

START THE NEW YEAR BY MEETING HARRY WHARTON & Co., Inside!

The Magnet 2^D

Billy Bunter's
Own Paper

SMOKING



CAUGHT!



WOT I ses is this here—A Happy Noo Year to All! Mind you, I still think most young ribs should be drowned at birth, but at this time of the year I generally feels a bit more corjial towards the yewman race, so here's my good wishes and best respects to one and all.

Thanking you kindly for your message, Mr. Editor, I'm quite willing to take a 'and in writing your maggazine this week, though, ackchewally I ain't much good at literary work. Still, I'll do me best out of respect to you, and not for the ten bob you sent me, as I never trouble much about money.

Money, as well you know, sir, is the root of all evil, and I don't 'old with it. Of course, if a young gent likes to grease my palm with silver, I won't say as I ackchewally refuse it with scorn; but wot I ses is this here: I ain't one to be bribed out of doing my dooty. Never shall that be said of William Gosling.

In the sirkumstances, I'd just as soon send your ten bob back with a 'aughty refusal to accept it, but, seeing as 'ow this might perraps offend you, I 'ave decided to stick to it like a leech—I mean, to retain it in my possesshion.

In your letter you ask me to tell your readers somethink about myself and my work 'ere at Greyfriars. Well, it ain't for me to blow me own trumpet, but I think it's generally known that Greyfriars could not hexist without me. Mr. Editor and Readers, I work like a nigger, and that's the fact. I've got a Motter, and I act up to it. The Motter is this:

DOOTY IS DOOTY!

Dooties are of two kinds, them I hate and them I like. The most noomerous of these are them I hate. Cleanin and polishin and sweepin and mendin and carryin and trapesin all over the whole blessed school ockupy my time for about twenty-six hours every day. From early morn to dewy eve I work, to use a figgurative expression, like a nigger, and never get a word of thanks for it. On the contrary, the young ribs makes jokes about a man hold enough to be their grandf—father, I mean.

Only the other day I 'eard young Cherry call out;

"'Allo, 'allo, 'allo! They've been and gorn and put up a statue in the quad."

"That ain't a statue," says another young imaje named Bull. "That's Gossy sweepin' snow!"

In fact, they make out I never does a 'and's turn, and wot I ses is this here, they oughter've been drowned at birth, like kittens, drat 'em!"

But some dooties, I must confess, are most enjoyable. Now and agen I have to 'oist a young rip for a public flogging by the Head in Big Hall. I get a great deal of pleasure from that, needless to say, and I wish it took place more orten.

Then there's the job of reportin young ribs to the masters for being out arter lock-up or climbin trees and such like. Dooty is dooty, and it's never too much trouble for me to tramp into the 'ouse and report a hofferder for punishment. Sometimes I catch young Skinner or one of his pals smoking in the woodshed, and then they try to bribe me not to report 'em to Mr. Quelch.

"Dooty is dooty!" I say sternly, and though I certainly do take their coin of the realm—just to punish 'em—I never neglect my dooty, unless I 'appen to forget it, which certainly sometimes does 'appen in these sirkumstances.

But to suggest that William Gosling is capable of taking a bribe is an outrageous lie, which I hurls back into their teeth.

JUST A PHEW!

There is another matter which I feel bound to touch on. A mallicious roomer is going about that I am fond of knocking it back—or, to put it in plain English, that I shift a certain amount of licker. Whenever young Skinner drors a cartoon of me he always gives me a black bottle and a bright red nose, which of all lies is the most vilest in the world.

Now, the fact is, that I do ackchewally possess a black bottle, but it contains some stuff which I take for rhoumatism, and whenever I get a rhoumatic twinge I, nacherally, apply myself to the tonic. But I never take much. Just a few glasses each day, mainly in the evenin. I 'ave one glass, or a cupple, perraps, or maybe one more, and sometimes just another one—or maybe even two—but to suggest that I partake of the cup which cheers and also ineebryates, is nothing but a slander, and I've a good mind to persecute them in a Court of Lawer.

CHRISTMAS CHEER.

You ask me 'ow I spent Christmas, Mr. Editor. Well, wot I ses is this here, I worked like a nigger the 'ole time. On Breakin'-up Day I nacherally had a few tips from the young gents, bless their arts, and, on consulting my books, I find that the gross total was £19 10s. 1½d. The odd 'apenny was collected by public subscripshun in the Third Form, and represented all their worldly welth.

Here are some items from the account:

MASTER COKER (5th Form).—£1. Wished 'im a Merry Christmas in a voice breaking with emotion. He has a 'art of gold and a rich aunt, and I wish there were more here like 'im.

MASTER SKINNER (Remove).—1d., with special instruckshions not to spend it on drink. Gave him a cold stare and dashed the coin angrily into my trousis pocket.

MASTER FISH (Remove).—His Best Wishes, unaccompanied by cash. Replied with a sniff, which did not affect him in the least.

MASTER BUNTER (Remove).—A Story About A Postal Order. I replied haughtily: "Wot I ses is this here, you 'op orf before I report yer!" I've 'eard of that postal order before!

'IS LORDSHIP (Remove).—£1. He was asleep in his car when it came past my

lodge, but I venchered to wake him up in order to wish him a Merry Christmas. '2 was quite serprised when he fished out a tip, as, nacherally, I 'ad no such idea in mind.

MASTER VERNON-SMITH.—5s.—after pulling out a purse stuffed to the hilt with banknotes. Mean as they make 'em, that young rip!

I may say I had a very meager Christmas dinner. I don't 'old with a-gorgin' and a-stuffin' at Christmas. Wot's more, a poor man like wot I am can't afford these here luckshuries. I had nothing but one turkey with a few veges, quite a small ham, a measley little chicken, and hardly any sossiges—not more'n a cuppla pounds—and only a tiny pork pie, and as for me Christmas poodden, it was no bigger'n a football, and was gorn in a flash, while two duzen mince pies went nowhere, and I had to fill me inner man with froot which Joe Mible, the Head's gardener, sent me.



The worst of it was that I 'ad the rhoumatism crool bad at Christmas-time and was obliged to take a good deal of tonic. But it did me no good. In fact, the more tonic I took, the worse I got, and arter a time the room began to swim round me, so I decided to go to bed. Yes, Christmas is a good time for you young gents, but when you get as old as I am, you'll think different.

Well, Mr. Editor, I got to go and lock up the gates. It's just six o'clock. So once agen, a Happy Noo Year, and if you want me to write for you agen, kindly send fifteen bob next time, because prices is going up, owing to the Govingment.

Yours trooly,

WILLIAM GOSLING.



W. Gosling

GOSLING THE PORTER

Gosling, the ancient porter and gate-keeper of Greyfriars, is the subject of many jokes, owing to his crusty and surly disposition. Gosling hates boys, and is always keen to report them for breaking the rules. He works in a leisurely fashion, never doing more than he has to, and his hobbies are grumbling, smoking his old pipe, and more grumbling. How old he is has never been discovered, but it is certain that he has seen many generations pass through the school. He has an acute idea of the value of money, and is not above taking a tip to overlook some small offence. He is a great believer in whisky as a cure for rheumatism, in spite of the fact that this only makes it worse. As the target for many practical jokes, his life is, at any rate, not dull. "Gossy" is, in fact, a Greyfriars institution, and is taken humorously by the boys.

(Cartoon By HAROLD SKINNER.)

I can say—I never was selfish. Lucky it's not catching, or I might become as selfish as you fellows in the long run."

And Bunter closed his eyes again.

Harry Wharton & Co. gazed at him. They did not speak again. Perhaps Bunter had taken their breath away! But Bob Cherry stepped towards the settee, grasped the cushion on which Bunter's fat head rested, and jerked it away suddenly.

Bump!

"Wow!" roared Bunter.

The cushion being withdrawn, Bunter's fat head was left without any visible means of support; and naturally it bumped down on the settee.

Bunter sat up, and rubbed it.

"Ow! What—wow! Beasts! Ow, my napper! Who's got that cushion? Gimme that cushion, Bob Cherry, you beast!"

"Sure you want it?" grinned Bob.

"Yes, you fathead!"

"Coming!" answered Bob.

It came quite suddenly—whizzing! It landed on Bunter's fat chin—and once more he was extended on the settee—involuntarily, this time!

"Man down!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Ow! Oh crikey!" spluttered Billy Bunter. "Wow! Why, you rotter—ow! I'll jolly well chuck it at your head! Ow!"

Billy Bunter grasped that cushion and scrambled up. His eyes gleamed with wrath through his spectacles. He gripped the cushion, and swung it up, to hurl at Bob Cherry's head.

Five fellows, grinning, prepared to dodge. Bob, at whom the fat Owl was taking aim, was in the least danger, for Billy Bunter's aim was never good.

"Take that!" hooted Bunter.

Bunter's aim was not very accurate; but he put plenty of beef into it. The cushion fairly shot across the hall, like a bullet.

It missed Bob Cherry by yards. It missed the other members of the Co. by feet! It whizzed on.

But every bullet has its billet; and the same law applies to cushions!

That cushion shot on its way, straight for the library door. It was rather unfortunate that that door opened at the same moment and Colonel Wharton came out.

Harry Wharton's uncle stepped into the hall, quite unaware of what was coming. Whatever he was thinking of, he was not thinking of whizzing cushions. That whizzing cushion took him by surprise.

"Good gad!" yelled the old colonel, as it landed on his third waistcoat button. "What—what—what—"

He sat down in the doorway. The cushion fell at his feet. He sat and blinked dizzily.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Harry Wharton. He rushed to render his elderly relative first aid.

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Billy Bunter. His eyes almost popped through his spectacles at the unexpected result of his cushion hurtling. "Oh lor'! Is—is that the old fogey? Oh scissors!"

Harry Wharton gave his uncle a hand up. Bob Cherry gave him another hand. The old military gentleman regained his feet, gasping. He stared down at the cushion on the floor—then he stared at the juniors; and the frown that came over his brow was a twin to the "frightful, fearful frantic frown" of the Lord High Executioner!

"Who threw that cushion at me?" asked Colonel Wharton, in a deep voice.

"Oh crikey!"

"Was it you, Bunter?"

"Oh, no! I never touched it!"

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gasped Bunter. "Besides, it was an accident! I was chucking it at that beast Cherry! I—I mean, I never chucked it! I—I was fast asleep, on this settee, when I did it—I mean, when I didn't do it—"

Colonel Wharton gave him a long, fixed look.

"You clumsy young ass!" he said. "If it was an accident, I will overlook it—but if you throw anything about again, Bunter, I shall box your ears."

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Pah!"

The old colonel, gasping a little, went back into the library and closed the door with almost a bang. Evidently he was annoyed.

Billy Bunter gave a snort.

"That isn't how we talk to guests at Bunter Court!" he remarked. "But I don't expect much in the way of manners here. Now, you gimme that cushion, Wharton, and don't play the goat! And what I want to know is this—are you fellows going to stop jawing, or ain't you going to stop jawing, while a chap gets forty winks?"

Bunter did not receive a reply to that question. Harry Wharton picked up the cushion and brought it back to the settee. But he did not hand it to Bunter! He grasped it in both hands and raised it over his head. It descended like a flail.

Swipe!

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter.

Swipe!

"Wow! Stoppit!"

Swipe!

"Beast! Stoppit! Chuck it! Leave off! I say, you fellows, stoppin! I say—whoop!"

Swipe!

Billy Bunter rolled off the settee. The cushion swiped again as he rolled. He bounded to his feet. The cushion swiped again as he bounded. He bolted for the stairs. The cushion swiped again as he bolted. He rushed up the staircase. Once more the cushion swiped as he rushed.

At the foot of the staircase Wharton brandished the cushion.

"Come back and have some more!" he roared.

"Beast!" gasped Bunter. He glared over the banisters. "Yah! Rotter! If this is how you treat a guest, you swab, I can jolly well say— Oh crikey!"

Whiz!

The cushion flew and landed on a fat little nose, and Bunter's face disappeared from the banisters. There was a bump on the stairs.

"Oh crikey! Ow! Oh lor'! Whooooooh!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Come down, you fat frog, and bring that cushion with you! I haven't finished yet!"

"Beast!"

If Harry Wharton had not finished, Billy Bunter had. A door was heard to slam above, and a key to turn. Billy Bunter had retired, after all, to his own room, for that much-needed nap.

THE SECOND CHAPTER.

By Whose Hand?

"ANYTHING up, Wells?" asked Harry Wharton.

Wells, the butler, came down the stairs, with a very grave face.

His plump, clean-shaven face was so very grave, very, very solemn, that five pairs of eyes turned on it curiously. Something in the upper regions, apparently, had caused Wells great concern.

It was late in the afternoon. The Famous Five had, after all, gone out, in spite of falling snow. They had come in fresh and ruddy, feeling all the better for it, and were gathered in a cheery group round the log fire, when Wells descended.

It was nearly time for tea, but not quite time, so Billy Bunter had not yet reappeared. Bunter was still deep in his belated nap, and not likely to emerge save at the irresistible call of the foodstuffs.

Wells glanced across at the Greyfriars fellows. In the gravity of his face dawned a spot of disapproval.

"Yes, Master Harry," he answered.

And without further explanation Wells traversed the hall to the door of the library, into which apartment he disappeared. Whatever was "up," he was going, it seemed, to report to Colonel Wharton there.

"What the dickens!" said Bob Cherry.

"What's the row upstairs, I wonder?" said Harry, puzzled.

"Bunter snoring—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Wells can't be going to tell my uncle that! I wonder—"

Wells' suave voice was heard murmuring in the library. The deep tones of the old colonel barked back.

"Good gad! Amazing! I never heard of such a thing! One of the boys— Really, I'm astonished!"

There was a heavy tramp, and Colonel Wharton came out into the hall with a frown on his brow. He fixed his eyes on the surprised juniors.

"Harry, this is most extraordinary! Surely you, or one of your friends, would never damage the property of a guest recently departed from this roof?"

"Eh! What? No! Hardly!" gasped Harry.

"It is extraordinary!" said Colonel Wharton, evidently very much disturbed. "The boy Fish, who came here yesterday—he left rather suddenly this morning—so suddenly that he did not take his suitcase with him—you are aware—"

"Yes. What about that?" asked Harry.

The Famous Five had seen Fisher T. Fish into his train at Wimford that morning, and had been pleased to speed that particular parting guest! Fishy's company was not of the kind in which they delighted.

"Fish telephoned after he had arrived at the school!" rapped the colonel. "He requested me to have his suitcase sent after him."

"Yes, I know," said Harry, more and more surprised. "I heard you tell Wells to have it sent down to Wimford, and put on the railway."

"Then you do not know what has happened to it?" exclaimed the colonel.

"Has anything happened to it?"

"So Wells tells me!" rapped Colonel Wharton. "He tells me that when he went up to Fish's room, to see about it, he found the suitcase smashed and its contents strewn over the floor."

"Great pip!" gasped Bob Cherry.

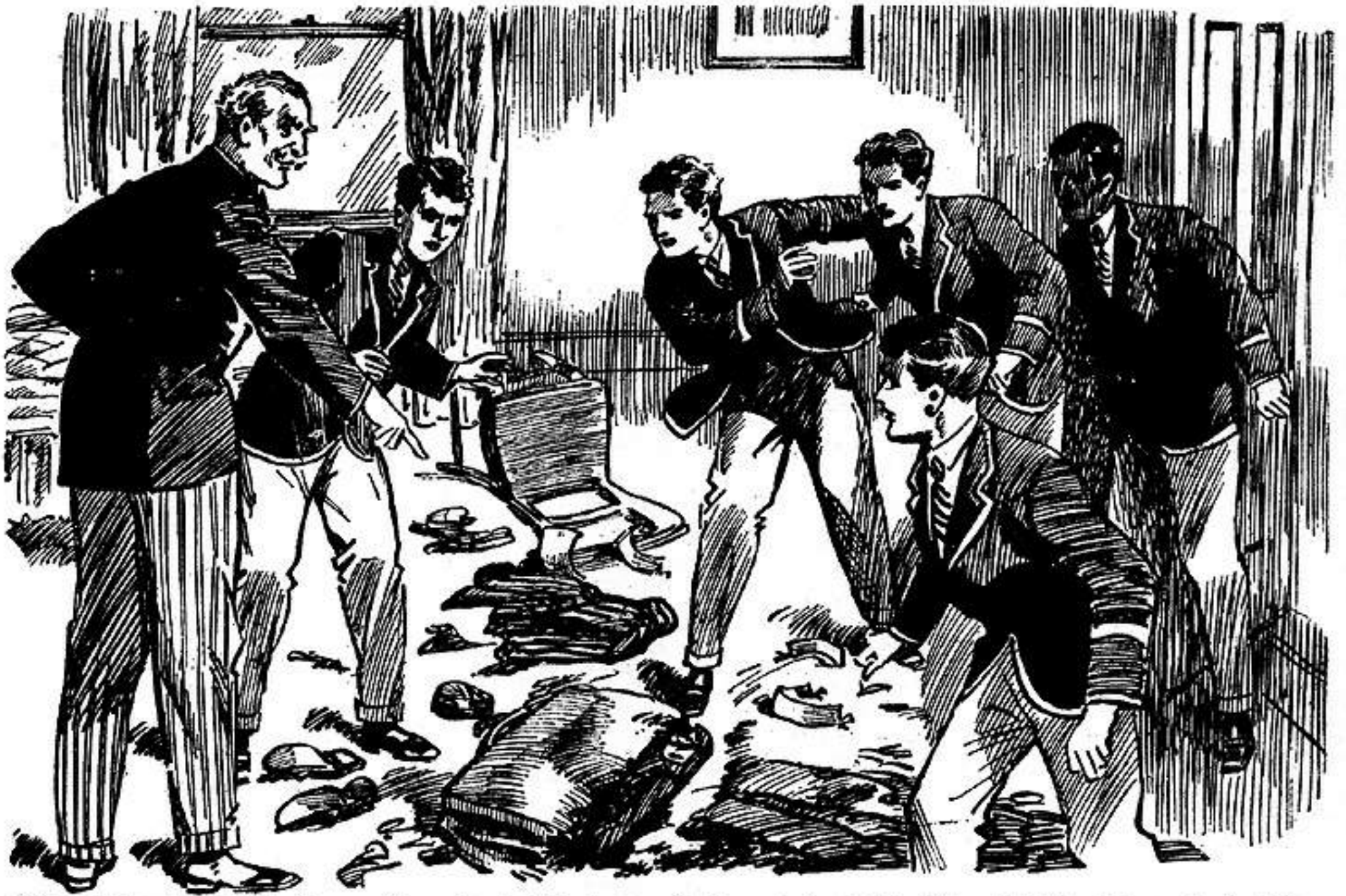
"The suitcase is hopelessly damaged, sir," said Wells. "It will have to be wrapped up and tied very carefully if it is to travel by rail. It will not hold together otherwise. If you will give me your instructions, sir—"

Colonel Wharton did not heed the butler. His eyes were fixed grimly on the astonished juniors.

"Well?" he rapped.

They could only stare.

That Fishy had gone off without his suitcase, and that he had phoned for it to be sent after him, they were aware.



Colonel Wharton and the Famous Five stared at the damaged suitcase belonging to Fisher T. Fish. The contents of the case were strewn on the floor in a rent and dismantled state. "Looks like a rag!" said Frank Nugent. "The ragfulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Singh.

But that anything had happened to that suitcase they had had no idea, not having had any occasion to look into Fisher T. Fish's room.

"This is a serious matter, Harry," said the colonel. "I can allow for schoolboy jokes and japes, but this is nothing of the kind. Please come up with me, all of you."

Colonel Wharton tramped up the staircase.

After him went the Famous Five, greatly surprised and wondering.

They entered the room that had been occupied by Fisher T. Fish during his brief stay at Wharton Lodge. And, having entered it, they stared at what met their eyes.

It was a cheap fibre suitcase that belonged to the American junior of Greyfriars. It was not of much value. Now, however, it was of no value at all.

It had been dealt with with a heavy hand. It looked as if it had been smitten with terrific smites by some heavy implement—probably the poker that lay in the fender. It was split open in several places. The lock still held, but hardly anything else did.

The contents were strewn on the floor—shirts and socks and pyjamas and such things, many of them in a rent and dismantled state!

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"Looks like a rag!" said Nugent, in wonder.

"The ragfulness is terrific."

Colonel Wharton's frowning brow grew grimmer and grimmer as he stared at the wreck.

He had not liked the boy Fish. As Fishy was left over at the school during the holidays, he had been hospitably prepared to let him stay at Wharton Lodge as long as he liked, or as long as Harry liked. Still, he had not been displeased by any means when the

Famous Five came back from Wimford without him and mentioned that Fishy had decided to take the train back to Greyfriars.

But whether he liked Fish or not made no difference to the courtesy that was due to a guest, specially a departed guest. For such a guest's property to be damaged before it could be sent after him was really intolerable. It was a reflection on his own hospitality and good manners.

"Upon my word!" said the old colonel, "this is simply scandalous! Harry, I am very much surprised and shocked at this! The boy Fish travelled here yesterday to bring the silver cigarette-case he had picked up at the school, and which he then believed belonged to Bunter—the silver case with the Greek letters inside. But he stated subsequently that, not being satisfied that Bunter was the owner, he intended to hand it over to the police."

Harry Wharton & Co., made no answer to that.

They were quite aware that Fisher T. Fish had intended to "freeze" on to that silver cigarette-case, and had no intention of handing it over to the police, any more than to Billy Bunter.

However, they did not care to tell the colonel so, so they said nothing.

"You walked to Wimford with Fish this morning to see the case handed over at the police station," went on the colonel. "But you told me that Fish did not hand it over, and that he stated that it was lost through a hole in the lining of his pocket."

"He said so," murmured Harry.

"You did not believe his statement?" rapped the colonel.

Wharton hesitated.

"Will you answer me, Harry?"

"Well, none of us believed him," admitted Harry. "We knew that Fishy was on the make—he generally is."

"Is that why he left so suddenly, without returning here for his suitcase?"

"Well, we were going to boot him till he coughed up that silver case!" confessed Harry Wharton. "He had no more right to stick to it than Bunter had! Bunter had more right than Fishy as he says that a man gave it to him to take to somebody he couldn't find."

"Is it possible to believe a word uttered by Bunter?" grunted the colonel.

"Um!"

"But certainly Fish should have handed it over to the authorities. That was his only reason for not returning it to Bunter. Do you suppose that he took the train back in order to take away the silver case with him?"

"No; I'm sure he never had it on him."

Colonel Wharton's jaw squared.

"Quite so!" he rapped. "And if he did not have it on him, and did not drop it as he pretended, he can only have left it locked up in his suitcase here, to be sent after him. Did you guess as much?"

"We thought it jolly likely."

"Quite so!" said the colonel again. "And now I find that the suitcase, which was left locked, has been smashed open. It is scarcely possible to doubt why! Was it smashed to take out the silver case?"

"Oh!"

"The boy Fish," said the colonel, in a deep voice, "struck me as being very sharp, and possibly unscrupulous. That was why I desired you to walk to the police station with him this morning, to see the article handed over. But whatever that boy's character may be, and whether he retained the article or not,

his property in this house should have been sacred. You know that!"

"Oh, yes, But—" "If he retained the article he had found, his dishonesty was a matter for his own conscience. Nothing can justify breaking the lock on a suitcase left here by a departed guest. Nothing—no consideration whatever. I am amazed—scandalised—that such a thing should have happened under my roof!"

"But who—" gasped Bob. "I have no doubt," continued the colonel, "that this was done to regain possession of the cigarette-case which Fish left locked in his bag. I require to know who has done it."

Harry Wharton set his lips. "Not I," he said, "and I can answer for my friends. No fellow here would think of doing such a thing."

"Then who—" "As if in answer to the colonel's question, a fat voice floated in at the door. A gong had sounded below, announcing tea. It had drawn Billy Bunter from his lair.

"I say, you fellows!" A fat figure, and a fat face adorned by a large pair of spectacles, loomed in at the doorway.

Billy Bunter blinked at the juniors, at the staring colonel, and at the wreck on the floor.

"I say, you fellows," he said, with a chuckle, "Fishy's things look a bit wrecked. I wonder who did that? He, he, he!"

THE THIRD CHAPTER.

Gulley Or Not Gulley?

"BUNTER!" The Famous Five all spoke at once. They did not need telling. It was Billy Bunter's fat hand that

had done this fell work on the property of Fisher T. Fish.

Colonel Wharton guessed it, too. His frowning glare was fixed on the grinning fat Owl of Greyfriars. Wells gazed at the fat face curiously. The butler had no doubt, either.

"Bunter!" said Colonel Wharton, in a deep voice. "Did you do this?"

"Oh! Are you going to be waxy about it?" asked Bunter, blinking at him through his big spectacles.

"What! I am certainly very angry, if that is what you mean!"

"Then I didn't do it!" said Bunter promptly.

"Good gad!"

"Never came near the room!" said Bunter. "Mind, it serves Fishy right! I'm jolly glad somebody's done it, though I haven't the faintest idea who it was! Look at what he did—"

"Never mind that now—"

"But I do mind!" said Bunter warmly. "That swab Smithy chucked my cigarette-case out of his study window, last day of term. I never found it. That villain Soames has been after me all through the Christmas holidays to get hold of it! Fishy found it, and brought it here—making out that it was to bring it to me, though I told these fellows at the time that he was only trying to stick on for the hols—"

"Never mind that—"

"And then he never gave it to me!" said Bunter. "Made out that it wasn't mine, just because it didn't belong to me—absolutely no other reason at all."

"Good gad!" gasped the colonel.

"Walked off with it!" said Bunter hotly. "He made you believe he was going to hand it over—but think I believed it? No fear! I jolly well knew he was sticking to it. The fact is, Fishy ain't honest. Sticking to a silver cigar-

ette-case what belongs to somebody else—revolting, I call it!"

"Isn't that what you were doing?" yelled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Was it yours, you fat villain?" asked Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"Answer my question, Bunter!" roared Colonel Wharton. "Did you break open this suitcase to search for it, or not?"

"Not!" answered Bunter. "I never knew he'd left it locked up in that bag, any more than anybody else did. I thought he'd walked off with it. I never dreamed that it was in the suitcase, till I saw it there—"

"Then you saw it there, when you broke open the suitcase?"

"Oh, no! I never busted that suitcase!" said Bunter. "I haven't been in this room at all. Never. Serve Fishy jolly well right to have his bag busted, after walking off with my cigarette-case. 'Tis for tat, you know. But I never did it—not if you're going to be shirty about it, I mean!"

"Oh crumbs!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Did you, or did you not, commit this rascally act?" roared Colonel Wharton.

"Certainly not! Wells knows I didn't, don't you, Wells?"

"I am afraid, sir—" murmured Wells.

"Don't you remember I told you?" asked Bunter. "When I came down from here, you know, I mentioned that I hadn't been in Fishy's room, and that if anything had happened I knew nothing about it! Don't you remember that, Wells?"

"Yes, I certainly remember that!" gasped Wells.

"Well, there you are!" said Bunter, blinking at the colonel. "Wells knows, as I said. I never came into this room—I was lying down in my own room, for a rest after my walk, at the time. Besides, why shouldn't I rag Fishy—after he walked off with my silver case? Not that I did, you know!"

"Is that boy in his right senses?" gasped the colonel.

"Oh, really sir!"

"It is clear that Bunter did this damage," said Colonel Wharton. "But if it was a foolish act of retaliation on Fish for having kept the silver case, that alters the matter. You did not break open this suitcase to search it, Bunter?"

"No fear! How was I to know that Fishy parked the cigarette-case in it?" demanded Bunter. "Never thought of looking. I shouldn't have seen it at all if it hadn't dropped out of the socks he had wrapped it in."

"You admit that you did this damage?"

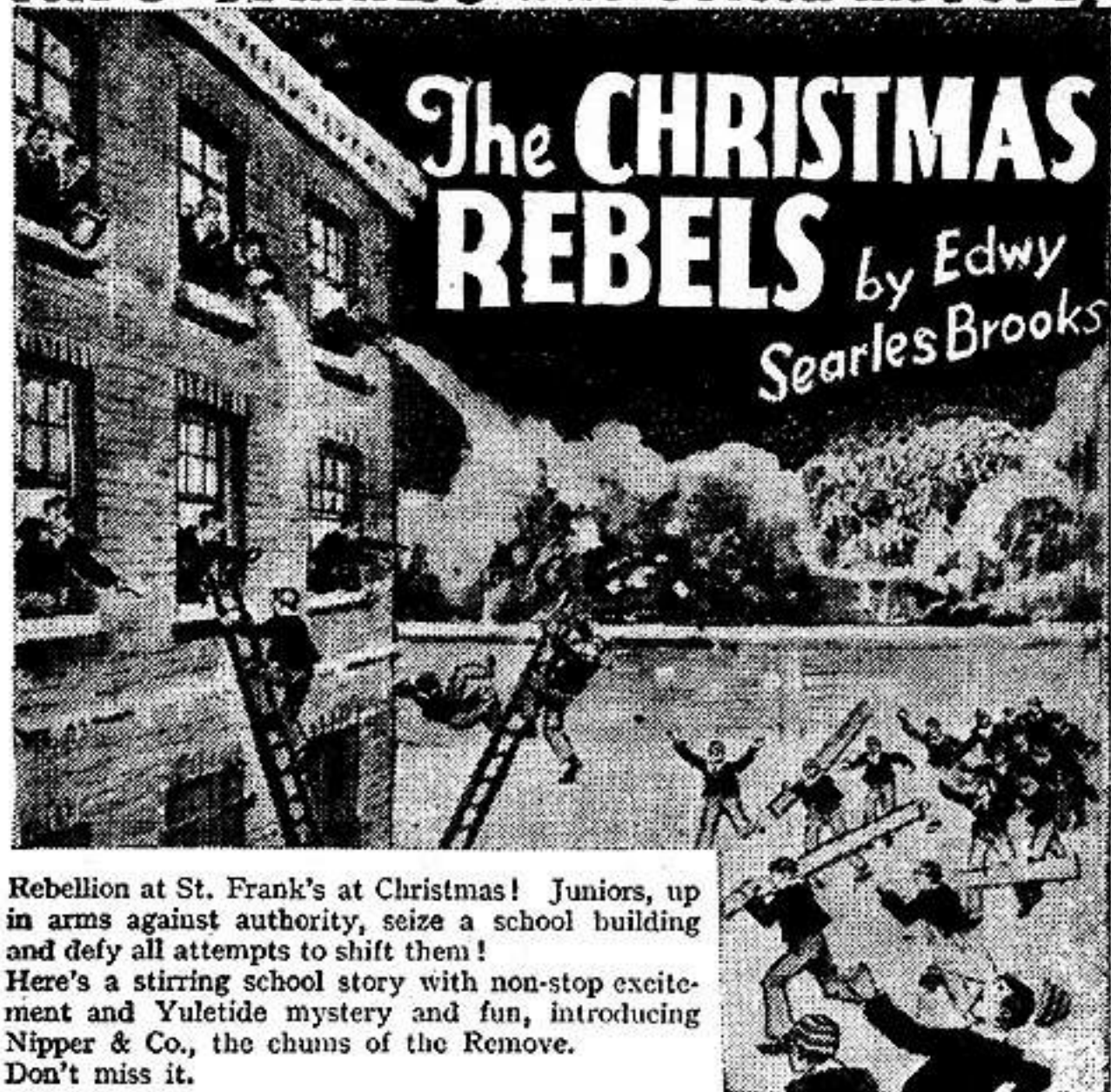
"Oh, no! I can't imagine who did it—unless it was Wells—"

"Grant me patience!" gasped the colonel, while the butler gazed at Bunter as if spellbound. "Bunter, if you broke open this suitcase to search it, you have been guilty of a rascally act, and must leave this house at once. If you damaged it for a thoughtless retaliation on Fish, you have only acted like the utterly stupid boy you are, and it can be overlooked. Now, which was it?"

"Oh! You ain't going to be waxy, if I tell you I did it for a rag on that cad Fishy?" asked Bunter cautiously. "I don't mind admitting that I did it to pay Fishy out for pinching my cigarette-case!"

"And you found the cigarette-case inside unexpectedly, after smashing the case?" asked the colonel, his brow clearing considerably.

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"That's it—dropped out of a pair of socks!" said Bunter. "Made me jump, too! I never dreamed—"

"Wells, you must manage to pack this suitcase together, somehow, with its contents, to travel on the railway!" said Colonel Wharton. "Harry, you must enclose a letter, explaining Bunter's foolish action to Fishy."

Then the old colonel turned to Bunter. "The cigarette-case is now in your hands?" he demanded.

"Oh, no!"

"You have admitted that you found it, when you damaged this suitcase, and turned out its contents," thundered the colonel. "Therefore it must be in your hands now."

"It ain't!" yelled Bunter. "Look, if you like! There!"

Bunter held out two fat paws—both in need of a wash.

Colonel Wharton gazed at them almost dazedly.

"You—you—you utterly stupid boy!" he stuttered. "When I say that it is in your hands, I do not mean actually in your hands, but in your possession."

"Oh!" said Bunter. "You said in my hands! Blessed if I see anything to cackle at, you fellows—you all heard him say in my hands—"

"Is it in your possession?" shrieked the colonel.

"Well," said Bunter, blinking at him cautiously, "as it's my property, till I find that man Thompson, who it belongs to, I'm bound to keep it safe, from—from a sense of duty, sir! You see that?"

"Is it in your hands—I mean in your possession—or not?"

"Not if you want to have it packed up in Fishy's bag!" said Bunter firmly. "Nothing of the kind! But if you admit that it's mine, I don't mind telling you that it's in my inside jacket pocket."

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

The matter was serious, more or less, but really, Billy Bunter was too much for them.

"Good gad!" said Colonel Wharton, staring as if mesmerised at the fat Owl. "I do not envy your Form-master at Greyfriars, Bunter! If you had deliberately broken open Fishy's bag to obtain that article, Bunter, I should certainly order you to replace it! But if it fell into your hands by accident—"

The colonel paused a moment. "It fell into your hands by accident, Bunter?"

"Oh, no!" answered Bunter. "It fell on the floor—"

"What?"

"You see, I was picking up Fishy's socks, and it fell out! It couldn't fall into my hands, because I had the socks in my hands!" explained Bunter. "It fell on the floor just in front of me."

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

"I say, you fellows, I wish you wouldn't keep on cackling!" said Bunter peevishly. "A fellow can't open his mouth without you fellows cackling! I should think anybody could see that it never fell into my hands, when I had the socks in my hands—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Colonel Wharton gave the fat Owl a long, long look, and strode out of the room.

Wells, suppressing a gurgle, stooped to gather up the scattered garments on the floor.

Billy Bunter blinked at the Famous Five.

"I say, you fellows, I'm not going to tell the old bean, or you, either, that I've got that cigarette-case, if there's going to be any fuss about it," he said

anxiously. "I say, do you think your uncle means me to keep it, Wharton?"

"Looks like it!" said Harry, laughing.

"Oh, all right, then!" said Bunter, satisfied. "I've got it in my pocket, then! I say, you fellows, fancy Fishy's face when he gets that suitcase at the school and looks in it for my cigarette-case? What? He, he, he!"

The Famous Five chuckled. How much right Billy Bunter had to that mysterious, silver cigarette-case might be a doubtful point, but it was absolutely certain that Fisher T. Fish had no right to it! It was quite entertaining to think of Fishy's face when he unpacked that suitcase.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER.

Fierce For Fishy!

FISHER T. FISH of the Greyfriars Remove jerked his bony head in at the doorway of Gosling's lodge.

It was the following day, the day that Fisher T. Fish expected the arrival of his suitcase, left behind him at Wharton Lodge, and sent after him to the school.

Six or seven times during the afternoon had Fishy looked in on Gosling, the ancient porter, to inquire whether it had "arrove."

Fishy was very anxious for the safe arrival of that suitcase! It was not, in itself, of much value, neither were its contents—with the exception of the mysterious cigarette-case, which had a mysterious value for the man who had been seeking it so long.

What that value was, Fishy did not know, though he suspected that it had something to do with the Greek letters scratched on the metal inside. There was, at all events, nothing else about it to distinguish it from a hundred other such cigarette-cases.

But though Fishy did not know, he did not care very much. That it had a value was enough for Fishy to know or care about.

Neither did it worry Fishy very much that the man who was in search of it—James Soames—was, according to the Famous Five, a crook.

Fishy did not know, or choose to know, that Soames was a crook. All Fishy knew, or chose to know, was that James Soames wanted that silver cigarette-case, and was prepared to pay over the handsome sum of twenty pounds to obtain possession of it.

As its intrinsic value was not more than a pound, or thirty shillings at the most, that was good business, for Fishy.

True, that cigarette-case was not his to sell. But neither was it Bunter's. It really seemed to have no owner.

Bunter's tale was that it had been handed to him in Friardale Lane, by a man he had never seen before or since, to be taken to a man named Thompson, at Pegg, whom the fat Owl had failed to find.

It seemed much more probable, to Fisher T. Fish, that Bunter had picked it up somewhere and "froze" on to it.

That, at all events, was what Fishy himself had done!

It had been lost in the snow in the school quadrangle, and Fishy had found it! He had taken it to Wharton Lodge, chiefly as an excuse for barging in there, to get away from the deserted school for a time. But there he had learned of its strange and mysterious value—which had quite changed Fishy's plans.

Fisher T. Fish was always on the make! If a "guy" was prepared to

give twenty pounds for that cheap silver case, Fishy was not the man to say "nope" to such an offer! All Fishy was anxious about was to see that cigarette-case again, and put the trade through.

"Say, big boy, has it come?" asked Fishy, as he inserted a bony head and a pair of bony shoulders into Gosling's lodge.

William Gosling grunted. He was tired of seeing that bony, sharp face haunting his lodge. He had seen altogether too much of Fisher T. Fish.

There was a drawback to the school holidays, from Gosling's point of view. The boys were away, which, of course, was so much to the good! But Fisher T. Fish, whose home was in New York, stayed at Greyfriars over the hols. It was a fly in the ointment—a bony and disagreeable fly!

Gosling was quite glad to be able to tell Fishy, at last, that what he expected had been delivered by the carrier from Courtfield! It meant a rest from Fishy's sharp face and sharp voice.

"It's 'ere, Master Fish," grunted Gosling, "and wot I says is this 'ere—you take that there parcel away, and don't you keep on a-opening and a-shutting of a man's door."

"Parcel!" repeated Fisher T. Fish. "It's sure a sootcase I'm expecting! They sure ain't wrapped up a sootcase in a parcel!"

"That there parcel is all there is for you, Master Fish," answered Gosling, pointing to it, "and the sooner you take it away, the better I'll be pleased! Opening and shutting of a man's door, in these 'ere draughts—"

"Aw, can it!" said Fisher T. Fish.

He picked up the parcel and jerked out of the lodge with it.

Thankfully, Gosling shut the door after him. Gosling had not a happy nature, and was not wont to look on the bright side of things. But a pleased expression came over his gnarled face as he shut his door after Fishy. It was always a pleasure to see the last of Fisher Tarleton Fish.

Fishy jerked away to the House with his parcel in his hand. He was quite puzzled to see it carefully wrapped up and corded. That was not the usual way of dispatching a suitcase.

However, he had no doubt that it was the goods, puzzling as it was, and he was very keen to get it into his study and unpack it.

He bumped it down on the table in Study No. 14 in the Remove, and cut the cord which was so carefully tied round it. He unwrapped the wrappings.

Then the suitcase was revealed. "Gee-whiz!" gasped Fisher T. Fish as he saw it.

His narrow, sharp eyes fairly popped at it. That suitcase was almost falling to pieces. Only the wrapping and the cording had prevented it from doing so, in its transit by the railway.

Uncorded and unwrapped, it sprawled open in several places, and its contents exuded from gaps, and slits, and gashes.

"Wake snakes!" howled Fisher T. Fish. "I'll ask a man what them guys have been doing to my sootcase!"

Tied on the handle was an envelope, addressed to Fishy in Harry Wharton's handwriting. Astonished and angry, Fishy grabbed it and tore it open. He glared at the letter within.

"Wharton Lodge.

"Surrey.

"Dear Fishy—Sorry your suitcase is in such a state, but you seem to have asked for it, when you took that cigarette-case from Bunter. That

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benighted Owl smashed it up, as a Roland for an Oliver. We've packed it together as well as possible, and all your things are in it—some of them damaged, I'm afraid. Sorry—it's Bunter's idea of tit for tat, and you asked for it, you know.—H. WHARTON.

"Carry me home to die!" breathed Fisher T. Fish.

He gazed at his wrecked suitcase in deep anxiety. The damage was bad enough. It reduced the value, which was bitter to Fishy. But his chief concern was for the silver case he had hidden within.

Was it still there?

That the Famous Five would guess that the cigarette-case was inside the bag, he knew was very likely. But he knew, too, that they would never think of forcing the lock to ascertain, and that Colonel Wharton would allow no such thing, if they had thought of it.

On that point Fisher T. Fish had felt quite safe.

He had not calculated on an exasperated Owl taking vengeance by ragging his property! Cute and smart and spry as he was, Fisher T. Fish really could not have guessed that, or calculated on it.

But that was what had happened!

Wharton's letter of explanation made no reference to the cigarette-case! Had Bunter found it, or was it still there?

Fishy began to search.

He had hidden it inside a folded pair of socks, he remembered. He sorted out every sock in that bag, and examined it thoroughly. Not a sock in the lot contained anything, excepting darns.

Fisher T. Fish breathed hard through his long sharp nose.

With hope growing fainter and fainter, he turned all the contents out of the wrecked suitcase, and searched and searched and searched.

Nothing like a cigarette-case came to light.

Fishy had to abandon hope at last! The silver case was not there! Bunter must have found it when he smashed the suitcase. It had gone back to Bunter—and the prospect of receiving twenty pounds for it was gone from Fisher T. Fish's gaze like a beautiful dream!

"Aw, search me!" groaned Fisher T. Fish. "This is fierce! I'll tell a man, this is sure fierce!"

It was undoubtedly fierce. All that Fisher T. Fish had to show, after all his cunning and unscrupulous artfulness, was a wrecked suitcase—there was no profit to go down in the account, only loss—dead loss!

Fisher T. Fish groaned—and groaned—and groaned again! There was no profit to show—no prospect of profit—his sharpness, his spryness, his cuteness, had only "set him back"—and the business man of Greyfriars groaned in anguish of spirit!

THE FIFTH CHAPTER.

Futile Friendship!

"**B**OB, old chap!" Billy Bunter's voice was affectionate in its tones—indeed honeyed.

Judging by the amount of affection Bunter managed to squeeze into that remark, Bob Cherry was the fellow he liked best in the wide world.

While he thus breathed affectionate regard, Bunter beamed also, with an affectionate grin.

Bob Cherry grinned also.

Without being a suspicious fellow, he

could not help suspecting that there was reason for Bunter's sudden affection, apart from any discovery Bunter might have made of what a nice fellow he was!

"Go it, old fat bean!" he said.

They were in the hall at Wharton Lodge. Bunter had been dozing in an armchair after tea, while the Famous Five sat round and discussed arrangements for the remainder of the holidays.

Bunter had, perhaps, dozed with one ear open—perhaps both! When the Co. moved away he woke up suddenly and addressed Bob, in that affectionate way.

"I always liked you, old chap!" said Bunter.

"You're pretty smart at concealing your feelings, ain't you?" said Bob. "I never guessed that one."

"I mean to say, I don't really think you're a clumsy ass, and a barging hippopotamus, and all that!" declared Bunter. "I may have said so—"

"You have," agreed Bob. "Often I've kicked you for it sometimes!"

"What I really meant was—don't walk away while a fellow's talking, old chap! It was only my little joke, if I said anything of the kind," explained Bunter. "When you pulled that cushion away yesterday, I didn't really think you were a silly fathead! I really enjoyed the joke!"

"Good! Like another of the same?" asked Bob, stretching out a hand to the cushion on which Bunter's fat head rested.

"Oh, no! Leave that cushion alone, you idiot! I—I mean, dear old chap—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"To tell the truth—" went on Bunter.

Bob Cherry jumped.

"You're going to tell the truth?" he ejaculated. "Help!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"New Year resolution?" asked Bob. "Good for you, old fat bean—but do you really think you can do it? Of course, you never know what you can do till you try—but you've never tried before—"

"You silly chump!" hooted Bunter. "I—I—I mean, I don't mind your little jokes, old chap! I—I enjoy them! He, he, he! As I was saying, to tell the truth, I want to see as much as possible of you these hols. I hate the idea of losing sight of you. We're pals, ain't we?"

"Are we?" asked Bob.

"Yes, old fellow—and jolly good pals!" asserted Bunter. "I may have called you names, in my joking way, but what I really meant was that I never saw a chap I liked better! We don't see a lot of one another at school—a fellow with a host of friends, like me, can't be as pally as he would like—but in the hols, my idea is to see a lot of one another! What?"

"I'm afraid I can't see much of you, Bunter!" said Bob regretfully. "But if you had a wash—"

"What?"

"I should be able to see more of you then!" said Bob affably.

Billy Bunter gazed at him through his big spectacles, and breathed hard. But he restrained the remarks that leaped to his lips. It was no time for telling Bob Cherry what he really thought of him!

"He, he, he!" cackled Bunter feebly.

"Shut off that alarm-clock!" said Bob. "What the dickens are you carrying an alarm-clock about with you for?"

"You silly chump—I mean, look here, old chap, my idea is this! Let's stick together till the end of the hols, what? Being such pals, I think it's a jolly good

idea. Mind, I never heard what you fellows were talking about just now!" added Bunter astutely.

"No," grinned Bob.

"Not a word," said Bunter, blinking at him. "I was fast asleep when you were talking about going on to Cherry Place from here."

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared Bob.

"Blessed if I can see anything to cackle at! It's really not good form to cackle like that when a fellow's talking about a serious subject like a tried and true friendship!" said Bunter reproachfully. "But if the party shifts over to your place, old chap—not that I know anything about it, you know—but if it does, I don't mind coming."

"I do!" said Bob.

"I can stand your pater all right—don't you worry about that!" said Bunter reassuringly. "He may be a bit of an old rhinoceros—"

"What?"

"But I don't expect too much! I can stand him."

"You have the advantage of him there," said Bob. "He can't stand you!"

Billy Bunter decided not to hear that remark! Bob was putting his new-found friendship to rather a severe strain; but Bunter was a stickler.

"The fact is, I want to see him rather specially," he said. "I want to hear some of his War stories. I don't think he's a fearful old bore—not at all, Bob."

"If you do," said Bob, "you'd better not mention it to me! Not unless you want to be burst all over Wharton Lodge, you fat frump!"

"I'll come," said Bunter. "I've got a letter from Mauly in my pocket, asking me to Mauleverer Towers; but I shall say no."

"Let's see old Mauly's letter—jolly glad to hear news of old Mauly—"

"Here it is—no, I must have left it in my coat pocket! Smithy wrote, too—he would like me to join him on the Continent! But I'm not going, Bob."

"I shouldn't!" agreed Bob. "Guard with your left, if you do!"

"And Toddy!" went on Bunter, unheeding. "Peter Todd wants me to give him a few days! I can't! I wouldn't be found dead in Bloomsbury."

"You might be—if you butted in on Toddy!"

"So you can rely on me, old fellow!" said Bunter. "What time are you starting to-morrow?"

"When we leave here."

"Well, what time are you leaving here?"

"When we start."

"You silly idiot!" yelled Bunter. "I—I—I mean, do be serious, old chap! I don't want to get up late, if you're starting early."

"The later the better, old fat bean!"

"If you mean that you don't want me to come to Cherry Place, Bob Cherry—"

"What a brain!" said Bob admiringly. "Guessed it in one!"

"Beast!"

Bob Cherry chuckled, and rejoined his friends, leaving Billy Bunter frowning over his spectacles.

Now that the party at Wharton Lodge was breaking up, the fat Owl looked like being at a loose end again.

The Co. were all going with Bob to Cherry Place, in Dorsetshire. So was Bunter—if he could manage it.

But it looked as if Bob was not taking any. Perhaps he had had enough of Bunter's fascinating society at Wharton Lodge. Perhaps he had, indeed, had a little too much of it!

Billy Bunter had some thinking to do that evening.



"Wells," said Billy Bunter, giving the butler of Wharton Lodge a glare, "I usually tip the butler a fiver when I leave after a stay." "Indeed, sir!" murmured Wells. "Now I shan't!" said Bunter, crushingly.

Bob seemed to have no special use for his devoted friendship. But there were other ways and means.

"I say, you fellows," said the fat Owl, after supper, "better get to bed early, as you're travelling to-morrow! I'm sorry I shan't be able to come down to Dorset with you. But I'll tell you what: I'll see you off at the station before I take my train. What time—"

The Famous Five smiled.

"Too early for you, Bunter!" said Harry Wharton, shaking his head.

"I never was a slacker," said Bunter. "The fact is, I like turning out early. Up with the lark, you know, merry and bright!"

"Oh crikey!"

"I'd rather turn out at nine than miss seeing you off!" declared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I would, really! Dash it all, half-past eight, if you like!"

"What about six?" grinned Bob.

"Six!" gasped Bunter. "Six in the morning!" He blinked at the juniors in horror. "Did you say six?"

"S-I-X—six!" said Bob. "Think you could turn out at six?"

"Oh dear! I—I mean, yes! I'll do it," said Bunter heroically—"just for the pleasure of seeing you off, old chap!"

"Only just to see us off?"

"Just that!" said Bunter. "I'm not thinking of butting into the same train or anything of that kind, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Do stop cackling! I'll start at six, and—"

"Then we'll start at five!" said Bob.

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "I—I—I mean, all right, old chap! Rely on me to turn out at five!"

"You fellows like to start at four?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter gave Bob a withering blink and rolled off to bed, leaving the Famous Five chuckling.

But though he went up to his room, Bunter did not turn into bed. Bunter knew a trick worth two of that!

Once in bed and asleep, Billy Bunter knew only too well that he was not likely to wake at five, six, eight, or nine unless he was called—and he knew that it was still less likely that he would be called.

So he decided to snooze in an armchair before the fire.

This was a jolly good idea when a fellow had to turn out awfully early. He would be able to turn out ready dressed, and it saved all the trouble of washing! And, of course, a fellow sitting up in that way would sleep more lightly than in bed, and was sure to hear the sounds of fellows turning out and baggage being carried downstairs, and all that.

So Bunter piled logs on the fire, wrapped a blanket round him, and settled down in the armchair—to sleep lightly, with one ear open, as it were.

He slept—and he snored.

Probably, however, he did not sleep so lightly as he had calculated upon; for though he stirred and shifted and grunted a good many times, his eyes did not open. Sounds—if sounds were made—did not reach Bunter's ears. It was, after all, improbable that Bunter would see the travellers off at the station—and step into the same train.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER.

Fiercer For Fishy!

SOAMES stepped from the car at the gate of Greyfriars School in the falling dusk of the January evening.

The smooth, sleek face of the man who had been Mr. Vernon-Smith's valet, who had been a freebooter and a kidnapper

and many other things, wore a satisfied expression.

James Soames, at long last, was on the verge of success—at all events, he had no doubt that he was.

It had been a baffling quest. But it had, as he believed, come to an end, and the silver cigarette-case awaited him now. Fisher T. Fish, the keen and unscrupulous business man of Greyfriars, had it all ready to hand over to him—for a consideration.

It was a month since his confederate, Rat Hankey, had held-up the post office at Lantham, ten miles from Greyfriars, and, having been spilled from his motor-bike as he fled after the raid, had fallen into the hands of the police.

The officers of the law had Rat Hankey safe and sound, but they had never found the twelve hundred pounds in banknotes and currency notes that the Rat had carried off from Lantham.

They knew that the Rat had got rid of the loot in his flight. They probably knew that all he told them on the subject was specially designed to keep them from ever locating it.

But Soames knew that there was a clue. The Rat had scratched that clue in the silver cigarette-case in Greek letters with his penknife as he sat on the stile in Friardale Lane with an injured leg—unable to escape, but able to leave a clue for his confederate to snaffle the hidden loot.

Had that cigarette-case reached Soames where he waited, all would have been clear. But it had never reached him. Ever since he had been on the hunt for it, and again and again it had escaped his clutches.

Somewhere—not far away—the loot from Lantham was hidden. The Greek letters in the cigarette-case told where. All James Soames needed was a glance inside that silver case.

And Fisher T. Fish had found it
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where it had been lost in the snow in the Greyfriars quad. He had most unscrupulously kept it, and he was willing to part with it for the sum of twenty pounds. It was "all clear" now.

Soames stepped from the car on the snowy road and glanced round him. He expected to see the American junior at the gate. In the dimness of the falling dusk he made out a bony figure in coat and cap.

He gave Fishy a nod.

Fisher T. Fish gave him a lugubrious look in return.

Fishy was not feeling happy. His bright anticipations had all vanished. Indeed, he would not have kept the appointment with Soames at all, having nothing to hand over to him, but for the fact that it was unavoidable. Had he not turned up, Soames certainly would have run him down, believing that he had that mysterious cigarette-case in his keeping.

"I am glad to see you again, Master Fish," said Soames in his smooth voice. "You have the goods?"

"Nope!" mumbled Fishy.

Soames' steely eyes glinted at him.

"Take care, my young friend!" he said quietly. "If you have any idea of double-crossing me, I warn you to forget it immediately! I'm not a man to be trifled with!"

"I guess I ain't got it."

The sea-lawyer and crook compressed his lips. He did not believe that statement. He knew, from Fishy's dealings with him, that Fishy was an unscrupulous young rascal, and he was more than ready for attempted trickery.

"I have warned you!" he said in a low, venomous voice. "You told me that the article was left locked in your suitcase at Wharton Lodge, and that the suitcase would be sent after you. Has it not arrived?"

"Yep! But—"

"Do you doubt my good faith?" said Soames, with a sneer. "I have the twenty pounds ready for you. I am willing to step into the school and place the money in your hands before I touch the silver case—so long as I see it. You shall take every care that I do not break faith with you."

"I guess I was going to," answered Fisher T. Fish. "And I reckon I was keen enough on a trade. I found the goods, and there ain't no owner that I know of, and I sure guess I'd be glad to touch the spondulics. But—"

"Where is the cigarette-case?"

"That fat, pie-faced clam Bunter has got it!" said Fishy bitterly. "He got it before my suitcase was put on the railroad!"

"That is not true!" said Soames, between his teeth. "Colonel Wharton would never have allowed your bag to be forced—even if the boys would have done such a thing, which I do not believe for one moment."

"It wasn't like that!" grunted Fisher T. Fish. "That fat clam had his ears up because I froze on to that pesky cigarette-case, and he smashed up my bag to pay me out. He must have found it, because it wasn't in the bag when it got here."

Soames looked at him long and hard. If this was true, the silver case was in Bunter's fat hands once more, and once more he had to take up the trail at Wharton Lodge.

But was it true?

For a long minute he stood staring hard at Fisher T. Fish. Then he acted—suddenly. He grabbed the American junior by the collar, and, with a single swing of his arm, tossed him headlong into the car.

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Fisher T. Fish sprawled there, gasping and spluttering.

Another moment, and Soames was at the wheel, and the car was running down the Courtfield road.

Fisher T. Fish sat up dizzily.

He spluttered for breath and goggled at the dim, bent figure of the man in the driving seat. The car put on speed, racing along the dim Courtfield road over the common.

"Say!" spluttered Fisher T. Fish.

Soames did not answer or heed. The car was going too fast for Fishy to dream of jumping out; he tottered to a seat and slumped down there.

From the high-road Soames turned the car into a country lane. It ran on and on through the thickening winter dusk, miles from the school. Finally, the crook turned it from the lane into a cart-track across a misty field.

There at last he halted and stepped down.

"Get out!" he said in a low voice full of menace.

Fisher T. Fish, with his bony knees knocking together, got out.

He was scared almost out of his sharp transatlantic wits. Fishy had not chosen to believe that the man in search of the cigarette-case was a crook, though the Famous Five had told him so; but he could hardly doubt it now. He knew only too well that he was in the hands of a desperate and ruthless man.

"Say, big boy—" he spluttered.

"Now, you young scoundrel," said Soames, between his teeth, "I have you where I can deal with you. I read your character, you young rascal, in your face when I first saw you, and I was quite on my guard against trickery. I should have kept faith with you, but you do not choose to keep faith with me. Where is that silver case at this moment?"

"I guess I've put you wise," stammered Fisher T. Fish, through his chattering teeth. "Aw, wake snakes! I wish I'd never found it. I wish—"

Soames pointed to a half-frozen pond that glimmered under the willows by the cart-track; his eyes glittered at the hapless business-man of the Remove.

"Take care!" he hissed.

"Gee-whiz!" groaned Fisher T. Fish. "I'm telling you! I guess I was honing to trade that pesky cigarette-case with you! Surest thing you know!"

"You double-crossing young rascal, tell me the truth! Have you parted with it—to the police?"

Soames' voice was keen with anxiety. The silver case had passed through many hands, its secret unread; but, once in official hands, he knew that the secret would remain no secret.

"Nope!" gasped Fishy.

"Where is it, then?"

"That pie-faced gink Bunter—"

Fisher T. Fish broke off with a howl of terror as the crook grasped him and jerked him to the edge of the glimmering pond.

"The truth!" snarled Soames.

"I'm telling you!" shrieked Fisher T. Fish in dire terror. "Aw, carry me home to die! You sure can mosey in at the school if you like and see my sootcase all broke up, jest as that fat clam left it! I got the letter from Wharton in my pocket telling me what he did. Say, you let up on a galoot!"

"A letter! What letter! Show it to me!"

Fisher T. Fish was deeply thankful that he had Wharton's letter in his pocket. Obviously the crook was not going to take his word. He groped for it and jerked it out.

Soames glared at it in the light of the car.

He gritted his teeth with rage.

"Fool!" he snarled.

"I—I guess I never reckoned on that fat guy smashing my sootcase!" gasped Fisher T. Fish. "You could have knocked me down with a coke hammer when I unpacked it and saw it! I'm telling you—"

"Fool!"

Soames was convinced at last. He stepped into the car and backed it to turn, taking no further heed of the wretched Fishy.

"Say, you ain't leaving me yere!" gasped Fisher T. Fish.

Soames did not answer; he drove away in the winter dusk, leaving Fisher T. Fish standing by the pond, his bony knees knocking together, his teeth chattering, and his feelings inexpressible in any language.

The rear light winked red in the distance and disappeared.

Fisher T. Fish was left alone—with a walk of four or five miles back to the school.

Fishy set out on that walk; and if ever an unscrupulous young rascal repented of his unscrupulousness, Fisher T. Fish did as he tramped and tramped and tramped and arrived at last at the school gates with his bony legs almost dropping off!

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER.

Speeding The Parting Guest!

BILLY BUNTER yawned and awoke.

He awoke early—for Bunter in holiday-time; it was only nine o'clock.

He sat up, blinked, rubbed his eyes; and blinked again and shivered.

The fire had gone out—and it was cold.

Wintry sunlight glimmered through the blinds.

Bunter blinked at his watch. Now that he was awake he was rather anxious to see whether it was six o'clock yet.

But his watch did not enlighten him; he had forgotten to wind it.

He rolled out of the armchair and rolled across to the door at once; he opened that door and blinked into the passage.

Then he rolled along to the landing and blinked down into the hall; there he had a view of the top of the butler's head.

"Wells!" squeaked Bunter.

Wells looked up; there was a faint smile on his suave face.

"Yes, sir? Good-morning, sir!"

"What's the time, Wells?"

"One minute past nine, sir."

"Nine? Oh crikey! Have those beasts gone?"

"Those what, sir?"

"Those rotters!" roared Bunter.

"I am unacquainted, sir, with any beasts or rotters," answered Wells from below politely. "Perhaps you would be a little more specific, sir?"

"Beast!" hooted Bunter.

"Oh, thank you, sir! Is there anything else?"

"Where's Wharton and the others?" roared Bunter.

"At the present moment, sir, I have no doubt that they are in the train," said Wells. "They can hardly have arrived in Dorsetshire already—"

"Have they gone?" shrieked Bunter.

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Have they been gone long?"

"About two hours, sir."

"Oh crikey!"

"Master Harry left a message for you, sir," said Wells, gazing up calmly at the infuriated fat face over the banisters. "If you would care to hear it now, sir—"

"Oh, he left a message for me to follow on—"

"Hem! No, sir."

"Then what message did the silly idiot leave?" yapped Bunter.

"Master Harry requested me to tell you, sir, as you were not awake when he left the house, that he hopes you will enjoy the remainder of the vacation, sir, with the house party at Bunter Court—of which, I understand, you have told him—"

"What?"

"And he desires, sir, that you will give his best respects to the princes and dukes—"

"The—the what?"

"The princes and dukes, sir," said Wells, without moving a muscle. "I gathered from Master Harry, sir, that a large number of these distinguished

"Oh, Bunter!" he said. "Good-bye, Bunter! I shall not see you again. Good-bye, my boy!"

And the colonel went out to his car.

Billy Bunter breathed hard.

There was a cough at his fat elbow.

"I have rung up your taxi, sir," murmured Wells.

"Beast!"

"It will be here in about twenty minutes, sir."

"Oh, shut up!"

Wells shut up and glided away.

Billy Bunter blinked out into the cold and frosty morning till the taxi came grinding up the drive. He had no packing to do; nothing to carry off, except the silver cigarette-case in his inside pocket.

There was another cough at his fat elbow, and he blinked round again. Wells was holding his overcoat for him.

Billy Bunter gave the butler of Wharton Lodge a glare. Really, Wells seemed quite industrious in speeding the parting guest.

"Now I shan't!" said Bunter, crushingly.

"Quite so, sir," said Wells.

Bunter rolled off to the taxi. He hoped that that cheeky beast, Wells, was feeling fearfully disappointed about the fiver he might have received had that distinguished guest been better pleased with him.

Wells probably wasn't! It was probable that he knew exactly how many fivers Bunter had!

So far from looking disappointed, Wells looked pleased as he shut the door. He seemed to derive pleasure from shutting the door after Bunter.

The fat Owl sat in the taxi and rolled away to Wimford. There would have been certain difficulties about tipping Wells a fiver had Bunter been ever so pleased with him. Bunter's cash resources being limited to half-a-crown, which he had borrowed from Harry Wharton, and which was hardly more than enough to see him home on the railway.

HARRY WHARTON: "My New Year's Resolution is to play Toddy at centre-half in every match, and also to hand over the Form captaincy to Toddy, who is much the better man." (See he!—H. W.)

BOB CHERRY: "I resolve to buy an iron file and a rusty nail, and to rub these together instead of whistling, as it will be a much more musical sound." (If I buy an iron file, I shall rub a cheeky chump's outsized nose on it, and do us both good.—R. C.)

H. J. R. SINGH: "The resolvefulness will be to speak the English lingo even betterfully than ever, and not to quotefully repeat any English proverbs, for the early birdfulness makes the most sound."

H. VERNON-SMITH: "I resolve to use my unlimited pocket-money to brighten the lives of poor villagers like Joey Banks, Bill Lodgey, Soapy Smith, and Charlie Cobb, bless them!"

W. G. B.: "In such a perfick karachter, Noo Yeer's Resolushuns are a farse. Nevertheless, I have a few defex—yes, even me, you kno. So I resolve never to tell a li if the trooth sounds better, never to take a meen advantage of my strength, curridge, handsome feechers, and

people are in the New Year house party at Bunter Court—"

"You cheeky idiot!"

"And Master Harry sent them his best respects, sir. He also instructed me to ring up a taxi to take you to the station, and to pay the taxi-driver if by any chance you had left your bank-notes at Bunter Court, sir."

Wells' face was expressionless as he delivered that message.

Bunter gave that expressionless face a devastating blink.

"Beast!" he snorted.

"Thank you, sir."

Bunter rolled down in great wrath. The beasts were gone—and Bunter, evidently, was expected to go also.

He proceeded to surround a large breakfast, frowning over the foodstuffs as he packed them away.

It was Bunter Court, after all, for Bunter; and he was not feeling in the least anxious to see that palatial abode, or the princes, or the dukes!

After breakfast he rolled into the hall.

Colonel Wharton was there, just going out. He glanced round at the fat Owl.

DIARY DIPS

As an Xmas and New Year gift, every fellow in the school received a small Greyfriars Pocket Diary, with the school arms stamped on the cover. Here PETER TODD forecasts some of the entries for January 1st

athletick prowess, and never to look down on my skoolfellows becos they are not in the same klass soshially. Abuv all, I prommis to tell the whole trooth about my postle-order witch is, that it is bound to come by the neckst post."

FISHER T. FISH: "I calculate I've gotta resolution this year. I resolute always to give a kind word to any guy with dollars in his rags. Kind words cost nix, but it kinda hurts to waste 'em on bankrupt boxoes, so no Bunters need apply."

HORACE JAMES COKER: "It is my intenshun this yeer to Open Eyes. I shall open Prout's eyes. It is hi time he realised that he

hannot treat me as a meer ordinary fello like Potter or Greene. If he dares to object to my spelling or Jeoggraffy or Latin, I shall wither him with a glarnce. I shall open Wingate's eyes. I'll sho him I'm the best footbawler in the skool, bar nun. He tries to keep me out, but I'll make him alter his tacketix."

TOM DUTTON: "I resolve to boot the next silly ass who comes into my study and talks about mutton!"

HENRY SAMUEL QUELCH: "I shall try, as heretofore, to teach my Form by gentle persuasion rather than violence. Which reminds me—I must order a dosen new canes this term."

LODER, Sixth-Form: "I will endeavour to be more generous to everyone, and will start by giving fags 200 lines instead of 100 and six whops instead of a couple."

MRS. MIMBLE of the tuckshop: "I resolve to give the young gentlemen of the Remove unlimited tick during the coming term." (This is written more in hope than expectancy.)

PETER TODD: "I resolve to make a man of Bunter, or die in the attempt." (Wreaths should be addressed c/o The Editor.)

"Your coat, sir!" murmured Wells.

Bunter, with deep feelings, crammed himself into his coat.

"Your hat, sir."

Bunter put on his hat.

"Your gloves, sir."

Bunter put on his gloves.

"Pleasant journey, sir," said Wells. His hand hovered over the door, preparatory to shutting it after Bunter.

Billy Bunter breathed hard. He breathed deep. He gave Wells a look that ought to have pulverised him.

Quite unpulverised, however, Wells waited respectfully for Bunter to roll out to the waiting taxi.

Bunter rolled out. Then he turned back.

"Wells!" he said, with dignity.

"Sir," said Wells, his hand on the door. Really, it almost looked as if Wells was prepared to shut that door on Bunter's little fat nose if Bunter inserted that little fat nose into the doorway again.

"I generally tip the butler a fiver when I leave after a stay," said Bunter. "Indeed, sir."

The taxi, fortunately—for the driver, at least—was paid! It shot away on the Wimford road and arrived at the station.

Billy Bunter rolled into the railway station. His train home was just due. Bunter did not hurry for it.

Bunter was thinking.

Those beasts had gone off without him. Had he seen them off he might have stepped into the same train, and at the other end, whatever they thought about the matter, there he would have been, at all events.

But even Bunter realised that it was a risky matter to take a later train for the same destination. For one thing, his half-crown would have seen him home to Bunter Villa, but it would not have seen him a very long way on the rather long trip to Dorsetshire. Bunter did not object, on principle, to bilking the railway company—but unpleasant objections were liable to be raised by the officers of the railway.

He stood by the ticket office—thinking. His way home lay eastward. But
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Westward-ho was Bunter's motto! The question was whether to risk it?

The fat Owl had not made up his fat mind, and was standing by the ticket office in uncertain cogitation when a man in a thick overcoat, with a pulled-up collar, came into the station vestibule and crossed to a telephone cabinet.

Bunter had a glimpse of his profile as he passed.

His fat heart stood still.

The man did not glance towards him. Obviously, he had no idea or suspicion that Bunter was in the station, and was not looking for him. Soames had simply stepped in to use the telephone.

Bunter stood frozen for a moment.

Then he woke to activity. It was Soames—and Soames had not seen him—and was not going to see him. Bunter's mind was made up now. That momentary glimpse of Soames had made it up.

Hurriedly, he took a ticket for a station as far up the westward line as his half-crown would cover. He fairly scuttled on to the platform. He had ten minutes to wait for a train, and every one of those minutes seemed like an hour to him—if not like a day. But the train came in at last, and Bunter bundled into it.

Soames was after him again. He had not, as the fat Owl had confidently expected, stuck to the trail of Fisher T. Fish. Soames knew his home address! Soames was back in Surrey—after him!

Billy Bunter hardly breathed till the train was rolling out of the station, bearing him swiftly away to the west.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER.

Where Is Bunter?

WELLS lifted the receiver.

He did not know the voice that came through. He had heard the voice before, but then it had been sleek and smooth. Now it was husky, and did not sound at all like the same voice.

"This is Wharton Lodge," answered Wells. "The butler speaking."

"Please ask Master Bunter to come to the telephone. His uncle speaking, from his home," said James Soames, from Wimford railway station.

"I regret, sir, that Master Bunter has left this morning."

"Left—this morning!"

"Yes, sir."

The sleek-faced man at Wimford railway station breathed hard. This was an unexpected check.

But he went on, in his carefully disguised voice:

"Dear me! I am sorry to have missed him. Is he on his way home now?"

"I regret, sir, that I can give you no information," answered Wells, suavely and politely. "Since certain occurrences here, the master has instructed me to give no information over the telephone."

"Come, come! You can tell me whether my nephew is on his way home or not!" said Soames.

"I regret, sir, the master's instructions—" said Wells apologetically, but firmly. "Letters, sir, will be sent on—"

"Very well."

Soames rang off.

Wells put up the receiver at Wharton Lodge. He had no idea who was at the other end, but the colonel's instructions were strict, and it was his duty to carry them out. Bunter had gone home—at all events, Wells believed that he had—and his "uncle" who was telephoning from his home would not have to wait long to see him. But if by

chance the caller was the man who had been so keen to get on Bunter's track, he was not going to receive any help from Wharton Lodge.

Soames set his lips hard as he left the telephone. He was angry and disappointed.

Now that he knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that that cigarette-case was in Bunter's fat hands, the crook had decided on a new tack.

He had not succeeded in getting that silver case away from Bunter for the simple reason that it had not been, as he had believed, in the fat schoolboy's possession. But it was in his possession now.

That was a certainty.

He would not part with it if he could help it, and Soames' desperate attempts at Wharton Lodge had put the whole household on its guard, and made it difficult and dangerous to carry on with such methods.

But it seemed to him probable that Bunter, now that he actually had the cigarette-case, would be as willing as Fisher T. Fish to part with it—for a consideration.

True, it was not Bunter's to part with, and the fat junior was by no means so unscrupulous as Fisher T. Fish. Still, he was far from scrupulous, and Soames knew that he was hard-up. It was quite on the cards that he might be willing, like Fishy, to make it a "trade."

It was worth trying on, at all events, and Soames had resolved to try it on.

A talk to Bunter on the telephone would settle the matter one way or the other. The fat junior was not likely to come to the telephone if he knew that Soames was at the other end, but he would come to answer a call from his "uncle." Then—Soames hoped, at least—the offer of a "tenner" might work the oracle!

Possibly, it might have—had Bunter been still at Wharton Lodge. But Bunter was gone—and the butler declined to say where.

Whether he had gone home, or whether he had gone to spend the rest of the holidays with some other Greyfriars fellow, Soames did not know—and from Wharton Lodge there was no information to be had.

In the former case, however, he would not be long off the track, for he knew the telephone number of Bunter Villa.

If Bunter had gone home that morning, he had not long to wait, for it was no more than an hour's run.

But another doubt was in Soames' mind.

It was not likely, but it was possible, that Bunter had not left Wharton Lodge at all, but that the statement over the telephone was intended to mislead the crook who had been on his track.

It was far from likely; but it was possible, and Soames was not the man to leave anything to chance.

During the next hour he was occupied in making quiet and discreet inquiries up and down Wimford railway station.

There it was easy enough to pick up some news.

He picked up the news that Harry Wharton and his friends had gone off in a party—the five of them:

Bunter had not been with them.

That settled that!

He learned, further, that a fat schoolboy in spectacles had been seen going on the platform two or three hours after Harry Wharton & Co. had gone; and when he compared the time, he realised that Bunter must have gone

on the platform at the very time he was on the telephone speaking to Wells.

Soames gritted his teeth when he learned that!

Billy Bunter, with the cigarette-case no doubt in his pocket, must have walked by almost under his nose!

However, he knew now what he wanted to know! The Christmas party at Wharton Lodge had broken up; Harry Wharton and his friends had gone off in a bunch early, and Bunter had gone off by himself later.

He had little doubt that Bunter had gone home.

So, having given the fat Owl more than ample time to arrive home, Soames went back to the telephone and rang up the semi-detached villa which Billy Bunter called Bunter Court, but which was known locally by the less imposing title of Bunter Villa.

A fat voice, very like Bunter's, answered the call.

"Hallo! Is that you, Billy?"

Soames' eyes glittered at the telephone! That answer did not seem to indicate that Billy was at home!

"Speaking from Wharton Lodge!" he said into the transmitter. "Is Master Bunter at home?"

"No; only me."

"Who—"

"I'm his brother Sammy! I say, has Billy really left? I thought he was sticking on till the end of the vac. Who's speaking?"

"Hem! The butler," said Soames. "I desire to speak to Master Bunter about something he appears to have left behind."

"I don't suppose it was Billy's if he did!" said the cheerful Sammy. "I know he never took anything with him, but what he stood up in."

"Oh! Has he not arrived home yet?"

"No!"

"When do you expect him?"

"We ain't expecting him—at all! Catch him turning up before the last day of the vac if he can help it!"

"But he left Wharton Lodge this morning—"

"He, he, he!" came a fat cackle, remarkably like Billy's own. "Couldn't he work it till the end of the vac? He generally manages it somehow!"

"Oh! Perhaps you can tell me where he is gone, sir!"

"Mauly's, most likely! Mauly's soft! I know he tried Mauly first, and hooked on to Wharton as second-best," chuckled Sammy, who seemed to have no reticence at all. "Bet you Mauly's got him!"

"Mauly!" repeated Soames.

"Lord Mauleverer, Mauleverer Towers, Hampshire!" said Sammy. "If Wharton's chucked him out, ten to one he's barged in there! He's got a neck!"

"Oh!" gasped Soames.

"But I say, what has he left behind?" asked Sammy Bunter. "Nothing to eat, I'll bet! I say—"

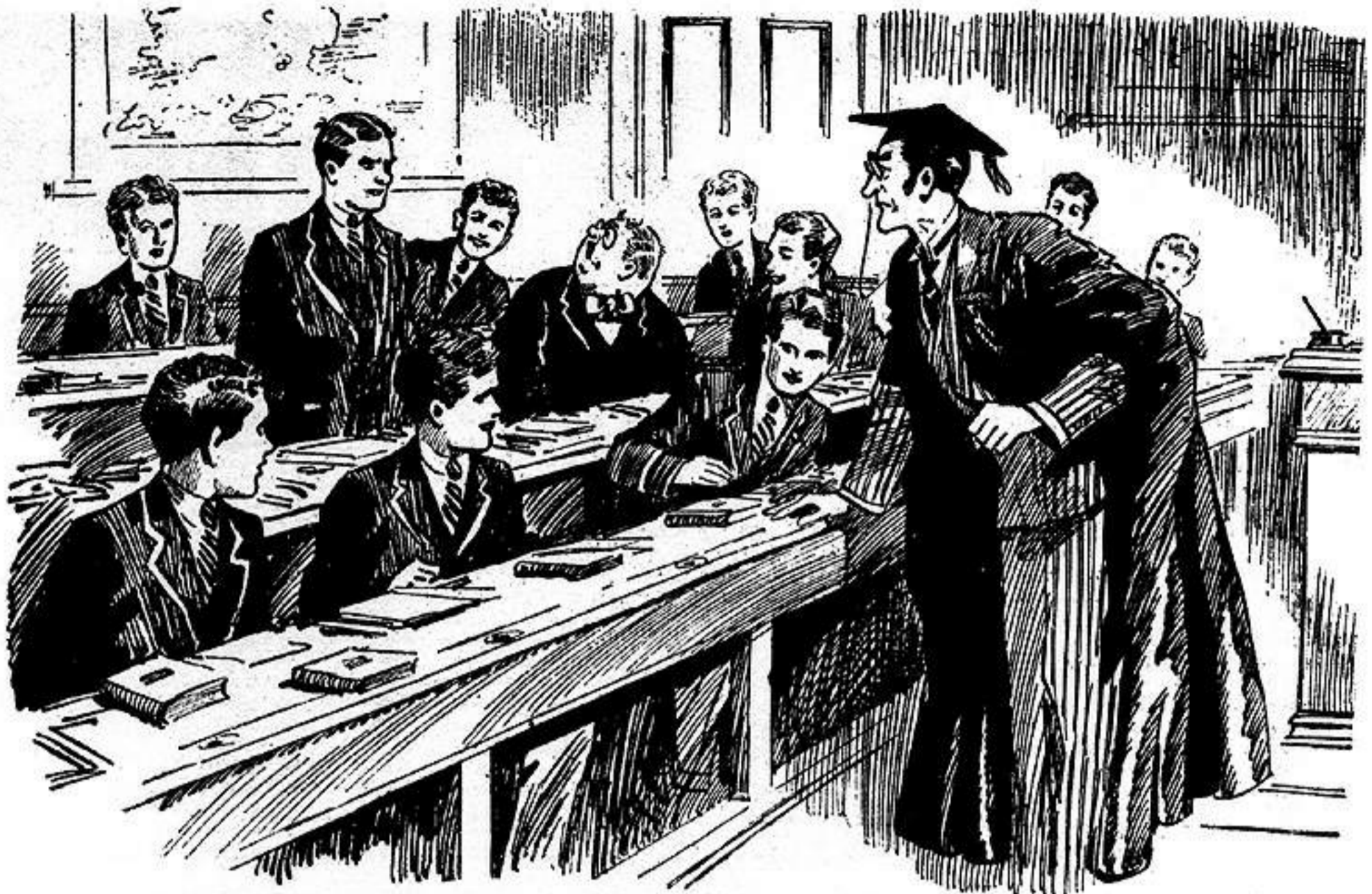
But Soames rang off. He had heard all he wanted to hear from Sammy Bunter.

Billy Bunter had not gone home, and was not expected home. He had landed himself on somebody for the remainder of the school holiday—not, obviously, on Harry Wharton & Co., as they had departed without him!

Soames put in another long-distance call, this time to Mauleverer Towers, Hampshire.

But from that palatial abode he only learned that Master Bunter was not there, and was not expected there. Sammy had been in error.

James Soames went back to his car at last with a set, savage face. Where was Billy Bunter? Wherever Billy



"Vernon-Smith!" said Mr. Quelch, in a rumbling voice. "Did you enter my study last evening and take Bunter's cigarette-case from my overcoat pocket?" "No, sir!" answered the Bounder, coolly. "Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter. "I say, you fellows, just hear him!"

Bunter was, was the silver cigarette-case, with the clue to Rat Hankey's hidden loot! But where?

That was a question to which Soames could find no answer! It really looked as if he would have to wait for the new term at Greyfriars if he wanted to see Billy Bunter again!

THE NINTH CHAPTER.

Bunter Wants Bailing Out!

"BOB!"

"Yes, dad!"

"You're wanted on the phone!"

"Oh!" said Bob Cherry.

Four fellows grinned. Bob did not. After tea, at Cherry Place, Bob was unpacking a dartboard and sorting out darts—a Christmas present from a relative which he and his friends were about to put to use.

The Famous Five had arrived in Dorsetshire in high spirits—not the less so, probably, because William George Bunter had been left in Surrey!

But when Major Cherry called up the stairs to Bob that he was wanted on the phone, the thought of William George came into five minds at once.

True, that phone call might be from anybody; Bob might be called up by a dozen people now that he was home again. But he had a feeling—and his chums had a feeling—that there was a fat Owl at the other end of the wire.

"If that's Bunter—" said Bob.

"Bet you two to one in doughnuts!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Bother the fat frump!"

Bob went down to take the call. His friends smiled at one another. The telephone was in the hall below, and they heard Bob hoot into it.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

They did not hear what came back. But they could guess, when they heard Bob's next remark.

"You fat fozzler!"

Four smiling faces looked over the banisters at Bob. He glanced up at them.

"That fat chump!" he said. "I'm going to tell him what I think of him. You fellows can do the same, in turn—see?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The five gathered round the telephone. Close to it, they could all hear the fat squeak that came through.

"I say, Bob, old chap—are you there, or have you gone away, you beast? I say, dear old fellow—"

"I'm here!" said Bob into the mouth-piece. "Fat ass!"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Chump! Porpoise! Porker!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Hold on; Wharton wants to speak! Here you are, Wharton."

Harry Wharton, laughing, took the receiver.

"You there, Bunter?"

"Yes, old fellow! Is that you, Harry, old bean? So jolly glad to hear your voice again! It seems ages since I've seen you, old thing."

"I hope it will be ages before you see me again! Fathead! Ass!"

"Oh, really, Bull—"

"Here you are, Johnny, your turn!" Wharton handed the receiver to Johnny Bull.

Johnny proceeded to speak to the fat Owl at the other end.

"That you, Bunter? Have you washed to-day?"

"Oh, really Bull—"

"Better go and do it! You'll have to wash for the new term at Greyfriars. Why not get it over?"

"Beast!"

"Here you are, Franky!" grinned Johnny Bull.

Frank Nugent took the receiver.

"Hallo! Are you there, Bunter?"

"Yes, old fellow! So glad to hear you, Franky, old chap! What a—a—a nice voice you've got, old fellow."

"Oh, my hat! Are you going to get that wash?"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

"If you do, put a pound of soda in," said Nugent. "You'll need it! You still had Christmas pudding on your face yesterday—"

"You cheeky idiot—"

"Here you are, Inky!" said Nugent. Hurree Janset Ram Singh, grinning a dusky grin, took the receiver in his turn.

As Bunter had rung up, he was going to get a word from all the members of the famous Co.

"My esteemed and idiotic Bunter—" began the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Dear old Inky!" came an affectionate voice over the wires. "So glad to hear you again! But I really want to speak to Bob—"

"The esteemed Bob has finished! It is a terrific pleasure to hear your voice on the telephone, my absurd Bunter—"

"I say, that's jolly pally, Inky, old man—"

"I mean, in comparison with hearing it close at hand."

"You black beast!"

"The furtherfulness off is the betterfulness. Pleasefully make it a Happy New Year for us all by keeping as furtherfulness off as possible!"

"Yah!"

Hurree Janset Ram Singh handed the receiver back to Bob, who jammed it on the hooks.

Bunter, thus cut off, was silent.

"That does it!" said Bob.

"Does it?" grinned Johnny. "Bet you there'll be another ring!"

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(Continued from page 13)

"Well, it's a comfort that Dorset is a long way from Surrey," said Bob. "He can't possibly raise the railway fare. Anybody here feel inclined to send it along to him?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Buzzzzzzzz!

The telephone-bell rang again, and there was a chortle.

Bob grabbed the receiver.

"I say, is that you, Bob? We seem to have been cut off! I say, old chap, I'm in rather a fix!"

"Stay in it!" said Bob. "Good-bye!"

"Hold on, old chap! I can't stay here in Dorchester—"

"Dorchester!" yelled Bob.

"Yes, old chap—I'm at the railway station. I've got to pay excess fare on my ticket!"

"Oh crikey!"

"You see, I took a ticket only part of the way—I was rather short of cash, owing to one thing and another—"

"You fat scoundrel!"

"Of course, it's all right if I pay the excess fare. But they seem to be making rather a fuss about it. I can't take a taxi to your place, you see—they won't let me go. It would be all right about the taxi, of course—you'd have to pay it; but my letters will be coming on, and I'm expecting a postal order, so that will be all right."

"Will it?" gasped Bob.

"Yes, old fellow! But they don't seem to want me to leave till I've paid the excess fare. They seem a suspicious, distrustful lot here."

"They can keep you!" howled Bob. "I wish them joy of you! Tell them, from me, that they can have you as a New Year's Gift—"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Good-bye!"

"Hold on!" shrieked Bunter, from the other end. "I say, old chap, Soames is after me—"

"Rats!"

"He nearly got me at Wimford this morning! I had a fearfully narrow escape. I say, if I go home, he will be after me there. See? That's why I'm coming to stay with you, old chap."

"Are you?" gasped Bob.

"I knew you'd be glad—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"I can put up anywhere, old fellow—don't worry about that. I know your little place isn't like Bunter Court; but I can rough it. So long as I have a decent room and a comfortable bed I shall be all right. You needn't worry about that, old fellow—you needn't, really."

"Not really!" gurgled Bob.

"Not at all! I shall be able to make myself at home, somehow—rely on that. But you'll have to come here, and pay these railway people—they don't seem to trust me to come back with the money, I don't know why—"

"Perhaps they've met bilks before!"

"Get here as quick as you can, won't you, old chap? Come in the car. I be—"

lieve your pater has a car of sorts—He, he, he! I know he has to drive it himself—I don't mind—anything, so long as you come quick!"

Bob Cherry banged the receiver back on the hooks.

Then he looked round at four grinning faces.

"I'm to get the pater to drive over to Dorchester, and bail that fat villain out, for the pleasure of having him here for the rest of the hols!" he said. "I can see myself doing it!" Bob gave a snort. "You fellows coming up to play darts?"

"Come on!" said Harry.

Bob made a step—and paused. He made another step—and halted. He frowned, and his comrades grinned.

"The fat octopus!" he said. "The blithering Owl! The burbling bandersnatch! I—I—I suppose we can't leave him at the railway station."

"Lesson to him!" suggested Johnny Bull.

"Um! Yes. But—" Bob Cherry was all good nature; and his heart smote him, at the thought of the unhappy Owl hung up at a railway station—unable even to walk out, because of a suspicious, distrustful lot who did not believe, for some reason, that he would come back with the sum due!

Buzzzzzzzz!

It was the telephone-bell again.

Bob turned back to the instrument and grabbed the receiver.

"I say, is that you, Bob? We got cut off again. I say, old fellow, how long will it be before you get here?"

"Bother you—"

"Dear old chap!"

"I'll come!" hooted Bob. "It's over an hour on the bus. But I suppose I've got to come."

"Don't waste time coming on a bus, for goodness' sake! The car—" squeaked Bunter.

"I haven't the run of my pater's car, you fat Owl, and my pater's my pater, not my chauffeur!" howled Bob. "I shall come on the bus, if I come at all."

"Why not ring up a taxi, then?"

"I will—if you'll pay the man!" snorted Bob.

"That's all right, then!" said Bunter, from the other end. "Leave that to me, old fellow, if you're short of money. I forgot you're not well off—I can't always remember things like that, as I always have plenty. Leave it to me, by all means—I'll settle that as soon as my postal order comes—"

"I'll come on the bus, you burbling bandersnatch! And the first thing I shall do, will be to kick you all over Dorchester!"

"Beast!"

Bob jammed back the receiver. He frowned at his grinning friends—and then burst into a laugh.

A few minutes later, the Famous Five sallied out to catch the motor-bus and go to the fat Owl's rescue—to be rewarded by Billy Bunter's attractive society till the end of the hols. Which, no doubt, was worth the trouble.

THE TENTH CHAPTER.

Back To School!

LANTHAM JUNCTION was crowded.

Boys of all sorts and sizes swarmed the platforms. It was the first day of the new term, and Greyfriars fellows were gathering from far and near. Innumerable footsteps tramped; innumerable voices called greetings; one voice recognisable over the rest by its stentorian tones:

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! This way, you men!"

Bob Cherry, half in a carriage, waved and roared to his friends. He had bagged that carriage, and was making the fact known to the rest of the Co., as well as to a considerable portion of the surrounding county of Kent!

"This way!" roared Bob. "Tumble up! Look alive! Here, sheer off, Temple—this carriage is booked! Buzz off, Hobby—no Shell-fish wanted here! This way, you men! Hallo, hallo, hallo!"

"Cherry! Cease shouting at once!"

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Bob.

An angular figure topped the crowd on the platform, and Bob Cherry "capped" his Form-master, Mr. Quelch. He had not been aware that Mr. Quelch was taking that train, till he heard him bark.

Mr. Quelch frowned.

"Less noise, Cherry, please!"

"Oh! Certainly, sir!"

Mr. Quelch walked on.

But the other members of the Co. had heard Bob's roar—which they could scarcely have failed to do, unless they had been very deaf indeed—and they came up with a rush—cheerfully barging Temple, Dabney & Co., of the Fourth, out of the way.

The Famous Five packed in. Bob, at the door, glanced up and down the platform for Quelch's tall head, and, failing to spot it, shouted again.

"This way, Smithy! Hop in here, Reddy! Toddy, old man, room for you! Room for you, too, Oggy."

Herbert Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing, Peter Todd, and Robert Donald Ogilvy, crowded in. The carriage was fairly full, when a fat figure rolled up and blinked in through a big pair of spectacles.

"I say, you fellows, I missed you—"

"The missfulness is as good as the milefulness, my esteemed Bunter! Roll on, and miss us again!" suggested Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Yah! Make room for a chap, you fellows! Hallo, Toddy, you back? What sort of hols. have you had? Pretty so-so, I expect!" said Bunter, blinking at Peter as he wedged in. "I say, give a fellow room! Look here, there's too many in this carriage!"

"Roll that porpoise out!" said Vernon-Smith.

"Oh, really, Smithy! I say, you fellows, where's my seat?"

"Standing room only!" said Harry Wharton.

"If you think I'm going to stand all the way to Courtfield, Harry Wharton—" roared Bunter indignantly.

"Sit on the floor!" suggested Toddy.

"Or the roof!" said the Bounder.

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter blinked round the carriage. All the seats were occupied—and several fellows were standing. There was always a crowd on that train, and fellows who did not want to wait for the next often had to stand. That was quite usual: and it did not matter, so long as one of the fellows who stood was not William George Bunter. That, of course, mattered a lot!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's old Coker!" exclaimed Bob. "I've got an apple in my pocket! Watch me get Coker's hat!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bob was in a corner seat. He rose from it at the sight of Coker of the Fifth, groping for the apple which was, so fortunately, in his pocket.

He leaned from the window to take aim; and Billy Bunter promptly squeezed into the seat he had vacated. Bunter was not the man to lose opportunities

Whiz!

The apple flew!

Coker of the Fifth was walking down the platform between Potter and Greene. Coker was talking—his usual state!

"These noisy fags!" Coker was saying. "These dashed noisy fags—I've cuffed two or three of them already! Lot of noisy young scoundrels! There's a Form-master on this train, and I've a jolly good mind to go to him and say plainly—Yarooop!"

Coker gave a startled yell as his hat flew off.

"Oh! Ah! Why—what—how——" stammered Coker.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Coker stared round, greatly surprised. He plunged after his hat, which flew across the platform, accompanied by an apple.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came a cheery roar from the carriage packed with Removites.

"Cherry!" came a bark.

"Oh!" gasped Bob.

He had forgotten Quelch! Quelch, perhaps, had forgotten him; but was reminded when the apple flew and Coker's hat went. Quelch came striding up.

"Cherry! This horse-play——"

"Oh! I—I didn't see you, sir——"

"Probably not!" said Mr. Quelch. "Cherry, any repetition of this and I shall cane you when we reach the school! Keep order, Cherry!"

"Oh! Certainly, sir!"

Mr. Quelch frowned and stalked on.

"Copped!" said Bob. "Never mind—I got Coker's tile!" And Bob sat down again—landing on a pair of podgy knees.

"Ow! Gerroff!" howled Billy Bunter.

Bob stared round at him.

"You, you fat villain! You've bagged my seat——"

"I suppose I've got to have a seat!" said Bunter, blinking at him.

"Not mine, you podgy pirate! Gerroff!"

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Oh, keep it if you like, fatty—I don't suppose you could hold up your weight till Courtfield!" said Bob; and he joined the standing-party.

Bunter settled down comfortably in the corner seat. He groped in his pockets. One fat hand came out with a silver cigarette-case in it. Bunter grinned cheerfully round at the juniors.

"Have a smoke, Smithy?" he asked.

"No, ass!" grunted the Bounder. Herbert Vernon-Smith was rather given to smoking cigarettes, chiefly by way of swank; but if anything could have made him give up that bad habit it would have been seeing Billy Bunter at it!

"Afraid of Quelch!" grinned Bunter. "He won't come by again, old fellow. I'm going to put on a smoke."

The Bounder stared at Bunter's cigarette-case. He had seen that case before and recognised it.

"So you got it back?" he asked. "That's the case I chucked out of my study window last term, when you pinched my cigarettes to stick in it."

"Fishy found it," answered Bunter. "The beast wanted to stick to it—but I got it back all right! Fancy a cad sticking to another fellow's cigarette-case!"

"Fancy a cad sticking to another fellow's cigarettes!" said Smithy.

"Well, those aren't your cigarettes!" sneered Bunter. "I bought this lot myself—jolly good Turkish, too——"

"You fat burglar!" said Bob Cherry. "That's where my pater's cigarettes went, is it?"

"Oh, really, Cherry! If you think I got these smokes out of your pater's box——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Won't you have one, Smithy? Better than the kind you smoke!" said Bunter. "You don't know much about smokes, old chap—no taste, you know! Who's got a match?"

Billy Bunter opened the silver cigarette-case, selected one of Major Cherry's Turkish cigarettes, stuck it in his wide mouth, and blinked round for somebody to offer him a match.

Nobody offered him a match.

"I say, you fellows, give a fellow a light!" said Bunter. "Have you got a match, Smithy? Have you——"

"BUNTER!"

"Oh crikey!"

A tall and angular figure stood by the carriage window. A pair of gimlet eyes gleamed in at Bunter!

It was probably on account of the exuberant Bob that Mr. Quelch was keeping an eye on that carriage! Anyhow, there he was—glaring in at Bunter and at the cigarette sticking out of the fat Owl's mouth and the well-filled case in his fat hand.

"Oooogh!" gasped Bunter.

He was fairly caught! He blinked in utter dismay at his Form-master, too taken aback to snatch the cigarette from his mouth. He gazed at Quelch.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Bunter, is this the kind of thing you have learned in the holidays? Shocking! Disgusting! Throw away that cigarette at once! Give me that cigarette-case! How dare you, Bunter? You will take a hundred lines, Bunter! Give me that case!"

"Oh lor'!"

Bunter threw away the cigarette! He handed the silver case over to his Form-master!

Mr. Quelch, with a snort, dropped it into his overcoat pocket. He turned away, frowning.

"Oh crikey!" said Bunter.

That celebrated cigarette-case was gone at last! In spite of Soames, and in spite of Fisher T. Fish, Billy Bunter had retained possession; and he had brought it back to school with him. And on the very first day of the term, before he had even arrived at Greyfriars, Quelch had spotted it—and taken it away from him.

"Oh lor'!" said Bunter.

"That's that!" grinned Bob Cherry. "That's an end of that jolly old cigarette-case! You won't see it again, you fat chump!"

"Beast!"

The train rolled out of Lantham. Billy Bunter did not enjoy—or otherwise—a smoke on the journey!

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER.

No Trade!

FISHER T. FISH smiled.

Gosling frowned.

The tramp of many feet in the old quad and the passages, the hum of voices where all had been silent, the bumping of boxes, the banging of doors; all these signs of the awakening life of the new term affected Fishy and Gosling quite differently.

"Drat 'em!" said Gosling to himself, not once but many times. The ancient porter of Greyfriars School sighed for the peace and quiet of the holidays.

Fisher T. Fish was glad to see everybody! He was almost glad to see Bunter. Bottled-up conversation streamed from Fishy's bony jaws. His chin hardly ceased to move for a moment. The continuity of his con-

versation must have made his nose tired—Fishy's conversation being conducted chiefly through the nose.

"Gosling, old bean, you're looking younger this term!" Bob Cherry declared; and William Gosling's ancient, gnarled face almost thawed for a moment.

"Think so, Master Cherry?" he asked.

"Bet on it!" said Bob. "Christmas pudding and pies have done you good, Gosling. You look hardly over the hundred."

"Wot?" hooted Gosling.

"What do you fellows think?" asked Bob, appealing to his friends. "Would you take him for more than a hundred now—or say, a hundred and ten at the most?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Drat 'em!" said Gosling as the Famous Five walked on, laughing. "Wot I says is this 'ere—drat 'em!"

A bony form shot out of the House to greet the Famous Five. A bony face beamed on them.

"Say, old-timers, here we are again!" said Fisher T. Fish. "Glad you're back, what? I'll tell a man, I'm glad to hear a yoman voice again! Say——"

"Jolly glad to see you, Fishy!" said Bob Cherry heartily. "We owe you a booting, and we never gave it to you at Wharton Lodge! Now, then, you fellows, all together, and see if you can land him right across the quad."

"Stand steady, Fishy!" said Harry Wharton.

"Aw, forget it!" yapped Fisher T. Fish, and he jerked away to bestow his bony company on other arrivals.

Fishy did not care particularly to whom he talked—so long as he talked! It was true that nobody wanted to hear him talk—but that was a matter of very small moment to Fishy!

"Mauly! Say, ain't it a sight for sore eyes to see you again!" said Fishy, catching Lord Mauleverer in the quad.

"Yaas!" assented Mauly.

"And I guess——"

"Comin'!" called out Lord Mauleverer in answer to a call that Fisher T. Fish did not hear, if Mauly did, and he cut into the House.

"Smithy, old-timer, you're back—I say, Smithy—don't you hear a guy?" exclaimed Fisher T. Fish. "Deaf?"

Herbert Vernon-Smith seemed deaf; at all events, he walked on without stopping.

Fisher T. Fish snorted, and shot off to Peter Todd.

"I'm sure glad to see you're back, Toddy!" he beamed.

"And I shall be just as pleased to see your back!" said Toddy genially.

"Say, old-timer——"

But Peter Todd was gone. Fishy was looking for another victim, when a fat squawk fell on his ears.

"Beast!"

"Aw, what's biting you, you fat clam?" demanded Fisher T. Fish, turning round to stare at Billy Bunter.

"Sneaking a fellow's cigarette-case!" said Bunter scornfully. "Yah!"

"You pesky pie-faced, slabsided mug-wump!" said Fisher T. Fish. "I guess you owe me money on that sootcase you busted! I'm telling you, that set me back three dollars."

"Serve you jolly well right!" said Bunter.

"Say, you got that cigarette-case, or did that hoodlum get it off'n you?" asked Fisher T. Fish eagerly. "If you got it——"

"Find out!" said Bunter, and he rolled on.

Fisher T. Fish jerked after him.

Fishy was very keen to know whether that silver cigarette-case was "around."

He had seen, and heard, nothing of Soames, since the crook had left him to walk five miles home on a snowy evening, and he had wondered a good deal whether Bunter had, and whether the fat Owl still had the cigarette-case.

"Say, big boy, if you still got it——" said Fisher T. Fish over a fat shoulder. "Yah! Don't talk to me, you rotter!"

"I guess I'm open to buy that cigarette-case, if you got it!" said Fishy. "I've sure tuck a fancy to it. I'd go to ten bob for it, Bunter, old-timer!"

Sniff, from Bunter.

"Catch me selling a valuable cigarette-case for ten bob!" he said scornfully. "My Uncle William gave five guineas for it."

"I'd make it a pound."

"Yah!"

"Now, you look here, old fat clam!" said Fisher T. Fish persuasively. "I guess I'd go to thirty bob, having tuck a fancy to it! You sure can't keep a cigarette-case around at school—suppose Quelch spotted it? I guess he'd take it off'n you, so quick it would make your head swim. Make it a trade!"

Billy Bunter halted, and turned his big spectacles thoughtfully on Fisher T. Fish.

Bunter had arrived at Greyfriars for the new term in his usual hard-up state. Thirty shillings was a handsome offer.

It was an offer that Fisher T. Fish could afford to make, as Soames was prepared to hand over more than a dozen times as much for that mysterious silver case; and Fishy had no doubt of being able to get in touch with him again, sooner or later, once the prize was in his bony grasp.

"Oh!" said Bunter.

"You brought it back with you?" asked Fishy eagerly.

"Of course I did! It's in the House now," answered Bunter. "I don't suppose I shall ever see that man Thompson now—so I don't see why I shouldn't sell it."

"It's a trade then!" said Fishy.

"Only you'd have to get it!" said Bunter cautiously. "I can't go and get it for you, Fishy. I'll sell it to you for thirty bob, if you'll get it yourself."

"Done!" said Fisher T. Fish. "Where is it?"

"In Quelch's study——"

"Eh?"

"He took it away from me at Lantham!" said Bunter. "You get it away from his study, Fishy, and you can have it for thirty bob——"

"You fat clam!" hooted Fisher T. Fish.

"Oh, really, Fishy——"

"You pie-faced big stiff!"

"Look here——"

"Aw, go and chop chips!" snorted Fisher T. Fish. "You pesky, pie-faced, ornery fat clam, forget it!"

Fisher T. Fish jerked away. He was disinclined to make it a "trade," with such difficulties in the way of a transfer of the goods.

"Beast!" hooted Bunter.

And he rolled into the House.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER.

Supper In Study No. 13!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Billy Bunter's fat squeak passed unheeded, in the buzz of voices in Bob Cherry's study.

There was no prep on the first night

of term, and Bob Cherry had brought back a hamper from home. For these two excellent reasons, there was a numerous company assembled in Study No. 13.

Studies at Greyfriars were fairly roomy, but No. 13 was rather packed.

Bob and Hurree Singh, Mark Linley and little Wun Lung, who belonged to the study, were there; Harry Wharton and Nugent and Johnny Bull were there, and, of course, Billy Bunter—Bunter was there because the hamper was there. Lord Mauleverer was there, and Peter Todd, and Hazeldene, and Smithy and Redwing.

When Fisher T. Fish looked in there really was no room for even a bony fellow like Fishy to wedge in, neither, perhaps, was any man there eager to hear the conversation that had been bottled up in Fishy all through the vac.

So Fishy leaned his bony person on the door-post, and good things from the hamper were handed over many heads to him; it was a hospitable study, and even Fishy was welcome to a whack in the hamper.

"I say, you fellows," repeated Bunter in a louder squeak.

Bunter was happy, and sticky, and shiny. Until he had eaten enough for three or four fellows, Bunter naturally thought only of the tuck. After that, having taken the keen edge off his appetite, Bunter was ready to talk. And he had something urgent to say.

"I say, you fellows!" roared Bunter.

"Pass Bunter a mince pie!" said Bob. "I mean pass him a dozen! That'll keep him quiet for a minute!"

"I say, about my cigarette-case!" said Bunter, with his mouth full. "I say, you fellows, now we're back here, Linley could read that Greek stuff in it for us. See? One of you fellows get it away from Quelch's study——"

"I don't think!" grinned Bob.

"Mind, it ain't because I want my cigarette-case back, and it ain't because I've been offered thirty bob for it!" explained Bunter. "It ain't that at all! But Linley's a swot, and he knows Greek, and he could read that Greek stuff in it that you're so jolly curious about. That's what I was thinking of."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" said Bunter warmly. "All through the hols. you were wondering what that Greek stuff meant, and trying to find out—and now there's a chance—if you get my cigarette-case back from Quelch——"

"Bow-wow!"

"I say, you fellows, it's easy enough, you know," said Bunter. "You all saw Quelch take it away from me in the train at Lantham and slip it into his overcoat pocket. Well, he hangs his overcoat up in his study—he's in his gown now. Ten to one that case is still in the overcoat! He's too jolly busy on the first day of term to bother about it—ten to one he's forgotten all about it. What?"

"Likely enough," said Harry Wharton, laughing, "and you'd better forget all about it, too, old fat man!"

"What I mean is, it's perfectly easy for a fellow to nip into his study and pinch it!" said Bunter eagerly. "Quelch is in Common-room—ten to one his coat's hanging up there on the hook, and ten to one that cigarette-case is still in the pocket——"

"Any man here keen on picking Quelch's pockets?" asked the Bounder.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Tain't picking his pockets, Smithy, you beast!" hooted Bunter. "It's mine, ain't it? One of you fellows—it's perfectly safe——"

"Safe enough for any man here, except Bunter!" remarked Peter Todd. "Bunter ain't keen on it himself."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, really, Toddy! I'd go, only——only——well, what I mean is, you fellows were fearfully keen to make out what that Greek stuff meant, and Linley would know, and I'm only thinking of you, of course. 'Tain't because I want to sell it to Fishy for thirty bob——"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"What on earth is the fat ass driving at?" asked Vernon-Smith, staring at Bunter. "Is there anything special about that cigarette-case?"

"Oh, lots and lots!" answered Bob Cherry, with a chuckle. "It's got a lot of Greek letters—about forty—cut inside—some sportsman cut them there with a penknife, but they don't mean anything. We thought they did, because that sweep Soames was after it—but it turned out——"

"Soames!" exclaimed the Bounder.

"Chap who used to be your father's valet—you remember him! He's been after Bunter all through the hols. for that jolly old case."

"Pulling my leg?" asked Vernon-Smith, mystified.

"Sober as a judge! Like to hear about it?"

"Yes, rather!"

The story of the mysterious cigarette-case was told; fellows who had not heard it, listening with wondering attention.

Herbert Vernon-Smith's face was very thoughtful.

"By gum!" he said, when he had heard all. "A man like Soames never took all that trouble for nothing—and all that risk! He was after something—and something worth getting after."

"That cigarette-case ain't worth much——" said Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry, my jolly valuable case——"

"How did Bunter get hold of it?" asked the Bounder. "I thought he'd picked it up and kept it, when I saw it last term——"

"Oh, really, Smithy, you cheeky beast——"

"Bunter says a man gave it to him in Friardale Lane, a few days before the hols., to take to a man at Pegg named Thompson!" answered Bob. "He says he couldn't find Thompson."

"Well, that's rot, on the face of it!" said Vernon-Smith.

"The rotfulness is terrific."

"Shove some mince pies over to Fishy! Hallo, hallo, hallo! He's gone! Fishy!" roared Bob.

But answer there came none. Fisher T. Fish had departed, in the middle of the feast!

No doubt he had his own reasons—after having heard Bunter's remarks on the probability of that cigarette-case being still in Quelch's overcoat pocket!

"Where did you get it, Bunter," asked Smithy, "and how the dickens does Soames come into the matter at all?"

"The fact is, Smithy, I gave five guineas for it—yaroooooh!" roared Bunter, as a jam tart suddenly squashed on his fat features. "You silly idiot, Smithy, wharrer you up to, you fat-head?"

"No use for lies, old fat man! Where did you get that silver case?"

"Beast!" Bunter dabbed at the jam tart. "Find out! Yah!"

"Kick him, Bull—you're nearest!"

"Ow! Beast! I'm just going to tell you!" roared Bunter. "A man gave it to me in Friardale Lane, and asked me



Fisher T. Fish was grasped by many hands, swung off his feet, and reversed. His bony head tapped on the study floor, and his bony legs thrashed wildly. "Gee-whiz! Say, you galoots—leggo!" he yelled. "Aw, my cabeza! Yarooooop!"

to take it to Mr. Thompson, on a motor-boat at Pegg. He never tipped me a quid for taking it—I should have refused such a thing with scorn, of course."

"And why didn't you take it, after being tipped a quid?" asked Smithy.

"I did, only I couldn't find Thompson. There was only one motor-boat at Pegg, and that beast Soames was on it," explained Bunter. "He pretended to be Thompson, at first, just to get hold of that cigarette-case, you know—and then I suddenly recognised him—"

The Bounder chuckled.

"You howling ass! Soames has used more names than he has fingers and toes, and very likely he was calling himself Thompson."

"Oh!" Bunter gave quite a jump. He had never thought of that possibility. "Oh crikey! Think so, Smithy?"

"Oh!" repeated Harry Wharton. "If that was the case, Bunter's yarn may be true, after all. Of course, we never believed a word Bunter said—"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Gammon!" said Johnny Bull. "Even if Soames was Thompson, why should a man give Bunter a cigarette-case to carry to him, instead of walking a mile himself?"

"That does it!" agreed Bob. "Just gammon, as per usual."

"That's all you know!" jeered Bunter. "That man couldn't have walked a mile—or a yard, for that matter. He had a game leg."

"You never told us that before!" said Bob suspiciously.

"You never asked me, did you? I say, I'll have some of that cake." Billy Bunter filled his mouth with cake before he proceeded. "He had had a spill in the snow, or something—anyhow, he couldn't walk, and I took his message, in my good-natured way—not because he tipped me a quid, you know! I'm not

the sort of fellow to be tipped, I hope."

Harry Wharton gave the fat Owl a very curious look. His mention of a man with a "game leg" brought back a recollection into the mind of the captain of the Remove.

"Blessed if it doesn't begin to look true!" he said. "There was a man with a game leg in Friardale Lane that afternoon—you fellows remember we saw him skid on his motor-bike and go over."

"I remember!" said Bob. "His bike went into the ditch and sunk in the snow—and we helped him along to the stile. I remember he seemed rather glad to be shut of us, too."

"Well, he was jolly glad to see me, if it was the same man!" said Bunter. "He was sitting on the stile, mumbling and groaning. Of course, I was sympathetic—I'd have taken a message for him, even if he hadn't tipped me a quid! Not that he did, you know—I would have refused to touch it."

"By gum!" The Bounder's eyes were gleaming. "There's something in this, that you fellows have missed. Greek letters scratched inside the cigarette-case—must have been a message of some sort."

"He gave me a message," said Bunter. "I was to tell Thompson where he was, and he couldn't walk, see? I was to take the cigarette-case to prove that the message was genuine—as Thompson would know that it came from him. That's what he said."

"And the real message was inside the cigarette-case all the time," said the Bounder. "In Greek, too!"

"Nothing in it, Smithy," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "You see, when that cigarette-case turned up at Wharton Lodge, my uncle called in a Greek friend of his, chap named Konstantinopoulos, to read it! He couldn't make head or tail of it—but he told us it

wasn't Greek—only a higgledy-piggledy of Greek letters that had no meaning at all."

"Just scratched in the case, by somebody who had nothing better to do," said Bob Cherry.

"Um! Why is Soames after it, then?" asked Smithy.

"Ask me another!"

"Anything special about the case, except those Greek letters inside?"

"Nothing at all."

"Then—that's that!" said Vernon-Smith. "I'd jolly well like to see it!"

"You go and get it, Smithy!" said Bunter eagerly. "You ain't funky of Quelch, like these fellows. I'll let you look at it, old chap, before I sell it to Fishy—"

The Bounder rose to his feet. It was evident that his curiosity was keenly aroused. Without saying a word, he slipped from the study.

He came back five minutes later.

"Got it?" exclaimed Bunter eagerly.

"No!" grunted Smithy.

"Wasn't Quelch's overcoat hanging up?"

"Yes; but there was no cigarette-case in the pockets."

"Blow him!" said Bunter.

It was a disappointment for Bunter. Still, there was plenty of tuck in Bob Cherry's hamper, so the fat Owl was able to find comfort.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER.

Who?

"WARE Quelch!" murmured Skinner.

Skinner was very careful not to let those words reach the ears of Mr. Quelch, as the Remove THE MAGNET LIBRARY.—No. 1,612.

went into their Form-room in the morning.

Quelch had a grim frown on his brow. Fisher T. Fish eyed him in a sidelong, watchful way. But Quelch took no notice of the American junior. His gimlet eyes fixed on Bunter.

Bunter, it seemed, was the object of his wrath. Why, nobody knew, unless it was the fat Owl's performance at Lantham the previous day.

"Bunter!" rumbled Mr. Quelch. "Oh! Yes, sir!" Bunter blinked at him in alarm. "It wasn't me, sir!"

"Bunter!" said Mr. Quelch, in a deep voice. "Yesterday I found you with a cigarette in your mouth, and a cigarette-case in your hand. I gave you a hundred lines——"

"I—I was going to—to write them to-day, sir——" stuttered Bunter. "I—I never had time yesterday, sir, being the first day, and—and helping fellows unpack, and——"

"I took the cigarette-case away from you, Bunter!" went on Mr. Quelch, unheeding. "I slipped it into my overcoat pocket. I had no time to think of it further, on such a busy day, and it was left in my overcoat pocket. It has been taken away from that pocket."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. He blinked round at the Bounder, an accusing blink.

"That overcoat was left hanging in my study, after I came in," resumed Mr. Quelch. "I did not look at it again till this morning, when I went to take out the cigarette-case and lock it up. The article was no longer there, Bunter! I can only conclude that you had the audacity, the impudence, to visit my study and regain possession of it."

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Fisher T. Fish sat with his sharp eyes looking down his long sharp nose. The Famous Five, as well as Bunter, looked round at Smithy. So did the other fellows. They knew that Smithy had gone down from supper in Study No. 13 to look for the silver case in the overcoat. He had returned to say that it was not there! But according to Quelch, it certainly had been there.

"If you have done this, Bunter——" said Mr. Quelch, in a deep, booming voice.

"Oh, no, sir!" howled Bunter. "I never went near your study, sir! I haven't seen that case since you took it away."

"I can scarcely believe that statement, Bunter. If you had taken the cigarette-case back, it would have been an act of disrespectful impudence—but on the part of any other boy, it would have been an act of pilfering. Did you, or did you not, take that cigarette-case from my overcoat?"

"No!" gasped Bunter. "Did you induce any other boy to recover it for you?"

"Oh, no! I haven't got it!" gasped the fat Owl. "I never asked any of the fellows to get it for me, sir. I never mentioned it in Cherry's study at supper, sir—you can ask the fellows who were there—they all heard me——"

"Shurrup, you blithering idiot!" breathed Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry——"

"Are you speaking to Bunter, Cherry?" rapped Mr. Quelch. "Take fifty lines for speaking to Bunter."

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"It appears," said Mr. Quelch grimly, "that you asked other boys to recover that cigarette-case for you, Bunter. No doubt one of them did so, and handed it to you. Now give it to me at once."

"He didn't, sir!" howled Bunter. "He came back and said it wasn't there. All the fellows heard him."

Herbert Vernon-Smith gave the fat Owl a black look. He was far from anxious for Mr. Quelch to learn that he had paid that surreptitious visit to the Form-master's study.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Then you admit that some Remove boy, at your request, went to my study to take away your cigarette-case, Bunter."

"Oh, no, sir! I never asked anybody! Besides, it wasn't for me—he wanted to look at it——"

Mr. Quelch's jaw set.

"Do you mean to say, Bunter, that a Remove boy went to take away the cigarette-case, and that he did not hand it to you?"

"He—he—he said it wasn't there, sir," stuttered Bunter. "I—I believed him, of course. I thought you'd locked it up, as he never had it."

"I scarcely understand this!" said Mr. Quelch. "The cigarette-case certainly was left in my coat pocket, and it certainly was taken away while I was in Common-room during the evening. It is impossible for me to believe that any Remove boy would take it and keep it. It can only have been taken to return to you, Bunter—and I order you to hand it back to me at once."

"I—I—I haven't got it—I—I——"

"Otherwise, Bunter, I shall cane you."

"Oh crikey! Look here, Smithy, you beast, you jolly well gimme that case!" howled the alarmed Owl. "I ain't jolly well going to be whopped because you're sticking to my cigarette-case! You can't expect it."

The Bounder set his lips.

The gimlet eyes were fixed on him now.

"Vernon-Smith!" said Mr. Quelch, in a rumbling voice. "Did you enter my study last evening and take Bunter's cigarette-case from my overcoat pocket?"

"No, sir!" answered the Bounder coolly.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter, blinking at the Bounder, with his eyes almost popping through his spectacles. "I say, you fellows, just hear him."

"Did you enter my study at all, Vernon-Smith?"

"Yes, sir!" answered the Bounder quietly. "I went to look for Bunter's cigarette-case, but it was not there."

"Oh, really, Smithy——"

"Silence, Bunter! You admit, Vernon-Smith, that you entered my study to take away an article that had been confiscated?" thundered Mr. Quelch.

"I wanted to see it, sir, because of something I had been told about it! I should have put it back again afterwards, as I knew that you would miss it," answered the Bounder. "I should not have given it to that fool Bunter! But I did not take it at all, as it was not there."

"It was left in my overcoat pocket, Vernon-Smith, and it is now missing."

"Then I suppose I wasn't first in the field, sir!" said Vernon-Smith. "Bunter must have had it before I went."

"I never——" yelled Bunter. "You jolly well know you had it, you beast, and you're jolly well sticking to it!"

"Silence, Bunter!" thundered Mr. Quelch. "How dare you make such an accusation? Obviously Vernon-Smith did nothing of the kind. Vernon-Smith, I believe your statement, of course, that you did not take the cigarette-case, and that it was not there when you looked for it; but that does not alter the fact that you entered my study with the intention of taking it away—a lawless and disrespectful act! You will take five hundred lines, Vernon-Smith!"

"Very well, sir," said the Bounder, with a glance at Bunter, which indicated a good time coming for the fat Owl after class.

"Bunter! No doubt you asked other boys, as well as Vernon-Smith, to fetch the cigarette-case for you. One of them, I have no doubt, did so."

"I—I might have mentioned it to a few fellows, sir!" groaned Bunter, "but if Skinner's got it——"

"Skinner!"

"I never touched it, sir!" exclaimed Skinner, in a great hurry. "Bunter asked me to get it, and I told him to go and eat coke!"

"If you've got it, Toddy——"

"You fat chump!"

"Todd! Did you——"

"No, sir!" answered Peter. "I believe Bunter asked half the Remove, but nobody was ass enough to do it!"

"There is no doubt," said Mr. Quelch, "that the cigarette-case has been taken. If you have not taken it, Bunter, it is clear that some other boy must have done so, at your request. In that case, it must have been handed over to you."

"Tain't!" shrieked Bunter.

"Is that silver cigarette-case in the possession of any boy here present?" demanded Mr. Quelch, looking over the Form.

No reply.

"Bunter——"

"I haven't got it, sir!" wailed Bunter. "I thought you'd locked it up, when Smithy came back and said it wasn't there."

"Very well," said Mr. Quelch. "Perhaps the article has not yet been returned to you, Bunter. I warn you, that if you are found in possession of it, you will be severely punished. I command you, when it is returned to you, to bring it to my study at once."

"Oh, certainly, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"I shall now," added Mr. Quelch, "cane you for having requested Remove boys to abstract a confiscated article from my study, Bunter."

"I—I—I didn't, sir——" yelled Bunter.

"What?"

"I—I never mentioned it to a soul, sir—never said a syllable about it! I—I—I'd forgotten it, sir—quite forgotten the whole thing——"

"Stand out before the Form, Bunter!"

"Oh crikey!"

Whop, whop, whop!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

Billy Bunter wriggled on his form during first lesson that morning. And he cast infuriated blinks at Herbert Vernon-Smith that almost cracked his spectacles.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER.

Boot For Bunter!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

"Fathead!"

"That beast Smithy——"

"Ass!"

"He's got my cigarette-case——"

"Idiot!"

After morning class Billy Bunter was in a state of excitement, of mingled wrath and apprehension.

In break that morning, Vernon-Smith had kicked him, and kicked him again, and kicked him yet again.

But if Smithy hoped that kicking would disabuse the fat Owl's mind of the idea that he had the cigarette-case, Smithy was disappointed.

Bunter was quite assured of that! Now the Famous Five were listening to his tale of woe.

"I say, you fellows, you can call a fellow names," hooted Bunter, "but you jolly well know he's got it! Didn't he go down from the study specially for it?"

"He told us it wasn't there, fathead!" said Bob.

"Well, Quelch says it's gone! I say, the beast kicked me, in break, because I knew he had it—"

"Serve you right!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter. "Think I'm going to have Smithy kicking me, because he's pinched my cigarette-case? Look here, Wharton, you're captain of the Form, and head boy, and you ought to make him hand it over."

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Head boy's duties don't include looking after cigarette-cases, old fat man," he answered.

"Smithy's got it—"

"You howling ass!" said Johnny Bull. "Smithy hasn't got it! Think Smithy would pinch a cigarette-case, you blithering chump?"

"Well, you see, he has—"

"You asked half the Remove to get it for you, you silly chump!" said Nugent. "Some fellow got it before Smithy got there, and he will hand it over to you—"

"Why hasn't he, then?"

"Blessed if I know. Nobody would keep it."

"Smithy's got it—"

"Fathead!"

"I say, you fellows, I can't ask him for it, because he kicks me whenever I go near him—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Oh, stop cackling!" roared Bunter. "I'm jolly well going to have my cigarette-case back from Smithy. The beast has got one of his own—and he's got tons of money to buy another if he wants it! He's jolly well not going to keep mine!"

"Smithy hasn't got it!" roared Harry Wharton.

"How do you know he hasn't—unless you have?" exclaimed Bunter, with a suspicious blink at the captain of the Remove. "I say, Wharton, if you've got it—"

"Why, you—you—you—"

"I don't mind letting you see it if you want to show Linley those Greek letters in it, but I ain't going to let you keep it! You can't expect it!" exclaimed Bunter warmly. "If you've got it—"

"Bump him!" said Harry.

"I say, you fellows— Yarooooop!" roared Bunter, as he sat down suddenly in the quad.

The Famous Five walked away—having heard quite enough of Bunter and his cigarette-case.

Bunter sat and roared, till Peter Todd kindly came and gave him a hand-up.

As Peter took hold of a fat ear to help him up, however, Bunter did not seem grateful. He roared again as he was assisted.

"Ow! Beast! Don't pull my ear off!" he yelled. "Ow! I say, Toddy, old chap, you could lick Smithy! You're no end of a scrapper, Toddy! I say, will you make that cad Smithy give me my cigarette-case back?"

"He hasn't got it, you burbling owl!"

"He jolly well has, and you jolly well know it!" hooted Bunter.

"He jolly well hasn't, and I jolly well know he jolly well hasn't!"

"Have you, Toddy?" asked Bunter—suspicious again.

"What?" ejaculated Toddy.

"Well, I mean to say, if you've got it—"

Bump!

Bunter sat down again.

He was sitting and spluttering when the Bounder came along.

Smithy did not offer him assistance. He stopped and fixed a deadly look on the fat, spluttering Owl.

Bunter blinked up at him.

"Still think I've got your cigarette-case, Bunter?" asked Vernon-Smith, very quietly.

"Eh? I jolly well know you have!" yapped Bunter.

Thud!

"Yarooooop!"

Bunter had been feeling too breathless to get on his feet. But as the Bounder's foot landed, he leaped up as if it had been electrified.

"Ow! Wow! Stoppit!" I say, you Gimme my cigarette-case, you cad— Yarooooop!"

Thud! Thud!

Billy Bunter bolted, without stopping to discuss the cigarette-case further.

After him went the Bounder, still kicking.

If booting Bunter could convince him that Smithy hadn't pinched his cigarette-case, Bunter ought to have been convinced. The Bounder dribbled him like a fat football.

"Ow! Wow! Stoppit! I say, you fellows, stoppin!" roared Bunter, charging up to the Famous Five, who were standing in a group at the gates.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I say— Yarooooop!" shrieked Bunter. "I say, Smithy, you—you can keep that cigarette-case, if you like— Whoooooop!"

Even that generous offer did not placate the Bounder! He kicked, and kicked again, and yet again; and as Bunter rushed out into the road, he rushed after him, still kicking.

Wild yells floated back, as Bunter bolted up Friardale Lane like a runaway steam-engine. Vernon-Smith followed him some distance, assisting his flight, before he turned and walked back to the gates.

Billy Bunter careered on, and did not stop till he reached the stile in the lane. He leaned on the stile, gurgling and gasping, and pumping in breath.

"Urrrrgh! Ooooooh! Urrrrgh! Grrrrgh!" gurgled the fat Owl.

He gasped, and gasped, and gasped. And a man muffled in a thick coat, with a hat pulled low over his brows, who stepped from the trees near the stile, stood watching him, with a smile of grim amusement.

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER.

All Right For Soames!

SOAMES smiled—grimly.

He had had to wait—since Billy Bunter's disappearance from Wharton Lodge in the holidays. But he had only to wait—he was sure of getting at the fat Owl again, when Greyfriars School reopened for the new term.

He was prepared to wait and watch patiently, lurking in the vicinity of the school, till he had a chance at Bunter. His chance had come sooner than he had hoped.

For a long minute he stood watching the gurgling, gasping Owl of the Remove. Then he stepped to him and touched him lightly on the shoulder.

"Ow! Keep off, Smithy, you beast!" yelled Bunter.

He spun round.

Then, as he saw

Soames, he gave a yelp of terror. Smithy would have been better than this!

"Oh crikey!" he gasped. "You! Oh lor!"

"Will you please step into the wood, Master Bunter?" asked Soames, in his smooth, deferential tones.

"Oh, no! I—I'd rather not! I—I've got to get back to dinner!" gasped Bunter. "I—I'm rather in a—hurry—" He broke off at the glitter in the steely eyes. "I—I mean, of—of course—j-j-just what I—I want—I—I—I—I'm so-so-so gug-gug-glad to sus-sus-see you again, Soames!"

"The pleasure is mutual!" said Soames ironically. "Come!"

Bunter rolled dismally into the trees, out of sight from the lane. During the last week or two he had almost forgotten Soames. He was most unpleasantly reminded of him now.

"I—I—I say, I—I ain't got it, you know!" he gasped. "I tut-tut-told you that beast Fishy had it, you know—"

"And I have learned since that you smashed Master Fish's bag at Wharton Lodge and kept back the cigarette-case!" said Soames quietly.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He wondered how on earth Soames knew that.

"Lying appears to be your long suit, Master Bunter!" said Soames. "But I warn you not to lie to me now. You have eluded me since you left Wharton Lodge, with a cunning I should hardly have expected from so stupid a fool."

"Oh, really, you know—"

"But I had only to wait for the new term to begin at your school," said Soames. "Thank you for coming out so opportunely, Master Bunter! Now hand me the cigarette-case, and I am done with you."

"I haven't got it—I really haven't!" howled Bunter, terrified by the look that came over Soames' face. "That beast Smithy has got it!"

"Master Herbert!" exclaimed Soames.

"Yes!" gasped Bunter. "He's pinched it!"

"I remember Master Herbert very well, having been for some years in his father's service," said Soames. "He has many faults, and very serious ones; but he certainly is incapable of pinching, as you call it, anything. I believed what you told me before—that he threw the cigarette-case out of his study window because you had filled it with his cigarettes. That is quite in keeping with Master Herbert's character. But he would no more steal a cigarette-case than he would hold up a bank!"

"But he has—"

Without replying again, the crook proceeded to search the trembling fat Owl. Then he stood looking at him, with a glint in his eyes that made Billy Bunter's blood run almost cold.

"Where is the cigarette-case?" he asked, between his teeth. "Tell me the truth this time, Master Bunter, or it will be very much the worse for you!"

"He's got it!" groaned Bunter. "You see, Quelch—that's my beak—saw me with it and took it away. Of course, we

(Continued on next page.)



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ain't allowed to have such things—and Quelch spotted it—and took it from me. He left it in his overcoat pocket in his study, and some fellow to get it for me— Oh lor'! And Smithy went—and came back and said— Keep off, you beast!"

Soames made a movement. But he checked himself, breathing hard.

"He—he came back and said it wasn't there!" gasped Bunter. "But Quelch said in Form this morning that it was gone, so I knew he'd had it. Oh dear!"

"You fat fool!" said Soames. "If Master Herbert said it was not there, it was not there! If what you tell me is true—" His steely eyes almost penetrated the fat, scared face. "Some other boy— Did Fish know where to look for it?"

"Fishy!" ejaculated Bunter. He gave quite a jump.

Soames' eyes glesmed. It was another check, another disappointment for him, but he could guess now how the matter lay.

"On a previous occasion," he said quietly, "the American boy Fish found the cigarette-case and retained it, as you told me. Is it possible that he has obtained it this time? Is he one of the boys you asked to get it for you?"

"The beast!" gasped Bunter. "I told him Quelch had it, and that he could have it for thirty bob if he got it out of his study—"

"So he knew?"

"He knew all right—the beast! Why, I remember he was at the supper in Bob's study," exclaimed Bunter, "and he cleared off before Smithy went down to look for it. Oh, that awful rotter! I jolly well know where he went now! No wonder Smithy never found it when he went!"

Billy Bunter breathed wrath.

In his exasperation, as he realised that it must have been Fishy who had taken that silver case from Quelch's study, he almost forgot his terror of Soames.

"The rotten cad!" said Bunter. "Just one of his tricks! He never dared get after it in Quelch's study; but then he heard me telling the fellows that Quelch had most likely left it in his overcoat pocket, so he only had to nip in and look while Quelch was in Common-room with the other beaks. I might have guessed—I mean, it ain't natural for a chap to go away before the end of a feed, you know; there was lots left when Fishy went—"

Soames stared at the fat Owl for a moment, and then smiled faintly.

He had no doubt now. Once more that silver cigarette-case was in the bony clutches of Fisher T. Fish.

"Wait till I get back!" breathed Bunter. "I'll make that cad cough it up! The other fellows will make him when I tell them. The awful rotter! They wouldn't back me up against Smithy; they kept on telling me that Smithy hadn't got it. But they'll know all right that Fishy's got it when I tell them. They know him, you see."

Soames eyed Bunter.

His first thought on learning that Fisher T. Fish had the prize again was to get rid of Bunter and keep a watch for a meeting with Fishy. He did not need telling why Fishy had pinched the article; it was for a "trade."

But now that his questions had enlightened Bunter it was clear that the fat junior was going back to the school as soon as he got away to claim the silver case back from Fishy.

Whether he would succeed, or whether

Fishy would succeed in keeping possession of the disputed article, was unknown to Soames; but in either case he could see his way clear now.

"Now, listen to me, Master Bunter!" said Soames quietly. "I want that cigarette-case very much, as you are aware. You have mentioned that you were going to sell it to Fish for thirty shillings."

"Well, I shouldn't be able to keep it, you know, with Quelch—"

"Quite so! If you regain possession of it, Master Bunter, I will buy it from you for twice as much."

"Eh?"

"If you will take three pounds for it, Master Bunter—"

"Wouldn't I just?" said Bunter, his eyes glinting behind his spectacles. "I mean to say, it don't belong to anybody in particular. I shan't ever see that man with the game leg again who gave it to me, I expect—"

"Probably not," assented Soames, with a smile. Soames knew, if Bunter did not, that nobody was likely to see Rat Hankey outside prison walls for three years to come.

"And I never found that man Thompson at Pegg that it was sent to," went on Bunter. Then he gave a start as he remembered what Smithy had said on that subject. "Oh, if—if it was you—I mean, if—if you were calling yourself Thompson—"

"So you have thought of that, Master Bunter?" said Soames ironically.

"Well, I'm pretty keen, you know," said Bunter. "I rather think that there wasn't really any Thompson at all, but only you. I mean to say, it looks to me as if that man with the game leg thought your name was Thompson. I shouldn't wonder if you told him so."

"What! Oh, yes!" gasped Soames. "You are a very bright lad, Master Bunter; you have a very penetrating intellect."

"I fancy I'm fairly keen," said Bunter complacently. "Well, look here, I'm going to get that silver case off Fishy, and I'll let you have it for three pounds—of course I will! Wharton says it ain't worth more than thirty shillings; but it jolly well must be, or Fishy wouldn't offer thirty bob for it! He's too jolly mean!"

He blinked uneasily at Soames.

"I—I say, you—you mean it about the three quid?" he asked. "You ain't just pulling my leg to get hold of it for nothing?"

"Not at all!" smiled Soames. "You shall have every assurance, Master Bunter. You may hand it to me in a public place if you like, where I could not possibly take it from you by violence—in the Market Square at Courtfield, if you choose, or in the village street at Friardale."

"Well, it's a jolly long walk to Courtfield," said Bunter. "I could get down to Friardale after dinner. I shall jolly well have it by then, if Fishy's got it—and I jolly well know he has now!"

"I shall look for you in the village street, Master Bunter," said Soames very genially.

"C-o-can I—I go now?" gasped Bunter.

"Certainly! I regret," said Soames in his smooth tones, "that there has ever been any disagreement on this subject, Master Bunter. We have now made an amicable arrangement, beneficial to both parties. It will be wiser not to mention having met me; it might place difficulties in the way of your coming—"

"Oh, yes, rather!" agreed Bunter. "I shan't say a word, of course—no fear! I say—"

"Yes?"

"You'll have the three pounds with you?"

"Certainly!" smiled Soames. "Good-bye, Master Bunter, till I see you in Friardale!"

Billy Bunter shot out of the wood into the lane.

Twice, thrice, he blinked back over a fat shoulder as he rolled off towards the school. Amicable as Soames now was, Bunter had by no means lost his dread of him.

But he saw no more of Soames, and he arrived at Greyfriars in a very cheery mood just as the dinner-bell was ringing. Bunter was feeling quite bucked as he rolled in to dinner.

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER.

Shaken Out!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

"Roll away, barrel!"

"Fishy's got it!"

"Got what?"

"My cigarette-case!"

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Bob Cherry. "Fishy now? It was Smithy this morning! Sure Wingate of the Sixth hasn't got it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter caught the Famous Five as the Remove came out after dinner. He required assistance in extracting that cigarette-case from Fisher T. Fish. It was not much use asking Fishy for it.

"I say, you fellows, don't cackle!" he snapped. "You know that Fishy got it once and stuck to it. He heard me say in Bob's study that it was in Quelch's overcoat pocket; and you know how he sneaked off before the spread was over—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Harry.

"By gum, I shouldn't wonder!" said Bob. "Fishy's worm enough! And I jolly well remember he cleared off early from the spread. I wonder—"

"I know he's got it!" declared Bunter. "I never thought of it at first, as Smithy went after it; but Soames knew at once—"

"Soames!" exclaimed the Famous Five together.

"Oh, no, not Soames!" exclaimed Bunter hastily. "I haven't seen Soames. I haven't been out of gates to-day at all, you know."

"You benighted Ananias, we saw you roll out—with Smithy's boot behind you!" growled Johnny Bull.

"Oh, I—I mean, I—I just went for a walk!" explained Bunter. "I never met anybody at all. I haven't seen Soames, and never spoke to him. Of course, I wouldn't! A man who was old Smith's valet—as if I'd speak to him!"

Harry Wharton & Co. stared at Bunter. That he had seen Soames while out of gates was clear, but it was a puzzle. Having seen Soames, they would have expected him to come in palpitating with funk; instead of which, it seemed that he desired to keep the meeting dark, for some mysterious reason of his own.

"I say, you fellows, you're going to make Fishy hand it over, ain't you?" asked Bunter anxiously. "I can't go to Quelch about it, or he would take it, instead of Fishy. I expect my pals to stand by me."

"If Fishy's got it, we'll make him cough it up fast enough," said Harry Wharton. "I think very likely he has; somebody has, and Smithy certainly hasn't."

"Come on, then!" said Bunter. "I say, you fellows, you get that cigarette-case back for me, and I'll stand you a spread for tea."



"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry, as he groped in the earthy hollow, and his fingers closed on something that felt like leather. "Got it!" gasped Nugent. "Look!" "Oh, my hat!" Bob Cherry held up a leather wallet, and all eyes fixed on it eagerly.

"Has that jolly old postal order come at last?" grinned Bob.

"I shall be in funds this afternoon," said Bunter. "I'm not going to talk, you fellows, but you can take it from me that I shall be in funds all right. But I've got to get that cigarette-case first. You fellows make Fishy cough it up. See?"

"Where is he?" asked Bob. "Anybody seen a bony fish hanging about?"

"He's gone up to his study—"
"Follow on!" said Bob; and the Famous Five went into the House, and up to the Remove passage; Billy Bunter rolling after them with bright and happy anticipation in his fat face.

The amount of tuck that could be obtained for three pounds was positively dazzling to Bunter! His mouth watered at the thought of it. And that sum was as good as in his fat hands! At all events, Bunter thought that it was—rather forgetting the ancient proverb that there is many a slip 'twixt cup and lip!

Johnny Bull hurled open the door of Study No. 14, which was his study as well as Fishy's.

Fisher T. Fish was seated there, with an expression of deep and earnest cogitation on his bony face.

Fishy was, in point of fact, thinking out the problem of getting "in touch" with the man who was willing to pay twenty pounds for a silver cigarette-case with some Greek letters scratched inside!

He jumped as the door flew open, and glared round at the juniors as they tramped in.

"Say, what the great horned toad is—" he snapped.

"Gimme my cigarette-case, you bony beast!" howled Billy Bunter. "I say, you fellows, you make him hand it over!"

Fisher T. Fish rose from his chair, his bony jaw squaring.

"You fat goob!" he said. "What'd I know about your cigarette-case—and it ain't yourn, nohow! Didn't I say, fair and square, at Wharton Lodge, that I'd hand it over to you if you proved it was yourn; and did you?"

"Beast! Gimme—"
"Have you got it, Fishy?" asked Harry Wharton quietly.

"I guess I ain't answering any questions, old-timer!" said Fisher T. Fish coolly. "What's put that idea into your head?"

"Bunter has seen Soames—"
"I say, I haven't!" yelled Bunter. "He told me specially not to mention that I'd seen him, and I haven't. I never said a word—"

"Bunter has seen Soames, and Soames seems to have guessed somehow that you had it, and told Bunter!" went on Wharton unheeding. "And it seems to us jolly likely, as you took it before, and stuck to it. Hand it over!"

"Say, is it yourn?" asked Fisher T. Fish sarcastically. "I'll tell a man that it ain't yourn, any more than it's that fat clam's!"

"It is not Bunter's, and it is not yours!" said Harry. "We want it, in the first place, to show Linley, to see whether he can make anything of those Greek letters in it—in the second place, whether Bunter has any right to it or not, he has more right than you have."

Fisher T. Fish shrugged his bony shoulders.

"If Bunter opines that I got anything of his'n, all he's got to do is to go to Quelch about it!" he answered.

"You bony beast, you know I can't go to Quelch—"

"Shut the door after you!" said Fisher T. Fish.

"Have you got that case?" roared Bob Cherry.

"I guess I said shut that door after you!"

"Shake it out of him, if he's got it!" said Bob.

"Good egg!"
"Hyer, you walk your chalks!" yelled Fisher T. Fish in alarm, as the Famous Five surrounded him. "I guess—I reckon—I'll tell a man—leggo—doggone you, will you leggo a guy—aw, wake snakes, this here is the bee's knee! Yaroop!"

Fisher T. Fish, struggling wildly, was grasped in five pairs of hands. They swung him off his feet, and reversed him.

A bony head tapped on the study floor. Two bony legs thrashed wildly. A voice like a saw was heard on its top note!

"Gee-whiz! Say, you galoots—leggo! Aw, my cabeza! Yaroop!"
Shake, shake, shake!

"He, he, he!" gurgled Billy Bunter. "Leggo!" shrieked Fisher T. Fish. "Aw! Carry me home to die! Great John James Brown! Yoo-hoop!"

All sorts of things streamed out of Fisher T. Fish's pockets, as he was shaken vigorously upside down! Among them was a cigarette-case!

"I say, you fellows, there it is!" yelled Bunter, and he pounced.

Harry Wharton picked it up before the fat paw could reach it.

"Leggo!" raved Fisher T. Fish.

The juniors let go—suddenly! There was a terrific crash as Fisher T. Fish spread his bony length along the floor.

Fisher T. Fish rolled and yelled.

The Famous Five walked out of Study No. 14, leaving him rolling and yelling. After them scudded Bunter, with fat hands outstretched for the cigarette-case. After all of them sounded the anguished howls of Fisher T. Fish.

"Ow! Wow! Aw, search me! Wow! Aw, my cabeza—wow! My bones! Ow! Wow! I'll say this is

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ferce! Wow! Aw, wake snakes! Wow!

Fisher T. Fish picked himself up dizzily. He rubbed his bony limbs, and gasped and groaned. He had an ache in every bone in his bony person; and for a long, long time, Fishy forgot the cigarette-case as he rubbed those aching bones!

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER.

Spotting The Secret!

MARK LINLEY stared. He stood in Study No. 13 with the silver cigarette-case in his hand—the Famous Five watching him, and waiting for the verdict.

Billy Bunter, in a state of breathless indignation, blinked in at the study doorway. The fat Owl did not object to anybody or everybody seeing the Greek letters in that cigarette-case; but he was in a hurry.

There was none too much time to get down to Friar-dale and back before afternoon class. In the village waited Soames, with three pounds for Bunter—if he arrived with that cigarette-case! Naturally, Bunter wanted to arrive.

If he did not lose a moment, there was a chance of getting back to the school in time for a snack at the tuck-shop before the bell rang.

In these pressing circumstances, Bunter had no time to waste while fellows bothered about those silly Greek letters in the silver case.

Bunter wanted to start!

"This is jolly odd," said Mark. The Lancashire junior was one of the few fellows in the Remove who did Greek; and the Famous Five relied on him to elucidate the meaning—if any—of the Greek letters in the silver case.

He seemed puzzled, and at the same time a little amused.

"I say, you fellows—" came a fat squeak from the door.

"Shut up, Bunter!" hooted the Famous Five together.

"Shan't!" hooted back Bunter.

"That's my cigarette-case, ain't it?"

"No!" "Beast!" roared Bunter. "Think I've let you take it away from Fishy to stick to it! Gimme my cigarette-case! I've got to get off—"

"Get off, then, you fat frump!" "I can't go without the cigarette-case, you fathead!" howled Bunter. "How can I sell it if I haven't got it?"

"You fat, fooling, fraudulent frump, you're not going to sell a thing that doesn't belong to you! Shut up!" "It's mine!" yelled Bunter. "I say, you fellows, give it to me! I shall be late for class if I don't start now! Now give it to me. I ain't going to wait!"

"Will you shut up?" roared Bob Cherry.

"No, I won't! I say— Whoop!" Five exasperated fellows rushed at Billy Bunter! They all booted him together!

Bunter, yelling, flew down the Remove passage.

The door of Study No. 13 slammed after him.

"Now, Marky—" said Bob.

Mark Linley laughed. "This is jolly odd," he said. "But it's simple enough to any fellow who knows the Greek alphabet."

"Well, we know the Greek letters, more or less," said Harry. "But not what all of them mean in English letters."

"That's it," said Mark.

"But a Greek chap looked at it at Wharton Lodge, and he couldn't make anything of it," said Harry.

Mark laughed again.

"He couldn't have known English, then," he said; "I mean, he couldn't have been able to read English."

"Right on goal," said Bob. "He couldn't—he spoke it, but did not read or write it. I remember Colonel Wharton saying so. Blessed if I see how you've guessed it, though."

"Elementary, my dear Watson, as Sherlock Holmes would say," answered Mark Linley, laughing. "An English chap who did not know the English equivalents for Greek letters could not read this—and a Greek who did not know the English printed language could not read it. It must have seemed

to him just a higgledy-piggledy collection of Greek letters—"

"That's what he called it," said Harry. "But do you mean to say that you can make it out, Linley?"

"Easily. As I happen to know printed English, and Greek letters, too," said Mark, with a smile. "It's simple. Whoever scratched these letters in the metal was writing a message, using English words, but Greek letters."

"Oh! English words. That's why old Konstantinopoulous wasn't wise to it, then!" exclaimed Nugent.

"That's why. The spelling is English, but the letters are Greek. It's a trick to write a message in ordinary English, but one that could not be read if it fell into the wrong hands—unless the chap happened to know the Greek alphabet, of course, which most people don't."

"Oh, then all you've got to do is to change those Greek letters into English letters, and we shall read an English word!"

"More than one word—they're run together, either to save space or to make it more puzzling—perhaps both," said Mark. "I'll write down the English letters for you, anyhow."

He dipped a pen into the inkpot and wrote on a sheet of impot paper, the Famous Five watching him eagerly:

**"SEEKINTHEDITCHOPPOSITE
STILEINFRIARDALELANE."**

Harry Wharton & Co. stared at it. Even in English letters, it looked rather a puzzle as it stood.

Mark, smiling, drew lines dividing the words that were run together. Then it was clear enough.

**"SEEK IN THE DITCH, OPPOSITE
STILE IN FRIARDALE LANE."**

"Oh!" exclaimed the Famous Five.

"It's a message of some sort," said Mark. "Somebody's hidden something in the ditch opposite the stile in Friar-dale Lane—and scratched this message to tell somebody else—"

"By gum!" said Bob. "Pretty plain now why Soames was after it! That message would mean something to Soames."

"But what the thump—" said Nugent.

"Goodness knows!" said Harry Wharton. "That man we saw before Christmas come a cropper on his motor-bike must be the game-legged man who gave this to Bunter to take to Soames—or Thompson, as he called him. It can only mean that he hid something in the ditch, for Soames to collect afterwards."

"The meanfulness is terrific," said Hurree Jamsot Ram Singh, with a gleam in his dark eyes. "And as the esteemed Soames is a delectable and disgusting crook, the other man was likely a crook also, and whatever it was that he had hidden ditchfully did not belong to him."

"Some sort of plunder," said Bob breathlessly. "Oh, my hat! Why, he may have been getting away from a robbery or something when we saw him pelting along on that jigger in the snow, risking his neck—"

"Must be something of the sort, and something jolly valuable, for Soames to be after it like a dog after a bone," said Johnny Bull. "No wonder he was fearfully keen to get hold of that cigarette-case!"

"Lots of time for a run on the bikes before class," said Harry. "Now we've got the clue, we're jolly well going to

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see what's hidden in that ditch opposite the stile in Friardale Lane."

"Yes, rather."

"The ratherfulness is terrific."

The Famous Five rushed from the study, leaving Mark Linley smiling. They rushed down the Remove passage.

On the Remove landing a fat figure barred their way.

"I say, you fellows—" squeaked Bunter.

The Owl of the Remove got no further than that. The Famous Five were in a hurry, and they had no time to go round Bunter, so they went over him.

Bunter bumped, and the five trod over a sprawling, yelling, spluttering, fat figure, and cut on down the stairs.

Bunter sat up breathlessly.

"Ooogh! I say, you fellows— Ooogh! Beasts! I say, gimme that— Ooogh! Stop, you rotters, and gimme that— Groooogh!"

But the Famous Five were gone. They had cut down to the bike shed and wheeled out their jiggers before Billy Bunter got his second wind.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

Loot!

THERE was snow in Friardale Lane, filling the cart-ruts, powdering the hedges, ridged on leafless branches of the trees.

The ditch along one side of the lane was still full to the very brim with snow, as it had been on that December day when the juniors had seen Rat Hankey speeding along on his motor-bike, skidding and crashing. But they put on a good speed, all the same, eager to "seek in the ditch opposite the stile in Friardale Lane"—now that the secret of the cigarette-case had been spotted.

"This is where the motor-bike went over!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, a little distance short of the stile. "There was a rut under the snow, and it skidded in it, and— Yaroooooh!"

Obviously, Bob had spotted the very spot, for as he was speaking his bike wobbled in that very rut and went suddenly over.

Bump!

"Oooh! Whoop!" spluttered Bob, as he went.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Found the spot all right, old man!" grinned Johnny Bull. "Right on the spot, and no mistake!"

"The rightfulness is terrific."

Bob scrambled up, gasping, and collected his jigger. The other four dismounted.

Well they remembered how the beak-nosed man's motor-bike had gone crashing into the ditch and sunk out of sight under the snow. They wondered whether it was still there. It was likely enough, for all through Christmas the snow had remained unmelted, and the surface was unbroken, giving no hint of what might lie below.

They wheeled their bicycles on, to the stile. It was on that stile that they had left the motor-cyclist on that December afternoon nursing his injured leg. That it was the man who had "tipped" Bunter to carry a verbal message, and a cigarette-case with a hidden message, to the man who waited at Pegg they could hardly doubt.

The bikes were stacked against the stile, and they walked across the lane to the ditch opposite the stile.

It was piled with snow—a little more thickly, perhaps, since that December day, but otherwise unchanged.

But the juniors had come prepared for that, having borrowed the largest trowels they could find in the gardener's shed.

Quickly they set to work, trowelling snow.

"Jolly good place for a hide-out," remarked Bob Cherry. "No chance of a thing getting spotted here till the thaw."

"And that sportsman with the game leg expected Soames to get after it as soon as he got the message in the cigarette-case," said Harry. "But it could lie here for weeks at this time of the year, and nobody would ever know."

"It's lain here all through Christmas, anyhow," said Nugent. "Unless—"

"Unless what?"

Frank Nugent laughed.

"Unless the game-legged sportsman came back for it!" he said.

"Oh!" said Bob.

But Harry Wharton shook his head.

"Not likely," he said. "If he meant to come back for it, why should he have sent that secret message to Soames? Something happened to that game-legged johnny to keep him out of touch with Soames—that's plain enough. If Soames had had word from him he wouldn't have wanted the cigarette-case."

"Of course!" exclaimed Bob. "But what the dickens—"

"If he was some crook on the run—and I jolly well believe now that he was—he may have been nailed by the police," said Harry. "Anyhow, the fact that Soames is after the clue proves that he hasn't got word to Soames."

"It jolly well does!" agreed Johnny Bull. "Whatever he stuck in this ditch is still here, and we're going to spot it."

It was cold and frosty weather—a bitter January day, but the five juniors were soon warm enough, if not a little too warm, as they laboured at trowelling out the mass of snow.

But many hands made light work, and soon they had delved deep into the snow-packed ditch opposite the stile.

Nothing, however, appeared in sight except snow, and mud under it, and they widened the excavation till all five of them were able to stand in it on the frozen mud at the bottom.

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

He was examining the ditch, and he detected a hollow in the bank at the depth of an arm's length from the top edge towards the road. He groped in that earthy hollow, and his fingers closed on something that felt like damp leather.

"Got it?" gasped Nugent.

"Look!"

"Oh, my hat!"

Bob Cherry held up a leather wallet. All eyes fixed on it eagerly. It had been stuffed into that hollow under the bank, evidently by a man stooping over the edge, and thrusting his arm down into the snow in the ditch.

It might have remained hidden there, unseen and unsuspected, even after the snow had melted. Nobody would have been likely to investigate that hollow in the side of the ditch at any time, unless some ditcher, at work when the spring came, found the wallet there by chance.

It had been safe enough—quite safe, until the clue in the silver cigarette-case was read. But now—

"That's it," said Harry. "Anything else there?"

He groped in the muddy hollow under the bank; but there was nothing else, except mud and snow.

"Now we're going to see what we shall see," chuckled Bob, as he scrambled out of the ditch, the wallet in his hand. His chums followed him fast.

Every face was eager as the wallet was opened.

What they were going to see they did not know; but that it was loot of some sort they could hardly doubt. All the evidence pointed to that. But though they expected something of the kind, there was a general jump when the wallet was opened, and its contents revealed.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bob, as he stared at wads of banknotes and currency notes. "Great Christopher Columbus!"

"Great pip!"

"No wonder Soames wanted it!" gasped Nugent. "Why there must be hundreds of pounds there!"

"Hundreds and hundreds!" said Johnny Bull. "More than a thousand pounds, I'll bet! Whose the dickens is it? Not Soames', and not that game-legged sportsman's."

"No fear!"

Harry Wharton whistled.

"We can't be sure, I suppose," he said slowly. "But everything points to this money being stolen! A man doesn't hide his own money in a ditch, and send secret messages to a crook about it."

"Hardly," grinned Bob.

"It's been pinched, of course," said Johnny Bull. "That man with the game leg was running with it, and he knew he could never get away with his crooked leg, and he hid it here, and got that secret message off to Soames. It's as plain as daylight now."

"The plainfulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Janset Ram Singh. "And the esteemed and absurd peelers are the persons to deal with that cash."

"Shove it in your coat pocket, Bob, and let's get off to Courtfield," said Harry. "The sooner that is handed over to Inspector Grimes the better. He will know whether it's been pinched or not."

"We shall be late for class; but I suppose, in the jolly old circus—"

"Blow class! Come on!"

The juniors packed the trowels on their bikes, the wallet of banknotes was crammed into Bob's coat pocket, and they mounted and rode back up the lane.

The way to Courtfield took them past the gates of Greyfriars School, and in that gateway a fat figure stood, blinking out through a pair of big spectacles.

Billy Bunter waved a fat hand as the Famous Five came in sight.

"I say, you fellows!" he yelled.

"Can't stop, old fat bean!" called back Bob.

"Gimme my cigarette-case!" yelled Bunter. "Wharton, you beast, gimme my cigarette-case!"

Harry Wharton laughed, and jerked the silver case from his pocket. It was done with now, and the fat Owl was welcome to it.

"Catch!" he called out.

He tossed the cigarette-case to Bunter without stopping.

Bunter caught it with his fat, little nose.

"Wow!" roared Bunter.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!"

The Famous Five, laughing, careered onward.

Billy Bunter rubbed his nose with one hand, and picked up the cigarette-case with the other.

There was still time to see Soames

in the village, and Bunter rolled off in hot haste.

Half-way to Friardale he passed the stile, without even noticing the excavation in the snow in the ditch opposite. Puffing and blowing, he rolled on to the village which he reached, what time the Famous Five, going all out in the opposite direction, reached Courtfield.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

A Surprise For Mr. Grimes!

INSPECTOR GRIMES opened his eyes.

He opened them wide.

He fairly blinked.

Why five Greyfriars juniors had called upon him the inspector did not know, when a constable showed them into his room at Courtfield Police Station. And when Bob Cherry laid a leather wallet, open, on his table, and the inspector gazed at the cash crammed in it, he doubted his vision.

"What," gasped Mr. Grimes—"what—what—"

"Treasure-trove!" explained Bob. "We'd rather like to make it findings keepings, Mr. Grimes, but perhaps the owner of this stuff might object. So we thought we'd hike it along to you."

"Where—what—how—" gasped Mr. Grimes.

He broke off, and examined the contents of the wallet, which he poured out on the table.

He made little stacks of banknotes and pound notes and ten-shilling notes, and compared numbers with a list he took from a drawer.

The juniors watched him in silence. The inspector's eyes were gleaming. They could see, plainly enough, that he was acquainted with that heap of money—that he was identifying it as the proceeds of some robbery of which they had never heard.

When he had finished counting and comparing, he looked across the table at the Greyfriars fellows.

"All there?" asked Bob, with a grin.

"Every shilling," said Mr. Grimes. "Twelve hundred and ten pounds ten shillings—the whole sum that was raided from Lantham Post Office a few days before Christmas."

"Oh, so that was it!" said Harry Wharton. "We sort of fancied that it had been snaffled from somewhere, Mr. Grimes."

"And where," said Mr. Grimes, "did you boys find this?"

"Hidden in the ditch, opposite the stile in Friardale Lane," said Harry, smiling.

Mr. Grimes pursed his lips.

"That's where they got him," he said.

"Man with a game leg?" asked Bob.

"Exactly! Rat Hankey is what he is called. But what do you boys know about him?" asked the inspector sharply.

"Nothing, so far," answered Harry. "But we're jolly curious to know something, Mr. Grimes. We saw him come a purler on his motor-bike a few days before the school broke up for Christmas. But, of course, we never knew anything about him, or what he had been up to. We helped him to the stile, and left him sitting there, and never saw him again."

"And he was getting away with that stack of loot from Lantham?" asked Bob.

"He was, with the Lantham police after him," said Mr. Grimes. "They got him at that very stile—all in, with

a badly damaged leg. He had no chance of getting away. He was at the last gasp when they found him and got him, and nothing on him. He made out that he had thrown the loot into Lantham Chase, which only proved that it was nowhere near Lantham Chase. And all the time—"

Mr. Grimes pursed his lips again.

"It's been hunted for, high and low," he went on. "But there wasn't much chance while the snow's on the ground. Even his motor-bike has never been found—"

"We can tip you where to find it, if you want it," grinned Bob. "We saw it go into the ditch. It's under the snow there."

"So that's why he never came back for the loot, and never sent word to Soames," said Johnny Bull. "He's in chokey."

"He is certainly in chokey, as you call it," said Inspector Grimes dryly, "and has certainly had no opportunity of sending word to anybody. But what do you mean by Soames? I remember, Master Wharton, you telephoned me a few days before Christmas that you had seen the crook of that name at Pegg, but he was not there when he was looked for."

"We've seen quite a lot of him during the hols.," said Harry, smiling. "He's haunted us like a Christmas ghost—and we know why now."

"You had better give me all the particulars," said Mr. Grimes.

Inspector Grimes' eyes opened wide again—wider than before—as he listened to the strange tale of the silver cigarette-case.

"By gum!" he said, several times.

"By gum! If that cigarette-case had fallen into my hands, or any official hand. I suppose you boys had never heard of the raid on the post office at Lantham—"

"Not a word," answered Harry. "I suppose we might have, only the school broke up so soon afterwards, and we cleared off for the Christmas holidays. Of course, we never had the faintest idea that that game-logged johnny was a hold-up man."

"Where is the cigarette-case now?" asked Mr. Grimes.

"I gave it back to Bunter."

"Then tell Master Bunter that it must be handed over to me. It must be in official hands," said Mr. Grimes.

He paused.

"You have done your duty, my boys, in handing this money over to the police," he said. "I shall report your action in the proper quarter. I need hardly say that, if you see anything more of Soames, or hear anything more of him, you will give me an immediate ring on the telephone."

"Of course!" said Harry.

"One good turn deserves another!" said Bob Cherry, with a grin. "Like to give our beak a ring on the telephone, Mr. Grimes?"

"Eh—why?" asked the inspector, staring.

"Because we shall be fearfully late for class owing to performing these jolly old duties, and Quelch will get his hair off!"

Mr. Grimes grinned.

"I shall certainly speak at once to Mr. Quelch on the telephone," he said. "I am sure he will excuse you for being late, in the circumstances, especially as I shall tell him that you have performed a public duty, and acted in a way that is a credit to your school."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob.

And the juniors left Mr. Grimes, and went back to their bikes in a very cheery and satisfied mood, leaving the Courtfield inspector equally cheery and satis-

fied as he surveyed the stack of money on his desk, which it had seemed improbable would ever meet official eyes.

"Put it on, you men!" said Bob, as the Famous Five rode out of Courtfield. "Mustn't be too fearfully late, though we're jolly old credits to our school."

And the juniors put it on; but they were late—very late—for class when they wheeled their jiggers in at Greyfriars.

All the Remove stared at them when they came into the Form-room; and all the Remove expected to see Quelch turn his grimmest glare upon them and reach for his cane.

Instead of which, Quelch gave them a glance, a nod, and a smile! Evidently Inspector Grimes' telephone call had preceded the arrival of the late-comers.

"Sorry we're late, sir!" said Harry.

"Not at all, Wharton, in the circumstances," said Mr. Quelch graciously. "You may go to your places."

Which was a great surprise to the Remove.

"You're in luck," the Bounder whispered to Bob Cherry, as Bob sat down. "What have you been up to?"

"Performing public duties, old bean," said Bob cheerily.

"Eh?"

"Did you know I was a credit to this school, Smithy?"

"Never fancied so for a moment," answered Smithy.

Bob chuckled.

"Well, you know it now—official!" he said.

"What the dickens—"

"Silence in class, please!" said Mr. Quelch severely. "Wharton!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Bunter was not with you in Courtfield, I presume?"

"Bunter? No, sir!"

Harry Wharton glanced round, and noticed now that the fat Owl was missing from his place.

The Famous Five were late, but the Owl of the Remove, apparently, was going to be later.

"Very well," said Mr. Quelch, compressing his lips in a manner that really indicated that it was far from well.

And the lesson proceeded—minus Bunter.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

And When He Got There—

BILLY BUNTER opened the door of the Remove Form-room—about half an hour later—and blinked in uneasily.

He had cause for uneasiness.

A Remove man who turned up for class more than an hour late had something to expect from Quelch, not of a pleasant nature.

A pair of gimlet eyes fixed on Bunter as he appeared. All other eyes in the Form-room fixed on him at the same moment.

Where Bunter had been nobody knew, but how he had been occupied was evident at a glance. Neither Sherlock Holmes nor Ferrers Locke would have been required to detect the clues that were numerous on Bunter—they leaped to the eye.

There was jam on Bunter; he was of the jam, jammy! There were crumbs on him; he was of the crumbs, crumby! There was cream on him; he was of the cream, creamy! He was, in fact, sticky all over!

As the school shop was not open during class, he had not been there. But that he had been fearfully busy in some similar establishment was very clear.

Not only was he jammy, crumby,

creamy, sticky; he was breathing very hard—almost stertorously. Cold as the weather was, there was perspiration on his fat brow.

Somewhere or other, out of gates, it was clear that Billy Bunter had enjoyed a feast of the gods—to such an extent that traces of it were left all over him, and he seemed to have had some difficulty in carrying it back to the school with him.

Where Bunter had raised the wind for such a feed as he evidently had disposed of was rather a mystery, for only that morning he had been trying to borrow a "bob" up and down the Remove, and it was improbable that his celebrated postal order had arrived. Yet it was obvious that the fat Owl had been expending cash—quite a lot of cash, to judge by his look.

"Bunter!" Mr. Quelch's voice had a razor-like edge on it. "What does this

"Then you will return here, and I shall cane you!"

"Oh crikey!"

A jammy, crumby, sticky Owl rolled away, leaving the Remove grinning and the Remove master frowning.

That Bunter had not heard the bell for class was very probable, as he had been in the village tuckshop, a mile away. But it was probable that he had been too busy to think of the bell or of class.

Obviously, he had come into funds in some mysterious way, and, naturally, he had expended the same in refreshments, liquid and solid, at the nearest place where such refreshments were obtainable; and, thus occupied, the fat Owl had been blind and deaf to everything else.

No doubt, after that Gargantuan feed, Bunter had been startled and dismayed to discover how late it was, and

doubt it had been a gorgeous feast, but the reckoning was painful.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Yow-ow, yow!" roared Bunter.

Whack, whack, whack!

"Ooh-wooh-whoop!"

"You may now go to your place, Bunter," said Mr. Quelch, laying down the cane; "and if you utter any further ridiculous ejaculations, I shall cane you again!"

Billy Bunter tottered to his place, contriving to suppress further ridiculous ejaculations.

He wriggled rather painfully in his place during the remainder of that afternoon's lessons.

But towards time for dismissal the fat Owl brightened up.

The effect of the licking was wearing off, and he had happy anticipations to follow class. His fat face was almost beaming when Mr. Quelch dismissed the

RED AND BLACK—a grand game when there are eight or more guests. The rules seem a bit complicated, but once you've got on to them, you'll enjoy it. Here they are—

1. Put a circle of chairs—or a half-circle round the fire, if you like—a chair for each player and one over. The extra one is an armchair, which is called HOME. You can put it where you like, but it's usually near the fire. Nobody sits in this chair when the game starts.

2. Pick up sides, an equal number of guests on each side. The host controls the game, but does not play. You can take turns at being "host." The sides are RED and BLACK.

3. Take a pack of cards. Pick out the HEART suit and then the SPADE suit, and put each suit somewhere handy—on the mantelpiece. Then pick out the Ace, 2 and 3 of DIAMONDS and the Ace, 2 and 3 of CLUBS. The host keeps these six cards. The rest of the pack is not used.

4. The game starts by the host offering the six cards, face-downwards, to any player, who chooses a card and then returns it. If, say, the 2 of DIAMONDS is chosen, then all the red players move two chairs in a clockwise direction—to the left. If any black player is seated on the second chair to the left, the red player sits on his lap. If any red player lands in the HOME chair, he calls for and is given a red card—that is, one of the HEART cards on the mantelpiece. Then the host offers the six cards to any

GAY GAMES

for your

NEW YEAR'S PARTY!

other player, who may perhaps choose the Ace of Clubs, at which all the BLACK players move one place to the left, with the same procedure. And so on.

5. The object of the game is to obtain all the RED or BLACK cards before the other side. The winning side is that which gets all its cards first, by visiting the HOME chair and calling for a HEART or SPADE card according to which side you are on.

6. A player cannot move if there is anyone sitting on his lap. He sits where he is until he is free to move. It often happens that there are a dozen players sitting on the same chair, with the other chairs all empty! Well, the bottom man's in for a good long sit! Only the top player can move when his side turns up lucky.

7. The winning player on the winning side is the one who has managed to get to the HOME chair most times, and consequently has most cards to show at the end.

Try this at your party this year. It's an unusual game, with tons of fun and excitement.

GHOSTS is a good game, in which

you can play sides. You need an electric-torch, fairly powerful. One side go out of the room, the room is plunged in darkness, the other side sit waiting. Those out of the room come in one by one, disguised with hats, false moustaches made by ink or anything else they please. A curtain is stretched across the doorway. The room is in darkness. Suddenly the player who enters switches on the torch which is held beneath his chin, shining upwards on his face. The other side have to guess who it is. This is mighty difficult, for, apart from disguises, the shadows of the face are absolutely eerie, and the curtain prevents anything but the face from being seen. The player goes out, and then the next one comes in, and so on. The other side have to decide who is who, and make a list. Then they take their turn and go out.

The side which makes the most correct guesses wins.

SPOT THE OBJECT is a good competition game for all the guests. You announce that in every room in the house there is some object which normally ought not to be in that particular room. For instance, an egg-cup in the parlour, or a walking-stick in the kitchen. Guests have to spot these objects, which should be made as inconspicuous as possible. A coal-scuttle in a room with a gas-fire seems ordinary enough to be overlooked—yet it isn't right. See the idea?

The guest who spots most is the winner.

Good luck and good fun!

mean? You are seventy-five minutes late for class! You have missed a whole lesson! You—"

"Oh, sorry, sir!" gasped Bunter. "My—my watch stopped, and—and I—I—I never heard the bell, sir!"

"Where have you been, Bunter?"

"I—I—I had a walk down to Friar-dale, sir!" stammered Bunter. "It—it was such—such nice weather for a—a walk, sir; and I—I thought I—I wanted some exercise, sir, and—and I—I went along—"

"You have, apparently, been eating since dinner," said Mr. Quelch.

"I—I had a—a snack at Uncle Clegg's in Friar-dale, sir," said Bunter.

"I—I was hungry, sir. You—you remember you stopped me at dinner, sir, when I'd had hardly anything—only four helpings, and—"

"You will go and wash, Bunter—"

"Oh, really, sir—"

he had hurried back to school without wasting further time on a wash, which really he badly needed. No doubt, too, the cargo he had taken on board had slowed him down, for he was clearly loaded far above the Plimsoll line.

Now he was getting the wash he needed, and he took his time about it, for probably he was not anxious for the next item on the programme.

However, he rolled into the Form-room at last, and Mr. Quelch picked up his cane, with a grim brow.

"Bend over that desk, Bunter!"

"I—I—I say, sir, I—I never heard the bell!" mumbled Bunter. "I—I say, old Clegg kept me talking! I—I wasn't eating anything—"

"Bend over, Bunter!" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Oh lor'!"

Bunter bent, dismally over a desk. After the feast came the reckoning. No

Remove, and he rolled out, merry and bright.

Immediately he was out of the House he shot off in the direction of the school shop.

Apparently the effect of the feed at Uncle Clegg's had worn off, as well as the effect of Quelch's cane—and Bunter was ready for more.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob Cherry as he shot. "Hold on, Bunter!"

"Can't stop!" called back Bunter over a fat shoulder.

The Famous Five rushed after him, and surrounded him. Then Bunter stopped—having no choice in the matter.

He blinked with angry impatience at the Famous Five.

"I say, you fellows, don't play the goat—I'm in a hurry!"

"What's the hurry?" demanded Bob.

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"I'm hungry!"

"Oh crumbs!"

"I've got a pound left—and I'm hungry! Gerrouit of the way!"

"Hold on a minute!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "We've seen Inspector Grimes at Courtfield, fathead, and you're to take that cigarette-case to him. Official!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I—I say, I—I can't! I—I've lost it!"

"Better find it again, then!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Up and him, and shake it out of him, as we did out of Fishy!"

"I say, you fellows, no larks!" gasped Bunter. "I haven't got it now, really—I—I—I lost it. I never sold it, you know—I wouldn't!"

"Sold it to Fishy, after all?" asked Bob.

"Oh, no! Catch me letting Fishy have it for thirty bob when I could get twice as much! I—I mean, I—I never sold it at all! I haven't seen Soames!"

"Soames!" yelled the Famous Five.

"Yes—I mean, no! I never saw him this morning, you know, as I told you fellows, and he never offered me three pounds for the cigarette-case."

"Oh, my hat!"

"I never saw him this morning, and I haven't seen him since," explained Bunter. "As for arranging to meet him in the village after dinner, of course I never thought of such a thing!"

"You met him in the village?" gasped Wharton.

"Well, I jolly well wasn't going to meet him in the wood again and give him a chance of snatching that cigarette-case for nothing. I'm fly, you know! Not that I've met him at all," added Bunter hastily. "I haven't seen him since Christmas. I don't suppose I should know him again if I did see him. I say, you fellows, do let a chap pass—I'm in a hurry!"

"Well, my only winter bonnet!" said Bob. "So Soames tipped you to hand over that cigarette-case instead of scragging you!"

"Well, it was really his, in a way," said Bunter. "It looks to me as if he was Thompson all the time! I mean to say, I don't see why I shouldn't sell my own cigarette-case if I want to—as Quelch would snaffle it, you know, if I kept it here. Not that I've sold it. I lost it!"

"You fat, fibbing, frabjous frump!"

"I hope you can take a fellow's word!" said Bunter, with dignity. "I dropped it in Friardale Lane without noticing it, you know! It's gone! I—I don't suppose I—I shall ever find it again. I say, you fellows do let me pass, will you—I'm hungry!"

Billy Bunter wriggled past, and shot away to the tuckshop. With cash in his pockets, that establishment drew William George Bunter like a magnet.

The Famous Five looked at one another.

"So Soames got that jolly old cigarette-case at the finish!" said Bob Cherry. He burst into a roar. "Ha,

ha, ha! Bunter got three quid off him for it and headed for Uncle Clegg's! And where do you think Soames headed, after reading that jolly old Greek inside the cigarette-case?"

"He headed for the ditch opposite the stile in Friardale Lane just about as fast as he could go, I imagine!" said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"And got there about the time we got to old Grimey with the loot!" chortled Johnny Bull.

"And when he got there the cupboard was bare, and so the poor dog had none!" chanted Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The Famous Five roared.

They could picture Soames—having at long, long last got hold of that cigarette-case, and read the secret message from Rat Hankey—speeding to the spot where the Rat had parked the loot—to find a deep excavation in the snow in the ditch opposite the stile—and nothing else!

Soames had been about an hour too late. While he had been waiting for Bunter in the village, the Famous Five had been digging out the loot; while he had been groping in the ditch after it they had been handing it over to Inspector Grimes at Courtfield! And his feelings after his long trail, when he found that he was not first in the field, were easy to imagine.

The chums of the Remove yelled as they thought of it.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"We're done with jolly old Soames!" chortled Bob. "He's got that cigarette-case he was so fearfully keen on—and I wish him joy of it. He's got nothing else!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Famous Five roared again. "Perhapsfully," grinned Mr. Hurreo Janset Ram Singh, "the esteemed Soames will learn from this terrific disappointment that honesty is the cracked pitcher that goes longest to a bird in the hand and saves a stitch in time, as the English proverb remarks."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Whether Soames realised from that experience that honesty was the best policy, the Famous Five did not know—but he had, at all events, gone with empty hands, owing to their success in spotting the secret.

YOUR EDITOR.

THE END.

COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS AND GIRLS!

Your Editor is always pleased to hear from his readers. Write to him: Editor of the MAGNET, The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

As the publishing date of this issue falls on December 31st—the last day of 1938—both Mr. Frank Richards and myself wish every reader of the MAGNET a

HAPPY AND PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR.

To some readers, 1938 may have been a real jolly year, while to others it may have been just the opposite. May the New Year bring happiness and good luck to all of you!

By way of a change, next week's long complete school story.

"THE SPORTSMAN of the FOURTH!"

will deal with one of the shady characters of Greyfriars—to wit—Aubrey Angel, of the Fourth. Angel has figured in Greyfriars yarns before, so most of you are familiar with his character. I'm not going to let the "cat out of the bag"—to do so would be tantamount to spoiling a good thing. I will say this, though, you can all look to next week's Greyfriars story with the assurance from me that it is A1, top-hole, the goods—in other words, a typical Frank Richards yarn.

Supporting this treat will be another interesting issue of the "Greyfriars Herald," giving the latest news and views of the "big noises" at Greyfriars. "My Own Page"—our new feature—will be taken over by Dicky Nugent, which means that you can expect something extraordinarily good.

A word of warning—be sure and order your copy in good time.

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"KEEP IN GOOD TRIM, TEAM-MATES!"

Advices H. VERNON-SMITH

Are you all keeping fit during the holidays? Yes, I did say "FIT"—not "FAT"!



The GREYFRIARS HERALD

EDITED BY HARRY WHARTON. January 7th, 1939.

No. 326.

Herald," with the interests of our Junior oloven well in mind, I appeal to all Remove "regulars" and "would-be's" to start preparing themselves right away for the stern work that awaits them in the new term.

As Sports Editor of the "Greyfriars"

below us. Bagshot, though defeated in two successive games just before Christmas, are by no means a spent force, and may well return to their brilliant earlier form after the hols.

underrate the chances of the teams

PLAY LIGHT ON THE DRUMS!

Removite Reveals Dance-Band Secret

When Rake sought a jazz drummer for his party, Tom Brown promptly offered to fill the bill.

and a number of empty jam-jars from the kitchen, an old-fashioned motor-horn from a junk-heap in the garage, a dinner-gong, a police whistle and a couple of coconut-shells.



"Absolutely nothing!" said Brown firmly. "Just stand by for a minute, and I'll show you what it would sound like if I really let it rip!"

THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS!

By YOUR EDITOR

I expect many of my chums will have noticed what a lot is being written lately on the subject of the Freedom of the Press.

But, of course, running a newspaper has its responsibilities—even when it happens to be only a school newspaper!

There are some fellows at Greyfriars who don't trouble to conceal the fact that they would like to see our little paper suppressed, such as Loder, Hilton, Angot, and others.

When Loder and his lesser satellites do anything that calls for condemnation, we intend to condemn them in no uncertain terms.

ARE MODERN SCHOOLBOYS SOFT?

By PAUL PROUT, M.A.

I believe in giving a plain answer to a plain question. My answer to the question "Are modern schoolboys soft?" is Yes.

Few boys, I admit, could hope to compare favourably with such a notable example. I was, if I may say so, something of a holy terror in my early days.

Did I utter a single cry of pain or a solitary plea for mercy? Not in those days, be it noted, football was no kid-glove game as it is to-day, but a ruthless struggle for victory in which kicking, punching and biting were all part of the game.

After that first eventful day, I was treated with a good deal of respect by my colleagues. But I never relaxed or allowed my physical condition to deteriorate.



The morning and still be at it at midnight! Not that I neglected games. On half-holidays I played football with characteristic zest.

Later in the day I found my way to the Junior Common-room to meet my Form fellows—a ferocious set of youngsters who promptly decided to make me run the gauntlet.

SNOW SPECTRE AT WHARTON LODGE!

By BOB CHERRY

Funny how easily you can get a shock when it's wintry weather and the talk turns on ghosts!

Canada we might have imagined it was a polar bear, indulging in a spot of sleep also in the middle of its winter sleep.

When we told him afterwards that we had taken him to be either a polar bear or a hippo, Bunter said: "Beasts!"

LAST WEEK AT GREYFRIARS—

The pipes in the porter's lodge froze, depriving Gosling of water for two whole days. Gosling was fortunately not inconvenienced.

Mrs. Mimble had a new refrigerator installed in the tuckshop. Summer is on the way, lads!

IT THREW HIM INTO CONFUSION!

When tackled by Mr. Quelch about his broken window, Snop was not quite correct in saying that the only thing he had thrown was a snowball.