise!" said Bob comfortingly. "Tons of sandwiches, and a cake—"

"Oh dear!" said Bunter.

"And a box of candy!" said Harry, laughing.

"Oh lor'!"

"What's the matter with the fat fool?" asked Vernon-Smith, staring at the Owl of the Remove.

"Here's the grub," said Bob, taking a parcel from his saddle and unwrapping the same. "Jolly good sandwiches, Bunter."

To the amazement of the juniors, Bunter cast hardly a blink at the sandwiches. That he was hungry was certain; he would have been hungry again by that time, even if he had not missed his dinner. And he had missed it.

"Nothing happened here while we've been gone?" asked Bob.

"Oh lor'! Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter. "Oh crumbs! That awful villain! Oh, jiminy!"

"What awful villain, fathead? Has anybody been along here?"

"That man in the flour-bag!" groaned Bunter.

Six juniors jumped together.

"The man in the flour-bag!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Here?" exclaimed Nugent.

"You've seen him?" exclaimed the Bounder.

"Oh dear! Yes! He never saw me!" moaned Bunter. "I can tell you fellows, I hid pretty close when I saw the beast—"

"You needn't tell us that!" sneered the Bounder. "We can guess that one!"

"Beast!"

"Well, it was the best thing Bunter could do if the man really came this way," said Harry. "He hasn't a gun, and couldn't use one if he had. Thank goodness the man never spotted him, if he came here—"

"But did he?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Gammon!" grunted the Bounder. "The fat chump's been to sleep and dreamed it!"

"Oh, really, Smithy—"

Billy Bunter helped himself to a sandwich. He remembered that he was hungry. Another followed fast—and then another! Bunter began to feel better.

Harry Wharton & Co. regarded him rather dubiously, the Bounder with a sneer. It was possible, of course, that the man in the flour-bag had been there—it was, in fact, a likely spot for him to penetrate to get rid of his disguise, and it was more or less in the line of his flight. But Billy Bunter had heard a good deal of talk among the juniors about that man in the flour-bag, and it was quite likely that he had gone to sleep and had a spot of nightmare in the day-time.

"Well, tell us all about it, old fat top!" said Bob.

Gobble, gobble, gobble!

Having started on the sandwiches, Bunter was disinclined to leave off, even to relate his harrowing experiences in the chaparral.

"Sure you saw him?" asked Nugent.

Gobble, gobble, gobble!

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"We shan't get it till Bunter's finished the grub!" he remarked.

"And it will be all lies when we do get it!" grunted the Bounder.

Gobble, gobble, gobble!

The sandwiches—numerous as they were—vanished swiftly. Bunter was a quick worker.

"Of course, I wasn't scared," said Bunter, when the last sandwich was gone. Evidently he was recovering.

"Where's that cake?"

"Here you are!"

Gobble, gobble, gobble!

"O listen to the band!" murmured Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Gobble, gobble, gobble! The cake followed the sandwiches on the downward path. Bunter grabbed the box of candy.

But the candy went down more slowly, and the fat Owl was at liberty to use his fat chin for speech.

"I say, you fellows, it was pretty awful!" he said. "Of course, I wasn't scared. I dare say you fellows would have been, but I wasn't."

"Lie No. 1!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Beast! Seeing the brute come, with that bag over his face, I knew he was the beast you fellows had been talking about, so I hurried—I mean, I looked for cover, taking my time about it—"

"Lie No. 2!" said Smithy.

"Yah! If I'd had a gun, of course, I should have run him in!" said Bunter.

(Continued on page 28.)

WHO SAYS ANOTHER HIKE WITH—

The GREYFRIARS GUIDE



THE DAILY ROUND. 3 p.m. (Mon. & Thurs.) FRENCH.

(1)

It is now my regrettable duty to say
This subject makes everyone cheerful,
Although our linguistic accomplishments
may
Be possibly reckoned as fearful.
For adjectives, nouns, and irregular
verbs
We have no particular yearning,
And no such uneasy ambition disturbs
Our hearts as a passion of learning.

(2)

But, oh, what affection we have for
Mossoo!
What colour we give his existence!
He makes such a terrible hullabaloo
Whenever we offer assistance!
A desk full of frogs is a generous gift
Which makes him as mad as a weasel,
He's very ungrateful whenever we lift
The blackboard back on to its easel.

(3)

With penny balloons we endeavour to
bring
A laugh in his life full of worry,
A peashooter, too, is an excellent thing
To make him jump up in a hurry!
But humour and exercise fail to appeal,
He seems to regard them as hateful,
But still we go on, though we certainly
feel
He might be a little more grateful!



A WEEKLY BUDGET OF FACT AND FUN

By
THE GREYFRIARS
RHYMESTER

GREYFRIARS GRACES!

The first practice match, First Eleven versus The Rest, was played this week. The Remove could have whopped the lot of 'em.

Loder started by getting a duck. It is believed that, when he saw the red ball coming towards him, he tried to pot it.

Never mind—he made more than we expected.

Wingate, after making 26, was given out l.b.w. by Prout, acting as umpire. That made him wish the grizzly bears had been a bit more enterprising.

Blundell was top scorer with 82 not out. Twelve of these were made without any luck at all.

He was missed six times by Coker (playing for the Rest). If Coker is put in the Fifth Form team, we shall have the darkest suspicions.

The First Eleven made 216. The Rest were 74 for eight and a half wickets when stumps were drawn. The half-wicket, of course, being Coker.

Coker started by breaking a bat. On the wicket, needless to say. The Rest also broke a bat. On Coker.

Coker also bowled an over—with amazing success. He hit Prout four times!

Temple of the Fourth made some graceful and stylish strokes before he accidentally hit the ball and was caught.

Mr. Horace James Coker, the famous fool, has postponed all his engagements this season until he is quite certain that the home-made brake on his motor-bike is any good. He is, however, giving a farewell party before he goes out on the bike next Wednesday, and if he should happen to come back in one piece a celebration will be held in the evening.

Mr. Richard Penfold is confined to his study with a thousand lines, but is carrying on as well as can be expected.

The prefects have decided that something must be done to stop reckless young rascals breaking bounds and climbing the ivy at night. Why not fix an iron ladder to the wall?



AFTER SCHOOL HOURS Air Raid Precautions

When air raids threaten Greyfriars
School

We shan't make vain contortions,
We'll all be ready, calm and cool,
We've taken full precautions.
While bombs are dropping on the dorm,
We get out our umbrellas
To keep the shrapnel off, and form
A band of fearless fellers!

For even Bunter's not afraid,
Though he runs helter-skelter
Towards the pantry, where he's made
His private gas-proof shelter.
The rest are marching fully dressed
Towards the nether regions,
The basement—which is now possessed
By all the Greyfriars legions.

With gas-mask on, and mortar-board,
The Head strides into cover,
And facing all the gas-masked hoard,
He takes a calm Call-Over.
We're down below the ground all night,
Imbibing extra knowledge,
While several tons of dynamite
Removes the present college.

Next day we build it up again,
And then go into classes,
Until another aeroplane
Drops bombs before it passes!

Let's hope no war will really start
(It won't if we are steady),
But if it DOES—well, jokes apart—
One school, at least, is ready!

THE GREYFRIARS ALPHABET

GEORGE POTTER,
Coker's Chum in the Fifth Form



P is for POTTER—Coker's chum,
Who might as well be deaf and dumb
For all the chance he gets to jaw,
While Coker's laying down the law.
His part is just to nod and cheer,
Occasionally to say: "Hear, hear!",
And be impressed with Coker's brain,
And try to copy him—in vain!
This part George Potter does not play,
He also wants to have a say,
And when old Coker's in distress,
Just through his own fatheadedness,
George Potter's common sense is good
To see him safely through the wood.
Athletic, steady, safe, and sound,
George Potter's pretty good all round.

A Philological Commission of Language Study is to be set up to discover, if possible, the meaning of the words "Ow-wow-wow! Yaroooh!" which are so often heard in the Remove Form Room. It is believed they are derived from the Greek.

"I thought of knocking him down—I came jolly near doing it—"
 "Lie No. 3!" commented the Bounder.
 "Cad! Swab! Rotter! It was all your fault that I was here at all and got such an awful scare," hissed Bunter.
 "I—I mean, I—I wasn't scared—"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! I was as cool as—as—as ice! I just kept out of sight and watched him. I didn't see him just by chance, you know; being as cool as a cucumber, I stood and watched him—"
 "Lie No. 4!"
 "He took off the flour-bag and the cloak," said Bunter. "I saw his face, you know! You fellows would have been blue with funk, I fancy, and

at the ranch—the Rio Kid?"
 "No, you ass, nothing at all like him!" answered Bunter.
 "Jolly good evidence for the Kid—if Bunter really saw him!" said Johnny Bull.
 "Well, what was he like?" urged Bob. "Could you give old Lick, at Packsaddle, a description of him, to run him in?"
 "Oh, yes! Easily!" said Bunter. "You see, I saw his face—I should know him again anywhere."
 "What sort of a face?" asked Bob.
 "Oh, a face, you know!" said Bunter.
 "What colour were his eyes?" asked Harry.
 "I never noticed."
 "What shape was his nose?"

and dreamed that you saw the man in the flour-bag!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Will that do?"
 "I say, you fellows, don't go yet!" howled Bunter. "Hadn't you better get the things he left here?"
 "What?"
 "I mean to say, they might be useful, as evidence, or something!" said Bunter, blinking at the astonished juniors.
 "You howling ass!" roared Bob. "Did he leave anything here? Mean to say there's a single spot of truth in what you've been telling us?"
 "Oh, really, Cherry—"
 "Well, if he left anything here, where is it?" demanded Wharton.
 Bunter pointed to the spot.
 "You see, he hid the things there—nearly shoved them at me," he said. "That's where I was standing—"
 The Famous Five gave Bunter a look. Then they groped into the dense mass of brush and Spanish moss.
 There was a yell from Bob Cherry as he drew out a bundle. It was a large, dark, horseman's cloak, closely folded, and as Bob held it up it unrolled, and a flour-bag, slit with holes for eyes and mouth, dropped out of it at the feet of the juniors.
 The Bounder pounced on it.
 "Good gad!" he ejaculated. He held up the flour-bag.
 "Then—he's been here!" gasped Harry Wharton.
 "Didn't I tell you so?" yapped Bunter. "Haven't I been telling you all this time—"
 The Bounder's eyes gleamed.
 "By gad! That does it!" he said. "Bunter must have seen him. He hasn't sense enough to describe the man, but he can prove that it was not the Rio Kid! We'll walk the fat ass all over Packsaddle to-morrow and see if he can pick out the man. What?"
 "Good egg!"

More Stamps for Your Pals! See page 2



wouldn't have noticed anything! But I just spotted him, with perfect coolness! You know me!"
 "We do!" grinned Bob Cherry.
 "The knowfulness is terrific!" chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.
 "Then he counted up a lot of money—" said Bunter.
 The Famous Five exchanged a quick look. Even the sceptical Bounder took notice of that statement. They all knew that the man in the flour-bag had escaped with a "lot of money"; there was no doubt about that.
 "A whole lot," said Bunter. "He shoved it into a pocket, and—and then he cleared off."
 "Well, if you saw the man's chivvy, what was he like?" asked Bob dubiously.
 "Anything like that chap you saw once

"I didn't look at his nose specially."
 "Was he a beaver?"
 "N-no—I—I don't think he had a beard!"
 Bob Cherry chuckled.
 "Old Lick will get him, easily, on a description like that!" he remarked.
 "All Bunter noticed was that he had a face! I suppose you're sure he really had a face, Bunter?"
 "Ha, ha, ha!"
 "Well, now Bunter's finished gorging, and finished telling lies, suppose we get back to the ranch?" said the Bounder. He turned to his horse.
 "Come on, Bunter—we've got a tame gee-gee for you," said Bob.
 "I say, you fellows, mean to say you don't believe me?" hooted Bunter.
 "Well, we'll believe you went to sleep

It was a very cheery party that rode back to Kicking Cayuse, taking the cloak and the flour-bag with them. They had news for the sheriff of Packsaddle, news which could hardly fail to convince him that he was seeking to put salt on the wrong tail! And if the man in the flour-bag was a Packsaddle "guy," there was a healthy chance of Bunter spotting him in the cow town and picking him out!

(The next yarn in this all-thrilling series: "THE TRAIL - THIEF'S SECRET!" by Frank Richards, is better than ever, chums! Make sure of reading it by ordering next Saturday's MAGNET at the earliest opportunity. And don't forget—there will be more "Armaments" stamps in this issue.)

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