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Bunter and the Secret of the Scarab

Frank Richards

CHAPTER ONE

ALL MAULY'S MONEY!

"SHEER off!"

"What?"

"I'm talking to Mauly!" said Billy Bunter, with dignity. "We don't want to be interrupted, do we, Mauly?"

"Yaas."

"Oh, really, you beast--"

Whereat the Famous Five of the Greyfriars Remove chuckled.

It was a warm day on the Nile. All the days on the Nile were warm. Sunshine, the clear, dry sunshine of Egypt, streamed down on the slow-rolling river, on the city of Luxor, and on the dahabiyeh tied up to the bank.

Harry Wharton & Co. had been ashore with Hassan, the dragoman, seeing the sights.

Warm as the Nile valley was, the Famous Five did not seem to tire in which they were very unlike Billy Bunter and Lord Mauleverer. Billy Bunter was fat and lazy. Lord

Mauleverer was slim and lazy. Mauly liked to see the sights of Egypt from a long cane chair on the upper deck of the big Nile houseboat, with his legs resting on another chair, and his hands clasped behind his head.

Billy Bunter did not care a lot for sights, anyhow, and he declared that he was fed-up on temples and tombs and mummies. Sitting under an awning, eating sticky Turkish sweetmeats had more appeal for Bunter. So the two slackers had been left on board the dahabiyeh while the energetic five "did" Denderah with Hassan.

Warm and dusty, but merry and bright, the chums of the Remove clattered back to Luxor on their donkeys, and came tramping cheerily across the gangway to the tied-up dahabiyeh.

Lord Mauleverer gave them a sleepy grin and a tired nod as they tramped on the upper deck.

Billy Bunter gave them an inimical glare through his big spectacles; and as the glare produced absolutely no effect on the five, he requested them to sheer off. Bunter, it seemed, did not want their company just then.

But what Bunter wanted, or did not want, was a trifle light as air to the cheery chums of the Remove. Black Nubian servants pulled out deck-chairs for them, and they sat down, with smiling faces.

"I say, you fellows, I think you might sheer off!" said Bunter. "It's rather bad form to interrupt a private conversation!"

"Fathead!" said Bob Cherry politely.

"I'm talking to Mauly!" roared Bunter.

"Poor old Mauly!" said Frank Nugent, with deep sympathy.

"The poorfulness of the esteemed old Mauly is terrific!" remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"The interruptfulness is a boonful blessing, isn't it, my estimable idiotic Mauly?"

"Yaas!" yawned Lord Mauleverer.

"What's the jolly old secret?" asked Johnny Bull, with a glare at Bunter. "Are you expecting a postal order in Egypt, and asking Mauly to cash it for you in advance, you fat fraud?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I don't think you fellows ought to be inquisitive," said Bunter. "If there's one thing I can't stand, it's inquisitiveness!"

"Oh, my only summer hat!"

"Butting in when a fellow's having a private talk with a pal!" said Billy Bunter indignantly.

"Rotten bad form, you know! I say, Mauly, old man, come down to the balcony!"

"Can't!"

"Why not?" demanded Bunter.

"Tired!"

"You silly ass, you've been sitting in that chair for two hours! What's made you tired?"

"You!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter fixed his big spectacles on his noble pal with an expression that did not seem at all pally. But he controlled his wrath. He had an important matter to discuss with Lord Mauleverer--a very important matter indeed. It was not a time for telling the schoolboy earl what he thought of him.

"We've had no end of a time, Mauly!" said Harry Wharton. "You ought to have come! The Temple of Hathor at Denderah is a corker!"

"I'll take your word for it, old man!" said Mauly.

"And the Temple of Isis!" said Bob Cherry.

"I say, you fellows, shut up!" said Bunter. "If you haven't the good taste to sheer off while I'm talking to my pal, you might shut up, at least!"

"Don't you want to hear about the jolly old sights at Denderah, Mauly?" asked Nugent.

"Not at all--I mean, yaas!" amended Lord Mauleverer hastily. "Anythin' to keep Bunter from talkin'!"

"The celebrated Temple of Hathor is--" began Bob.

"Shut up!" roared Bunter. "Now, Mauly, I was saying--"

"Oh dear! Yaas!" murmured Lord Mauleverer. "Go it, old fat bean! Mind if I go to sleep?"

"Oh, really, Mauly, as I was saying, I'm not the fellow to brag or to make a song about what I've done--you know that! But did I, or did I not, get you away from those Arab beasts, Hamza and Yussef, when they bagged you the day we went to Karnak? Did I, or did I not, risk my life with a pluck that none of those fellows would have been capable of to rescue you?"

"No!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Why, you ungrateful beast!" roared Bunter.

"You jolly well know I did!"

"I know you were on the spot by accident, and in such a shivering funk that you jolly nearly left me to it!" said Mauly. "Is that what you mean?"

"No, it isn't!" roared Bunter. "And look at the night that Greek rotter, Kalizelos, got on the dahabiyeh after that silly scarab! Did I, or did I not, watch over your safety and save you?"

"No!" yawned Lord Mauleverer.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Of all the ungrateful rotters--" gasped Bunter.

"You got out in the night rooting after grub and butted into the Greek johnny, and were scared out of your wits!" yawned Mauleverer.

"Is that what you mean, old top?"

"No wonder Shakespeare talks about the thankless tooth of a serpent's child!" said Bunter bitterly. "I'm accustomed to ingratitude! Look what I've done for these fellows! And are they grateful? No fear! But there's a limit, Mauly! You owe me your life! I'm not bragging of it; pluck happens to be my long suit! Kindest friend and noblest foe, and all that--that's me all over. Now, look here, Mauly, for some reason remittances haven't reached me since we've been on this holiday in Egypt--"

"I knew he was expecting a postal order!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Shut up!" roared Bunter. "I'm not going to sponge on you, Mauly. I'm not like some fellows I could name, I hope! But a loan till my remittance comes is quite a different matter. You've lent me a few piastres already--"

"A few thousand!" grinned Bob.

"Do shut up, Cherry! Now, look here, Mauly--"

Lord Mauleverer sat up.

"I see the point," he said thoughtfully. "The fact is, you men keep on telling me that nothing's safe in my pockets. You've made me hide that jolly old scarab of A-Menah, so that I shan't lose it. Those Arabs the other day at Karnak got a lot of money off me. On the whole, I think the best thing I can do is to hand over all the money I've got to Bunter."

"You silly ass!" bawled Johnny Bull.

"Good egg!" exclaimed Billy Bunter eagerly.

"I'll take care of it for you, Mauly! Rely on me!"

Lord Mauleverer fumbled in his pocket. Billy Bunter watched him with his eyes almost bulging through his spectacles. Harry Wharton & Co. simply stared.

Lord Mauleverer was in the happy position of having more of that useful article, cash, than a fellow could possibly want. There was no doubt that he was careless with it. Backsheesh flowed from Mauleverer's pockets like a stream - or, rather, like a torrent. Hassan, the dragoman, was making a fortune out of him. Innumerable natives, all along the Nile, had lapped up the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Billy Bunter had used him like a bank in which he had an unlimited account. But this seemed to be rather the limit, even for Mauly.

Placing his cash in the care of Billy Bunter was really an amazing proposition. There was little doubt that it would have been for Mauly's benefit to have a friend taking care of his cash for him. But dropping it into the Nile would have been about as useful as placing it in the fat hands of the Owl of the Remove.

Mauleverer seemed in serious earnest, however. He drew his Russia-leather purse from his pocket.

"Mauly, you ass!" exclaimed Wharton, almost aghast.

"You shut up, Wharton!" roared Bunter wrathfully. "Mauly knows a pal he can trust. Mauly isn't asking you to take care of his money for him, are you, Mauly?"

"No."

"He's asking me," said Bunter loftily. "He knows he can rely on a pal like me. You fellows can shut up."

"Well, fools and their money are soon parted!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Thanks!" yawned Mauleverer.

"My esteemed idiotic Mauly--" murmured the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"Don't you men think it a good idea?" asked Mauleverer innocently. "You've told me often enough that I'm jolly careless. I own up-I'm careless. Well, this money will be safe with Bunter. I can leave it to his judgment to spend it how he thinks fit--"

"Oh crikey!"

"I leave it absolutely in his hands," said Mauleverer. "You don't mind, Bunter?"

"My dear chap-my dear old pal!" gasped Bunter. "That's all right! I'm your man! Hand it over!"

"It's a lot of responsibility off my hands, you see," Mauleverer explained to the staring five.

"Bunter's willin' to take it on. That settles it. I'm goin' to hand over all my money to Bunter-every piastre I've got about me. Bunter can do as he likes with it. I leave it to him entirely."

"Dear old Mauly!" said Billy Bunter, his fat voice fairly thrilling with affection. "Rely on me!"

"Here you are, old chap!"

Lord Mauleverer opened his nobby purse. From the interior he extracted a nickel coin, which was called a "kirsch" in the native tongue, but more generally a piastre. Its value was two-pence-halfpenny! This he placed in the eager outstretched palm of William George Bunter.

"There!" he said, and he replaced the purse in his pocket and sank back lazily in his chair. Bunter blinked at the coin. He seemed hardly able to believe his little round eyes, or his big round spectacles.

"What-what-what's this?" gasped Bunter blankly.

"It's a piastre, old top."

"I know it's a piastre, you idiot! But what-what is it for?"

"It's all my money."

"Wha-a-at?"

"By the way," added Lord Mauleverer thoughtfully, as if he had just remembered something. "I shall have to drop into the bank before we leave Luxor and get some cash. I've entirely run out."

Bunter blinked at him. He blinked at the nickel coin in his fat palm. He blinked at Mauleverer again. He seemed bereft of speech. There was a sudden roar from the Famous Five.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter found his voice.

"Mauly! You silly idiot-you frabjous ass-you burbling chump--"

"Eh?" Lord Mauleverer looked surprised.

"Are you calling me those fancy names because I'm trusting you with all my money, Bunter?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five. They realised now that his lazy lordship had been gently pulling the fat Owl's podgy leg.

"Mean to say this is all the money you've got?" shrieked Bunter.

"Yaas!"

"Why, you-you-you idiot--"

"I feel that I can trust you with it, Bunter, old bean. Spend it how you like-use your own judgment--"

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

The expression on Billy Bunter's fat face might have made the statue of Rameses the Second smile.

"You-you-you--" gurgled Bunter. "You-you funny idiot! You slacking ass! You idiotic dummy!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Anythin' the matter, old bean?" asked Lord Mauleverer, raising his eyebrows. "That isn't really the way to talk to a fellow who's trusting you with all his money."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter

"My dear chap--"

"Yah!"

Billy Bunter hurled all Mauly's money-that single, solitary piastre-into the Nile. Then, with a sort of scorn, he rolled away, followed by a sleepy grin from Lord Mauleverer and a howl of laughter from the Famous Five.

After which Harry Wharton & Co. told Mauly all about the wonderful things they had seen that day at Denderah. Mauly did not mind. He went to sleep, and slumbered gently and peacefully while they told him.

CHAPTER TWO

RUCTIONS ON THE RIVER!

"CAMPING out?"

"That's it!"

"Rot!" said Bunter.

The song of the Nubian sailors, as they handled their long poles, sounded musically in the sunny morning. The great houseboat swung away from the Nile bank and floated out into the river. The Greyfriars tourists had "done" the eastern bank-Luxor, and Karnak, and the other wonderful things-and now the dahabiyeh was being poled across the Nile to the western bank, where many more marvels awaited them.

Hassan, the dragoman, was bursting with information respecting the Necropolis, the "City of the Dead," the Tombs of the Kings, the Tombs of the Queens-tombs, and tombs, and tombs! -that covered a vast space on the west bank of the Nile opposite Luxor. There were, as the dragoman told them gleefully, innumerable dead persons-more innumerable than in any part of Egypt hitherto explored by the Greyfriars party. Which, to Hassan's mind, at least, was an irresistible attraction.

The juniors had breakfasted on the balcony, under the awning, at the stern of the dahabiyeh.

Billy Bunter was still breakfasting on the balcony when they went to the upper deck. The broad waters of the Nile glistened in the sunshine, and other dahabiyehs were to be seen, as well as a crowd of feluccas-some rowing with their great, heavy oars, others gliding under the big lateen sails. The Cleopatra was the largest and handsomest dahabiyeh to be seen. Mr. Hilmi Maroudi, of Cairo, who had lent it to the Greyfriars party, was a

millionaire, and his dahabiyeh was a palatial boat. The juniors watched the busy scene on the Nile with keen interest. Other tourists were going across to the western bank that morning, but most of them in the ferryboat or in hired feluccas.

Billy Bunter rolled up to the upper deck, after packing away several breakfasts, one after another, and he brought with him a big orange in either fat hand to wind up his meal. He found the Famous Five discussing what they were going to do on the western bank. And as soon as he learned that the idea was to leave the dahabiyeh tied up and camp out for a night or two ashore, Bunter stated his opinion-for what it was worth.

The chums of the Remove did not seem to consider that it was worth very much. They continued to discuss their camping arrangements, regardless.

"You'd like to go camping, Mauly-what?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Yaas."

"Look here, Mauly," said Billy Bunter.

"What's the good of roughing it in a silly tent when you can come back and sleep comfortably on the dahabiyeh? You'd rather come back to the dahabiyeh, wouldn't you?"

"Yaas."

"You can't do both, fathead!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Oh dear!" said Mauly.

Lord Mauleverer's system was to agree with every suggestion made-which was a little awkward when opinions differed.

Billy Bunter guzzled an orange, hurled the peel into the Nile, and swatted flies that had a fancy for the orange juice smeared on his fat face.

"Well, you can take this from me," he said. "I'm not going camping! If you camp out in a lot of putrid ruins you won't have my company!"

"I say, camping seems rather a jolly idea," remarked Lord Mauleverer thoughtfully. "Let's camp out, by all means!"

"Oh, really, Mauly!"

"Hassan can fix us up with all the things we need," said Bob.

The dragoman salaamed.

"On my head be it, sar!" he said. "Hassan is your dragoman. You trust Hassan. Everything shall be at the top of a hole, as you say in your noble English language."

"Everything shall be-what?" ejaculated Mauleverer.

"The esteemed Hassan means that the topholefulness will be terrific," explained Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh gad!" said Mauly, and the juniors chuckled.

A nasal voice, in emphatic tones, hailed the juniors on the dahabiyeh from a felucca on the Nile. In that felucca sat two tourists-one a tall, lean gentleman, with lantern jaws, the other a short, stout gentleman. Each of them wore a sun-helmet and smoked glasses, and carried a red-covered guidebook, and spat continually into the Nile. From which latter circumstance the juniors guessed that they were tourists from the great United States. It was the lean man who hailed the dahabiyeh.

"Say! You!" he called out. "You figure that you want to run down this doggoned felucca? I'll say you'd better tell your sailors to keep them pesky poles away."

The tall, bronze-complexioned reis, standing at the high helm of the dahabiyeh, glanced down at the felucca, but gave no sign. The singing Nubians poled on, unregarding. Billy Bunter sniffed. On board the most magnificent dahabiyeh on the Nile, Billy Bunter felt immensely superior to commonplace tourists in a hired boat.

He sniffed to make that superiority clear to the commonplace persons. Harry Wharton & Co. looked down at the felucca. The small craft was cutting across the bows of the big craft,

so they concluded that it was the felucca's own look-out if there was trouble, and left it at that. But Lord Mauleverer, with great politeness, raised his hat to the American gentlemen and answered in his most courteous tones.

"Sorry, sir! We'd much rather not run you down, as a matter of choice. But perhaps you wouldn't mind keepin' out of the way."

The lean gentleman gave him a glare.

"You bought the Nile?" he inquired.

"I think not," answered Lord Mauleverer thoughtfully. "I've been buyin' things ever since I've been in Egypt-the people here won't take no for an answer, you know! I can't remember everythin' I've bought! But I don't think the Nile was among my purchases." The Famous Five grinned as his lordship made that reply with perfect gravity. The lean American stared at him.

"Say, bo, was you born funny?" he asked. "I'll say you don't want to shoot off your mouth too promiscus when you're talking to George Washington Jacks! George W. Jacks might step aboard that hooker and spank you, some!"

"My esteemed and ridiculous friend," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "the spankfulness might be a boot on the other leg."

Mr. Jacks gave quite a jump. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh's English, learned from the wisest moonshee in Bhanipur, often had a surprising effect on strangers.

"Carry me home to die!" said Mr. Jacks. "Did you hear that, colonel?"

"Did I, colonel?" answered the fat man. "I'll say I did."

Both the American gentlemen, apparently, were colonels, though they did not look like military gentlemen.

"Jevver hear anything like it, Colonel Skink?" asked G. W. Jacks.

"I'll say no, Colonel Jacks," answered Colonel Skink.

The dahabiyeh rolled heavily on. The little felucca, which was rowed by a couple of brown men, danced on the wash of the great houseboat.

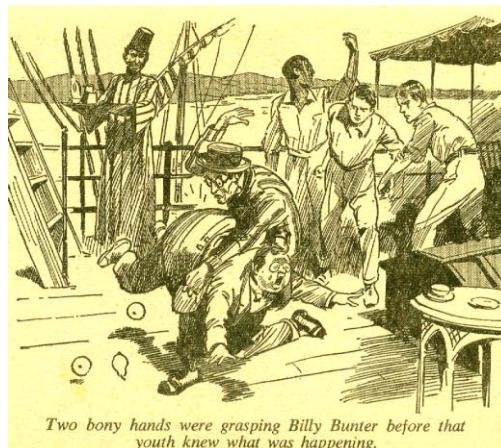
Some of the Nile washed aboard and wetted the feet of the two colonels, and angry remarks were made through the noses of Messrs. Jacks and Skink.

"Cheek!" said Billy Bunter.

He pushed his face into his second orange.

Bunter liked oranges, and he enjoyed them-but it could not be said that his method of dealing with them was either cleanly or elegant.

Having gobbled the interior of that fat and juicy fruit, Bunter carelessly tossed the remains over the side of the dahabiyeh.



Two bony hands were grasping Billy Bunter before that youth knew what was happening.

"Look out!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Eh?"

"You fat ass!"

It was too late for Bunter to look out. The remnant of the orange had landed. Every bullet is said to have its billet, and the same rule seemed to apply to that juicy relic of Bunter's latest snack. It landed in the keen, sharp, penetrating eye of Colonel Jacks.

G. W. Jacks was standing up at the moment.

The next moment he was sitting down. He sat down with a sudden concussion that made the light felucca rock. The roar that burst from G. W. Jacks might have been heard on both banks of the Nile.

"Oh gad!" ejaculated Lord Mauleverer. "You clumsy ass, Bunter--"

"Eh?" said Bunter. The short-sighted Owl of the Remove had not even seen where his missile had landed. "What's the row? I say, you fellows, what is that Yankee yelling about?"

Colonel Jacks was yelling wildly to his rowers. They stared at him dubiously, but obeyed. The felucca ran alongside the dahabiyeh, and the long-limbed American was aboard the Cleopatra almost in the twinkling of an eye. He was angry and excited-there was no doubt about his anger and excitement. There was, orange-juice in his eye, which was uncomfortable and painful. And obviously he was convinced that the missile had been thrown intentionally-which was enough to annoy even a very good-tempered man, And the long gentleman from the U.S. did not seem at all good-tempered, anyhow.

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

"What--"

"Yarooooh!" roared Bunter.

Two bony hands were grasping Billy Bunter before that fat youth knew what was happening.

He was sprawled, face down, across a bony knee.

Spank!

"Whoooooop."

Spank, spank!

"Yow! Wow!"

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Harry Wharton.

Spank!

"Yooop! Help! Rescue!" roared Bunter. "I say, you fellows--Whoooooop!"

Spank, spank!

"I guess you can't get by with sauce to G. W. Jacks!" roared the lean colonel. "No, sir! I'll say nope, sir! I'll surely say nope! Not G. W. Jacks, sir! George W. Jacks doesn't stand for it, sir! Sure! Not in your lifetime, and some over! Nope!"

Spank, spank, spank!

Billy Bunter wriggled and raved. Harry Wharton & Co. gathered round and grasped G. W. Jacks on all sides. Bunter deserved to be spanked, perhaps, for landing the relic of a juicy orange in a stranger's eye from sheer carelessness. But the lean gentleman was overdoing it wholesale. The Famous Five grasped various parts of Colonel Jacks' bony person and yanked him away from the Owl of the Remove.

"Chuck it!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Keep your jolly old temper, old bean!"

"Yaroooh! Pitch him into the Nile!" yelled Bunter. "Whop him! Oh crikey! Rag him! Pull his nose! Yaroooh!"

"I'll say you'd better leggo!" roared G. W. Jacks, struggling in the grasp of the juniors.

"Yep! I'll say so!"

But the juniors did not let go. The excited transatlantic gentleman seemed rather too dangerous to be released. They led him to the side, and Wharton shouted to the dancing felucca.

"Catch!"

"Search me!" ejaculated the other colonel in the felucca, staring up in astonishment. "By the great horned toad, you can search me!"

The rowers held the felucca close alongside, and the Famous Five dropped the bony gentleman back where he belonged. The thin colonel went sprawling down, and the fat colonel, in an unfortunate moment for himself, stepped forward to catch him and help him land. His foot slipped in the rocking boat, and he missed G. W. Jacks. But G. W. Jacks did not miss him-G. W. Jacks landed on the back of his neck.

There was an agonised gurgle from the plump colonel as he was squashed in the bottom of the boat under the bony colonel.

"Ooooh! Great gophers! Yooooogh!"

"Thunder!" gasped Colonel Jacks.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came in a yell from the dahabiyeh.

The two colonels were wildly mixed up in the bottom of the felucca. The light craft rocked wildly, shipping water, which drenched over the two struggling and sprawling colonels. There was a cackle of laughter from the Nubian crew of the Cleopatra; even the grave reis condescended to grin.

The dahabiyeh rolled on, leaving the felucca behind. Two crimson and breathless citizens of the United States sorted themselves out at last, and sat and gasped for wind. The dahabiyeh rolled on, and they faded out of the picture, still gasping.

CHAPTER THREE

WHAT IS THE SECRET?

"WHAT about the jolly old prisoner?" said Bob Cherry.

The dahabiyeh was tied up once more on the western bank. Before the eyes of the Greyfriars tourists stretched the vast necropolis of ancient Thebes. Nearer at hand a crowd of donkey-boys already had their eyes on the tourists, and were already leading their animals towards the bank and shouting from the distance. Itinerant dealers in spurious antiquities were watching for them to come ashore.

Lord Mauleverer nodded thoughtfully as Bob referred to the prisoner of the dahabiyeh.

"Let's go down and see the jolly old bird in his cage," said Mauly, and the Famous Five followed him down to the cabins.

One cabin door was locked, and a Nubian was squatted outside on guard. He rose and salaamed and unlocked the door, and Lord Mauleverer stepped into the prison-cabin, with the Famous Five behind him. Kalizelos, the Greek, rose to his feet, his black eyes burning at the Greyfriars fellows. For a good many days now Kalizelos had been a prisoner on board the Cleopatra under lock and key. As Mauleverer stepped in the Greek looked as if he would spring on him like a tiger. Mauleverer smiled and waved him back.

"Keep your temper, old bean!" he said.

"Hassan, knock him on the head if he cuts up rusty!"

"On my head be it, sar!" answered the dragoman, who had followed the juniors down, stick in hand.

Lord Mauleverer regarded the prisoner with thoughtful seriousness. Harry Wharton & Co. were smiling.

Mauly's method of dealing with the Greek made them smile; but there was no doubt, at all events, that it was keeping their enemy out of mischief.

And there was no doubt that Kalizelos had asked for it. He had crept on board the dahabiyeh in the darkness of a night to steal the Golden Scarab-and Mauleverer had awakened with the Greek's knife at his throat! In Cairo the rascal had been handed over to the police, by Mr. Maroudi, the juniors' Egyptian friend; but he had escaped. Mauly was taking his own measures to see that the villain did not escape a second time. So far, those measures had been efficacious.

"We're going away from the dahabiyeh for a day or two, Mr. Kalizelos," drawled Lord Mauleverer. "I'm givin' you another chance before we go. Are you comin' to terms?"

"Fool!" snarled the Greek.

"Look at it reasonably," urged Mauleverer placidly. "I've got the Golden Scarab that my father found in Egypt years and years ago. It's mine. It belonged to jolly old A-Menah three thousand years ago, in the reign of Ram-Ram-Ram-thingummy--"

"Rameses the Second!" grinned Bob.

"Yaas, I know it was Ram-somethin'. Jolly old A-Menah wore it as an amulet in those days, at the battle of What's-its-name, in Syria, and it seems to have brought him luck. He came back from the wars with a big diamond in his trousers pocket-if they wore trousers in the reign of Ram-Ram-Ram-thingummy! The story goes that the scarab will guide any Johnny who happens to hold it to that big diamond-the Eye of-of-of--"

"The Eye of Osiris!" prompted Bob.

"Yaas, that's it! Now, of course, I don't believe a word of it," said Lord Mauleverer cheerfully. "I can't quite swallow ancient Egyptian magic. But the trouble is that you do, Mr. Kalizelos. You keep on tryin' to get that scarab off me, and you've made things dashed unpleasant-shuttin' a fellow up in tombs, and so on. You can't expect a fellow to like it."

"Fool!"

"Your manners, old thing, are simply horrid," said Lord Mauleverer. "But never mind that. It seems that you got hold of an ancient papyrus, in your curio shop at Cairo, and learned the secret of the scarab. You're after that scarab like my friend Bunter after a jam-tart--"

"Oh, really, Mauly--"

"And a chap gets fed-up," said Mauleverer, shaking his head. "Now you've been obliging enough to drop into my hands, and I'm keepin' you where you can't do any more harm--"

"I demand to be handed over to the law!" said the Greek hoarsely.

Lord Mauleverer shook his head.

"You wouldn't-if you didn't fancy that you could wangle it to get away from the jolly old law," he answered. "I don't think a fearful lot of the law. It's rather a fishy bizney, even in my own country. In the East I've got an idea that it's largely a matter of backsheesh. You see, you got away in Cairo, old bean, and I can't help thinkin' you'd get away in Luxor. You're safer here."

"Fool!"

"Thanks! Now, there's two ways out of this difficult matter," said his lordship. "Either I can give you the scarab, or you can give me the secret. I'm not givin' you the scarab-it's mine. But I've got to draw your teeth! You see that?"

"Fool!"

"This sportsman doesn't seem to have a high opinion of my intellect, does he, you men? Never mind! Now, old top, if there's really a secret, cough it up. Once you've handed it over, you won't want the scarab, and I can get shut of you. I'd be thankful to see the last of you, believe me. You can see for yourself that it's the only way."

"Fool!"

Lord Mauleverer slipped his hand into his pocket and drew out the golden beetle, the cause of so many exciting adventures since the Greyfriars chums had started on their Egyptian holiday.

The Greek's eyes snapped at sight of it.

Shaped like the sacred beetle of ancient Egypt, made apparently of solid gold, the amulet lay in Mauleverer's palm, glistening in the light. Often and often had the juniors handled it, wondering what was its strange secret-if any. They knew that the tiny picture-writing engraved on it told nothing but the name and title of A-Menah. That it had magic properties was hardly to be believed. How it could possibly guide its possessor to the Eye of Osiris was unimaginable. Yet the look on the Greek's face, the hungry greed that blazed in his eyes, the eager twitching of his features showed how strong was his belief.

It was obvious that Kalizelos could barely restrain himself from springing at the schoolboy earl and snatching at the scarab. Yet what secret could he have read in that ancient papyrus written by the scribe of A-Menah? What secret could there be in the golden beetle that no other eyes could read?

"There's the jolly old article," said Lord Mauleverer, holding it up. "It's mine, as I've mentioned. I'm not givin' it away-especially if it's a clue to a diamond worth a quarter of a million pounds. That's askin' rather too much of a fellow, what? Trot out the secret!"

"I will tell you nothing!" hissed the Greek.

"If you weren't so jolly savage about it, old thing, I shouldn't believe there was a giddy secret at all. But you're not the man to risk your life, and spend money like water, for the sake of a mere curiosity. I'm beginnin' to believe there really is a secret-though I can't begin to guess what it is. Won't you cough it up?"

"Never!"

"Most likely it's only gammon," said Mauleverer. "But if it turns out to be worth anythin', I'll do the fair thing. I'll stand you ten percent of the loot, if I bag it. What?"

"That's a good offer!" grinned Bob Cherry.

"All or nothing!" muttered the Greek. "Fool!"

The scarab is valueless to you. You cannot read its secret. Only I can read it. A thousand pounds-ten thousand pounds-sell me the scarab."

"Beats me hollow," said Lord Mauleverer. "This sportsman is in earnest, you men-he'd be glad to trot out ten thousand pounds for this scarab, which is worth about twenty-five for its metal. Do you get him?"

"It's pretty plain there is a secret, and that Kalizelos knows it," said Harry Wharton. "But the scarab is yours, Mauly, and if it leads to a treasure, the treasure is yours."

"Quite! We can't let this man go," said Mauleverer. "Not unless he draws his own teeth by handin' over the secret. If I could trust him to let me alone, and let my scarab alone, I'd be glad to get shut of him. But--"

"It shall be mine!" snarled the Greek. "Your life, or a thousand lives, shall not stand in the way. I will gain my freedom-you cannot keep me on this dahabiyeh! Then for you, death; for me, the scarab!"

"Thanks for the tip," said Lord Mauleverer, slipping the sacred scarabæus of A-Menah into his pocket. "I'll see that you don't get loose-till you've coughed up that jolly old secret! Last time of askin'!"

"Fool!"

"I take that as an answer in the negative. Come on, you men!"

"Look out!" yelled Bob, as the Greek made a sudden, desperate spring.

Crack!

Hassan was looking out!

His thick stick whirled in the air, and came down with a loud crack on the head of Konstantinos Kalizelos.

The Greek gave a gasping cry, and rolled on the floor of the cabin.

Hassan chuckled.

"Hassan look out, noble sar!" he said. "Hassan, is your dragoman! You trust Hassan! Oh, yes!"

"Sorry, old thing," said Lord Mauleverer, politely, as the Greek sat up dizzily, clasping his head with both hands. "You asked for that-what? Ta-ta!"

The juniors left the cabin. The door was closed and locked on the Greek. His voice followed them in a string of fierce imprecations as they went.

Their faces were thoughtful as they returned to the deck. What was the strange secret of the scarab? It was an intriguing mystery. Looking at the golden beetle, they could not believe that it held a secret; but looking at the desperate Greek, they could hardly doubt it. Their minds seemed to sway to and fro on the subject.

"Better take it ashore with us, I think," yawned Lord Mauleverer. "That Greek sportsman is safe enough, but-- I don't fancy leavin' the scarab on the dahabiyeh with him while we're away for days."

"No fear," agreed Bob Cherry. "Mind you don't drop it in one of the jolly old tombs, though."

"I say, you fellows--"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Ready, Bunter?"

Billy Bunter fixed his eyes, and his spectacles, severely on the chums of the Remove.

"I'm ready, if we're going to have a car, and if we're coming back to the dahabiyeh for the night," he answered firmly. "If you're going to ride those beastly donkeys, and camp out among a lot of putrid old ruins, I'm not ready! I refuse to do anything of the sort!"

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"We're going to ride donkeys, and we're going to camp out for the night, old fat bean," he said.

"Yes, rather!"

"The ratherfulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter."

Snort from Bunter.

"Then you can jolly well leave me out!" he snapped.

Bob Cherry took out his handkerchief.

"Excuse me while I cry for a few minutes, you men," he said. "Boo-hoo! We're going to l-lose B-B-Bunter! Boo-hoo!"

"You silly ass!" roared Bunter.

"Pardon these tears!" sobbed Bob Cherry.

"Excuse my emotion! Boo-hoo!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I mean it!" roared Bunter. "You can jolly well get on the best you can without me, see?"

"Boo-hoo!"

"Come on," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

And the Greyfriars party went ashore, Bob Cherry drying his tears; and Billy Bunter glared after them with a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CITY OF THE DEAD!

"GREAT, enormous, and gigantic Ramesseum--" chanted Hassan.

Harry Wharton & Co., having "done" the Colossi of Memnon, arrived at the Ramesseum on donkey-back. Hassan's brown face fairly glowed with satisfaction. If there was anything the dragoman enjoyed more than cheating his lordly gentlemen it was pointing out to them the wonders of Egypt. And the Ramesseum, the gigantic temple built by Rameses the Second, was "some" sight.

The juniors dismounted from their steeds, which were left with the donkey-boys. Other tourists were on hand; and the ancient courts of the Ramesseum echoed to many languages-French and German, Arabic, English, and American.

It was a sunny day-and, of course, warm! It was going to be a real "beano," as Bob Cherry described it. The day was to be spent in donkey-riding among the ruins, seeing the sights; and instead of riding back to the Nile and the dahabiyeh, the party were going to camp out.

Within a short ride of the Tombs of the Kings was an estate belonging to Mr. Hilmi Maroudi, of Cairo, partly cultivated with orange-trees, partly desert. Mr. Maroudi, who had lent his magnificent dahabiyeh to his young friends, had told them of it, and that he had sent word to his manager to make them welcome if they gave the place a look-in. So while the juniors were sightseeing with Hassan, the Nubians were conveying the necessary things to Mr. Maroudi's land for camping out.

When the day's ride was over, the juniors were to find the camp ready, the tent up, and the supper cooked-which was camping-out on very easy and agreeable terms. The friendship of Mr. Maroudi was helping to make their holiday in Egypt run on very pleasant lines.

Had Billy Bunter been able to see the party as they arrived at the Ramesseum, he would not have been able to observe any diminution of their cheery spirits on account of his absence. Indeed, from their looks, it might have been supposed that the chums of the Remove were rather bucked by Bunter's determination to stay on the dahabiyeh.

Clatter! Clatter! Clatter! came the beating of donkeys' hoofs, and the juniors glanced round at new arrivals. A nasal voice, which they had heard already that morning, came to their ears.

"Say, you! You bonehead! You want to take a cinch on this ornery cayuse, I'm telling you." "Hallo, hallo, hallo, here come the jolly old colonels!" grinned Bob Cherry.

The two American gentlemen were in sight.

The tall, bony Colonel Jacks was struggling with a donkey that was trying to bolt. The donkey was so small, and the American gentleman was so long, that he could almost have touched the ground with his feet on either side of his mount by stretching out his lengthy legs. He had them doubled up, his bony knees jabbing at the donkey's ears. Perhaps that irritated the donkey. Anyhow, he was very restive, and G. W. Jacks was in difficulties, and yelling to his donkey-boy to control the steed.

The fat colonel, on the other hand, who was jogging on behind, was in no danger of his steed bolting. His unfortunate donkey looked on the point of collapse under his weight. Many Egyptian donkeys had suffered under Billy Bunter-but Colonel Skink was a heavier weight than Bunter, and he really looked as if he might turn his hapless moke into a pancake. The wretched donkey proceeded at a snail's pace, with an expression on his face that might have touched a heart of stone.

"Say, you bonehead!" roared Colonel G. W. Jacks, to his donkey-boy. "You hear me hoot? You hear me yaup? I'll say you want to take a cinch on this here cayuse!"

"Yes, sar!" gasped the donkey-boy. "Oh, yes, sar! Whack urn, sar!" Probably the donkey-boy, whose English was limited, did not know any American at all, and had to guess what "taking a cinch" might possibly mean. Apparently, he concluded that the donkey was to be touched-up; and he touched him up, hard. The donkey jumped, and his rider's sharp, bony knees jabbed him behind the ears, and he jumped still more.

The donkey-boy whacked again, and whacked again. Colonel Jacks swayed to and fro on the donkey, yelling. That was not what he wanted at all. He wanted the restive donkey held back, not driven to greater speed. But the donkey-boy did not catch on, and he whacked with great vigour-unlimited whacking being in the nature of Egyptian donkey-boys.

"Oh, my hat!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, as the excited and exasperated animal broke into an infuriated gallop. "That sportsman is going to hit trouble!"

"Begad!" murmured Lord Mauleverer. "I fancy he's going to hit Egypt."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Mauleverer was right.

Bony knees jabbing into him seemed to drive the donkey frantic. He galloped and plunged and roared, and suddenly put down his head and threw up his heels. G. W. Jacks shot over his head like a stone from a catapult and hit Egypt with a mighty smite.

"Oh crumbs!" gasped Frank Nugent.

"Him American gentleman him break him bones," remarked Hassan placidly.

"Well, he's got enough to spare!" murmured Bob.

Fortunately, the lean gentleman had not broken any bones. He sat up and stared after the donkey. The sagacious brute, relieved of his burden, was evidently desirous of keeping clear of it. He was going off at a gallop towards the Tombs of the Queens, with the perspiring donkey-boy raging in pursuit.

"Waal, I swow!" gasped Colonel Jacks. "I surely swow! Yep! I'll say I swow! By the great horned toad! You Ephraim Skink, you ride after that doggoned burro and get him for me."

"I guess you want to tell me how to make this burro move, Colonel Jacks!" panted Colonel Skink, coming up at a snail's pace. "Yep, I'll say I want to know how to make this goldarned burro move!"

Colonel Jacks scrambled to his feet. He glared at the group of Greyfriars fellows, who were smiling. Then he started in pursuit of the run-away donkey, his long legs thrashing' like flails. After him went the fat colonel, at a much slower pace. They disappeared from view beyond the Temple of Meremptah; and the grinning juniors turned back to the Ramesseum, the entertainment being over.

Harry Wharton & Co. found plenty to fill up the morning in the celebrated Ramesseum. After which, a luncheon-basket that had been brought on a donkey was unpacked, and they rested and lunched in the shade of a wide-spreading acacia.

In Egypt, it was an absolute necessity to rest in the midday heat. Not till well on in the afternoon did the tourists resume the exploration of the immense remains of the ancient Theban City of the Dead.

Then they rode up to Riban-el-Maluk to view the Tombs of the Kings. In that valley of the barren hills endless rock-tombs had been hewn by ancient hands. Most interesting to the juniors was that of Tutankhamen, of which Mauly's uncle, Sir Reginald Brooke, had told them. It was discovered in 1922 by Mr. Howard Carter and the Earl of Carnarvon. The mummy of the ancient king was still there, where it had been laid to rest so many

centuries ago; but that the juniors did not want to see. But they explored the tomb; and then clambered back up the endless steps to the valley, glad to get into the sunlight again. By that time the sun was setting over the hills of the Libyan Desert, and the juniors had had enough of tombs; and though Hassan told them enticingly of "innumerable dead persons" that remained to be seen, they decided to start for camp.

Hassan led the way, by a rather rugged and tortuous path over the hills, to the estate of Mr. Maroudi. The gleam of the orange-trees against the dusty brown of the desert was a welcome sight.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's the jolly old tent!" exclaimed Bob.

There was no road, only a donkey-track, which ran beside an irrigating canal. Beside the track, among a number of scattered acacias and tamarisk bushes, was a small tent.

The juniors drew rein and looked at it.

"That can't be our tent," said Harry Wharton.

"It's not big enough for half of us."

"No, sar; that is not the tent of honourable lords," said Hassan, looking puzzled. "Great and luxurious tent for lordly gentleman is farther onward."

"Somebody else camping here?" said Johnny Bull.

"No person has leave to camp on land of great Maroudi," said Hassan. "Only my lordly gentlemen, who are friends of great Maroudi. This is tent of some common person who has butted in, as you say in English."

"Oh, my hat! It's the jolly old colonels!" exclaimed Nugent.

A tall, lean man and a short, fat man came into view through the tamarisks. They stared at the Greyfriars fellows, who stared in return.

"Say, you bobbed up again!" said Colonel Jacks.

"The bobfulness is terrific, my esteemed transatlantic friend!" replied Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"You are camping here?" asked Harry.

"I'll say yep."

"But this is not of estimable permission!" exclaimed Hassan. "You have no affirmative leave from Mr. Maroudi."

Colonel Jacks looked at the dragoman.

"Who's Mr. Maroudi when he's at home?" he asked carelessly. Apparently, he had never heard of the Egyptian millionaire. "This here ground belong to him-hay? Perhaps he's the darky in the nightshirt who came along and blew off his mouth awhile back? Yep? Waal, I guess we're camping on this very identical spot, and I calculate that we ain't taking 'No' from an Arab! Nope!"

"I'll say nope!" chimed in Colonel Skink, "I'll surely say nope!"

Evidently the American gentlemen had made themselves at home on Mr. Maroudi's land without troubling about the formality of asking leave.

The "darky in the nightshirt" to whom G. W. Jacks alluded was no doubt Mr. Maroudi's manager, who had come along to explain that it was private land-unheeded by the free-and-easy gentlemen from the United States.

Colonel Jacks turned a plug of tobacco in his mouth and spat. Colonel Skink followed his example.

"Say, since we've met up so handy," went on Colonel Jacks, "I've got suthin' to say to you guys for dropping me off your boat this morning! I've sure got a stick in my tent, if you'll hang on a minute till I get it!"

The long-legged colonel made a stride towards the tent. Harry Wharton & Co. laughed, and rode on without waiting for him to emerge. A grove of orange-trees hid the Yankee camp from their sight as they came in view of their own camping-ground.

A dark gentleman in a djubbah-probably the darky in the nightshirt who had interviewed the two colonels-came salaaming towards them. Black servants stood round and salaamed. A large tent stood by the orange-trees; and a camp-fire was lighted, which was needed, for after the heat of the day the night was cold. The dark gentleman spoke in Arabic, which was translated by Hassan, bidding them welcome in the name of Mr. Maroudi, and placing himself and all that was his at the disposal of the Faringhee lords. "Jolly-what?" said Bob Cherry, as they sat down to supper round the jolly camp-fire. "What-ho!"

There was no doubt that it was jolly. Mr. Maroudi's servants left them after supper, returning to their own quarters on a distant part of the estate, and the juniors sat and talked round the camp-fire, under the glittering stars of Egypt, Hassan hovering round them with a beaming, dusky face. And when the juniors turned in, in downy beds in the big tent, the dragoman stretched himself on a prayer-rug in the doorway--to sleep, as he told them, with one eye open to watch over the safety of his lordly gentlemen; a statement which the juniors took the liberty of doubting, for before they closed their own eyes the dragoman was snoring.

CHAPTER FIVE

BUNTER ON HIS OWN!

"BEASTS!" growled Billy Bunter.

Billy Bunter was fed-up.

In one sense, he was more than fed-up; for he had spent a happy morning in taking a series of "snacks"-and every one of Bunter's little snacks would have made a square meal for any other fellow. That series of snacks had been followed by a Gargantuan lunch.

Lunch had been followed by a nap, and nap by a substantial tea.

Provender on board the houseboat was good and ample. Mr. Maroudi's own skilful Coptic cook was in charge of the commissariat, and he satisfied even Bunter. But even William George Bunter, at long last grew fed-up with meals and intermediate snacks. He had a rather uncomfortable feeling in his circumference, and doubted whether he would enjoy his dinner that evening.

And he was fed-up with his own company.

Bunter was gregarious. Camping out was rot; a comfortable cabin on the dahabiyeh was solid sense. But the other fellows had preferred their own "rot" to Bunter's solid sense, and Bunter had sniffed and left them to it. Now he wished he hadn't.

Even Bunter could not eat and sleep all day.

When he was not eating or sleeping he wanted to talk. His fat voice was music to his own ears, if to no others. The Nubian sailors on the dahabiyeh did not understand English; the Nubian servants understood very little. The reis understood the language quite well, but had no desire to use it as a means of conversation with Billy Bunter.

Indeed, the only living things on board the Cleopatra that had ever displayed any partiality for Bunter was the flies. One of Bunter's chief occupations was swatting the flies that loved him not wisely but too well.

Had the dahabiyeh still been tied up at Luxor, on the eastern bank, Bunter could have rolled ashore, and found something to do in the town.

But the Cleopatra was on the western bank now, and the broad Nile rolled between him and Luxor. Bunter blinked at the hills and valleys, at the towering Colossi, at obelisks and ruined temples and donkey-riders, and did not feel disposed to go exploring tombs on his lonely own.

It was just like those beasts, he reflected bitterly, to go off for the day and leave him on his own. It was true that he had refused to go with them; still, he might have consented if they had shown a proper yearning for his fascinating society. But they hadn't. If they had come back and begged him to think again, he might have consented to think again. But they hadn't.

"Leaving a fellow on his own!" grunted Bunter, blinking at the sunset over the Libyan Desert. "Beasts! After all I've done for 'em too! It's always the same. A chap can't be open-hearted, generous, considerate, without meeting with beastly ingratitude on all sides!" Bunter shook his head sadly over this. It was really a saddening reflection.

Leaning on the rail of the dahabiyeh, he blinked at the shore and debated whether he should go for a donkey-ride. He had had a lot of ill-luck with donkeys. Still, he was bored to the back teeth with hanging about the deck doing nothing. He was not hungry, and he was not sleepy, and a fellow had to do something. He had money in his pockets, too.

Lord Mauleverer had paid his visit to the bank before Luxor was left. When Mauly was in funds, Billy Bunter was in funds. He had borrowed a few thousand piastres from his lordship-the same to be "squared" out of some postal orders he was expecting next term at Greyfriars.

He had almost made up his fat mind to go ashore and hire a donkey when he observed a figure in a dusty djubbah standing under a palm watching the dahabiyeh.

It was an Arab; he had been there some time, though Bunter had not specially noticed him before. Now that he did notice him, something familiar about the man struck Bunter. He fixed his spectacles on the dark face, but the distance was too great for recognition by the short-sighted Owl of the Remove. As he watched the man, another Arab came through the palms and joined him, and Bunter could make out the scar of an old knife-cut on the newcomer's cheek. He gave a jump.

"Those villains!" he ejaculated.

He knew who they were now-Hamza, the man with the knife-cut; Yussef, the hawk-faced ruffian-the two Arab confederates of Kalizelos.

For a moment Billy Bunter felt a spasm of terror. But he realised that he was safe on the dahabiyeh, with its numerous crew and crowd of servants-all, by the order of Hilmi Maroudi, devoted to the service of the Greyfriars party.

Reassured by that reflection, Bunter watched the two rascals curiously through his big spectacles. They were watching the houseboat, and there was little doubt that they had discovered or guessed at last what had become of their missing master, and knew that Konstantinos Kalizelos was kept a prisoner on board the Cleopatra.

The two Arabs came down to the bank at last, stepped on the gangway, and approached the side of the dahabiyeh. Moussa, the reis, waved them back. Bunter did not understand a word of what followed; Arabic volleyed to and fro between the two rascals and the tall, grave reis. The argument grew hot, and Hamza, the scarred man, suddenly drew a knife from under his djubbah and made as if to rush across the gangway.

The reis did not stir; but he called out, and a dozen of the Nubian sailors crowded to the spot, with staves in their hands. The scarred ruffian jumped back just in time to elude a blow that would have knocked him off the gang-plank into the mud of the Nile.

Moussa waved his hand and barked Arabic.

Hamza and Yussef yelled back in the same tongue; and though Bunter did not understand, the words, looks and tones told him that they were hurling a storm of abuse at the reis. A faint flush showed under Moussa's dusky skin, and he rapped out an order to his sailors. Five or six of them ran across the gangway and began beating the Arabs with their staves. Bunter grinned.

"That's the stuff to give 'em!" he chuckled.

Yelling, the two Arabs beat a retreat and vanished beyond the palms. If they had entertained any idea of rescuing their master they had to give it up now. The Nubian sailors came chuckling back to the dahabiyeh.

Hamza and Yussef were gone, but the sight of them caused Bunter to give up his idea of a donkey-ride ashore. Probably they would not have heeded the fat junior with whom they had no concern; but Bunter was not taking the risk.

He loafed on the deck and yawned, and leaned on the side and blinked at the muddy bank of the Nile.

From a latticed window below, which was shuttered and fastened, he heard the sound of a voice and grinned. It was the voice of Kalizelos, the Greek; and though Bunter knew no Greek, ancient or modern, he did not need to be told that Kalizelos was uttering imprecations in the latter language. Doubtless, through the interstices of the shutter, he had seen his confederates and watched their retreat.

Bunter had forgotten the prisoner of the dahabiyeh, but he was reminded of him now. A thoughtful expression came over his fat face.

Kalizelos knew the secret of the scarab, if it had a secret. It was a secret, if the Greek was well informed, worth a quarter of a million pounds!

He had refused to reveal it to Lord Mauleverer as the price of his liberty; if there was, indeed, anything to reveal. Bunter was intensely curious on the subject, and he was idle and bored, and he resolved to have a talk with Kalizelos. It seemed possible, to Bunter that a deep, wily, sagacious fellow like Bunter might be able to draw something out of the Greek.

Wild horses would hardly have dragged Bunter into the cabin within reach of the Greek's sinewy hands. But it was not necessary to go to the cabin. The window of the prison-room looked on the balcony that surrounded the stern of the dahabiyeh. That window was covered by a slatted shutter, which allowed the air to circulate freely, and through which it was easy to speak.

The fat Owl went below, walked through the passage and saloons to the balcony, and strolled round to Kalizelos' window.

He tapped.

There was a startled exclamation in the cabin.

Bunter heard the Greek bound to the window.

He grinned at the thought that perhaps Kalizelos supposed that it was one of his confederates coming to his aid.

There was a mosquito-net over the inside of the window. The Greek dragged it aside, and his olive face was pressed to the slats. Even with the shutter between, Billy Bunter felt a thrill of terror at the gleam of the jet black eyes.

The slats were about six inches apart, but they were strong, and the shutter was locked, the key taken away. Bunter was daunted only for a moment. Then he grinned.

The Greek glared at him like a caged wolf.

Evidently he was surprised and not pleased to see Bunter's fat face outside.

"Hallo, old bean! Finding it warm in there?" asked Bunter genially.

"Fool!" snarled Kalizelos.

But his manner changed instantly. Perhaps the obvious fatuousness in Bunter's face gave him a gleam of hope.

"Boy! Listen!" He whispered through the slats. "A thousand pounds in English money to help me to freedom!"

"Oh crikey!" ejaculated Bunter.

He stared at the Greek, whose black eyes fairly burned at him through the slats.

"Are you watched? Can they see you?" breathed the Greek.

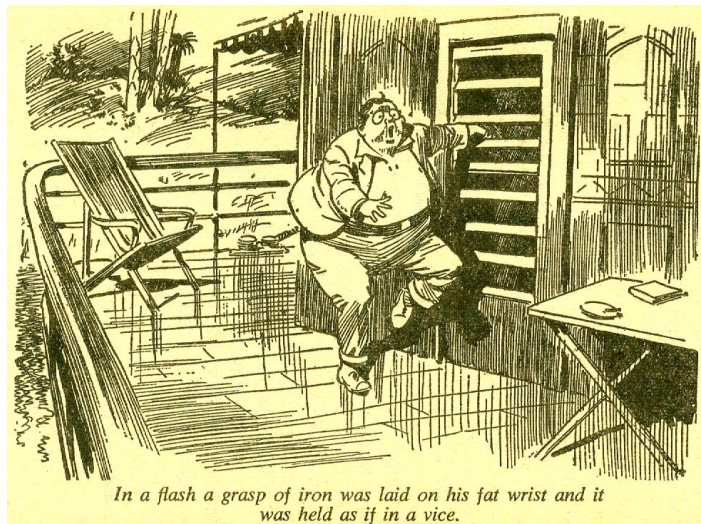
"Eh! No! They can't see me here from the deck," said Bunter.

"Help me! A thousand pounds--"

"Catch me!" said Bunter derisively.

The Greek eyed him evilly. He had set Bunter down as a hanger-on of the wealthy Mauleverer, and he had seen enough of the Greyfriars party to have learned a great deal about William George Bunter. He had hoped, at least, that Bunter could be bribed. But William George Bunter had his limit, though it was a wide one.

"You can wash that out, old bean," grinned Bunter. "Not that I believe you'd pony up; a knife in the back would be more in your line. He, he, he! But look here-about that jolly old scarab. Is there anything in the yarn, or are you gammoning?"



The Greek opened his lips for a savage retort.

But again he changed his mind swiftly. The fierce scowl faded from his face and he smiled.

"My young friend, there is a secret, and it is worth a large fortune," he answered. "I have read it in the papyrus written by the scribe of A-Menah, which was to be given to his son Menarsis. This papyrus came into my hands, among many hundreds of papyri, in my shop in Cairo. But the secret is useless to me without the scarab and without my freedom. His lordship made me an offer this morning. You heard him. Now that I have had time to reflect I accept it. When will he return to dahabiyeh?"

"Not till to-morrow night, or the next day," answered Bunter. "But look here, you can tell me--"

His little round eyes gleamed with eagerness behind his big round spectacles.

"If I write it, can you carry the writing to his lordship and bring back the order for my release?" asked the Greek.

"Yes, rather!" said Bunter at once.

"I will write, then!"

The Greek fumbled in his pockets and produced a sheet of paper. He fumbled again, but his hand came out empty.

"I have no pencil. If you have a pencil--"

"Here you are!" said Bunter.

He fished out a stump of pencil from his pocket, and put his fat hand through the slats to hand it to the Greek. In a flash a grasp of iron was laid on his fat wrist and it was held as if in a vice. And as Bunter gave a startled yelp the Greek's voice came hissing: "Silence, pig! One cry to the men on deck and I will twist your arm till the bones crack! Silence!"

CHAPTER SIX

THE ESCAPE OF KALIZELOS!

BILLY HUNTER gasped.

The grip on his fat wrist was like steel. If it had been caught in a vice the fat junior would have had about as much chance of getting it loose again.

With a jerk the Greek had drawn the whole fat arm through the opening of the shutter-slats, so that Bunter's podgy chest was pulled against the outside of the shutter. Once his grip was on Bunter that was all he wanted.

"Ooooooooooh!" gasped Bunter.

"Silence, or--"

The Greek's voice was low and sibilant, and a twist of the fat arm in his grasp gave Bunter a hint of what to expect.

The fat Owl gurgled into silence.

His arm, stretched through the slats, gripped by the Greek, was at KalizeLOS' mercy, and Bunter shuddered with fear and horror as he felt that warning twist. The Greek's powerful grasp could have broken his arm like a pipe-stern, and there was not the slightest doubt that he would do it if Bunter called for help, as readily as he would have broken the fat junior's neck to open a way of escape. It was a desperate man in the prison-room of the dahabiyeh; a man ready to take desperate chances, and as ruthless as a caged tiger. Bunter, pulled against the shutter, gasped for breath, but gave no sound but a gasp. He dared not.

The Greek listened like a wild beast in the jungle. This was a chance for him, but a desperate chance. Outside his locked door a black Nubian squatted on guard, and if he learned what was going on the cabin would be entered at once and the prisoner overpowered. All depended on silence, and the men on deck seeing nothing.

Bunter was silent; he dared make no sound.

Too late, it dawned on his obtuse mind that the wily Greek had been tricking him. He had had no intention of revealing the secret. Bunter knew that now. He had tricked the obtuse Owl into placing an arm within his reach, and Bunter had fallen into the palpable trap blindly. The Greek had judged his character well; he would not even have thought of attempting such a trick on any other of the Greyfriars fellows. But he had counted on Bunter's stupidity, and not in vain.

Over the balcony was a sun-awning which screened it from the deck. The Nubian sailors could not see Bunter unless they looked down and pulled a corner of the awning aside; which, of course, they were not likely to do. Had the other juniors been aboard, some of

them would have been on the balcony, but they were miles away. Only if some of the black servants came out on the balcony would Bunter's predicament be discovered. But that might happen any moment, as the Greek knew.

Bunter, his fat face white with terror, blinked through his big spectacles at the fierce eyes that glittered from within. Every instant he feared to feel his fat arm twisted and to hear the crack of breaking bones. His podgy heart almost died in his breast.

"Silence!" repeated the Greek, in a hissing whisper. "A single cry, and you know what to expect, fat fool!"

"I-I say--" Bunter whispered, even more faintly than the Greek. "I-I say, leggo! I-I say, you're hurting my arm! Ooogh!"

Kalizelos laughed savagely.

"I will break your arm to splinters if you do not give me the help I need!" he hissed.

"I-I-I-leggo! I say, I-I'll go round and unlock the door if-if you'll let go my arm!"

If Bunter expected the Greek to believe that mendacious promise, he was disappointed. A snarl answered him.

"I-I can't open the window, you know," breathed Bunter. "It's locked, and Hassan's got the key. It-it won't open. If-if you'll let go I-I'll go in and open the door--"

"Silence, fool!"

Bunter was silent. He was a helpless prisoner in the Greek's grasp, but what purpose the villain hoped to serve by his trick was a mystery to him. Certainly, Bunter could not have opened the locked shutter.

"You have a penknife-a pocket-knife. Give it to me with your other hand."

"I-I haven't--"

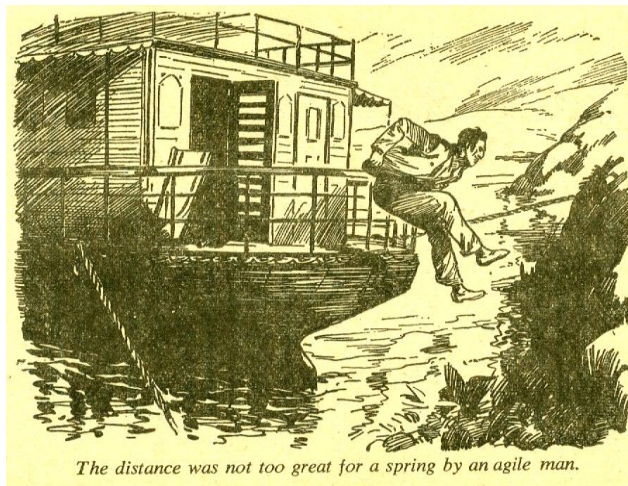
"I have seen you use it. Another lie, and I will break your arm like a reed!" snarled the Greek.

Billy Bunter fumbled in his pockets with his free hand. His pocket-knife was passed through the slats to the Greek within.

Even then, Bunter did not understand. The pocket-knife was useless as a weapon. But that was not what the Greek was thinking of.

He took the knife in his free hand and opened it with his teeth. Still holding Bunter's arm with his left, he used the pocket-knife with his right hand. Bunter heard a sound of clicking.

Then he understood. The Greek had used the knife to pick the lock of the window-shutter. "Oh!" breathed Bunter.



The distance was not too great for a spring by an agile man.

The shutter opened outwards. Bunter hoped, for a second, that the Greek would have to let him go to open it. Once he was loose, one yell would warn every man on the dahabiyeh that the prisoner was escaping.

But Kalizelos was not likely to let him go.

He allowed Bunter's fat arm to slip out, still grasping his wrist, and keeping the fat hand within. That gave him room to open the unlocked shutter sufficiently to reach round with his other hand and grasp the fat junior by the collar.

Then Bunter's fat paw was released and he jerked it away. The Greek's vice-like grip was on his collar now. He pulled round the shutter, which swung wide open. Warning him, with a fierce glare, to be silent, Kalizelos pulled him in at the window.

In a few moments Bunter was inside the cabin.

"One cry--" hissed the Greek.

Bunter did not utter a sound. Swiftly Kalizelos cut a sheet from the bed into strips and bound the fat junior hand and foot, gagged him, and laid him on the floor.

He drew a deep, deep breath as he turned to the window. The way of escape was open now.

Bunter watched him, with goggling eyes, as he climbed, actively as a cat, through the window, and dropped silently on the boat's balcony.

He vanished from Bunter's sight-and the fat Owl was thankful to see him go.

Kalizelos stepped softly across the balcony.

The dahabiyeh was tied up close to the bank, and the gangway was run from the lower deck to the Nile shore. The distance was not too great for a spring by an agile man-and the Greek was agile as a tiger. Under the edge of the awning he paused for a moment. Some of the Nubian sailors on the forward deck were singing. The Greek was unseen, so far; but the moment he left the dahabiyeh he would be in full view of the whole crew.

With his teeth shut tight, the Greek stepped lightly on the rail of the balcony, balanced himself for a second, and sprang.

Thud!

The desperate spring reached the high bank, but he fell on his face there, clutching at the hard, dried mud, scrambling like a cat.

Instantly there was a shout from the deck.

The Greek heard the deep voice of Moussa, the reis, booming, and the patter of the Nubian sailors' running feet.

Desperately he scrambled up the bank and stood on his feet.

He gave one hurried glance back.

Moussa, standing on the upper deck, was waving his brown hands and shouting. Six or seven Nubians were rushing across the gang-plank to cut off the Greek's escape.

Kalizelos bounded away.

He had a start-not more than a dozen yards, but it was enough for the agile Greek. He ran like a deer, with the Nubians shouting behind.

A few seconds, and he had disappeared behind a clump of palms.

The reis shouted frantically. The Nubians dashed in swift pursuit. Donkey-boys on the bank stared blankly. The Greek had vanished from sight, and he was not seen again. In a quarter of an hour the Nubians came back from the chase without even having set eyes on the escaping prisoner. Then Moussa came down to the prisoner's cabin to investigate, and his eyes almost bulged from his head at the sight of Billy Bunter, stretched on the floor, bound and gagged.

CHAPTER SEVEN

STRANDED!

"OH crikey!"

That was Billy Bunter's first remark when he was released.

"Is he gone?"

"The son of a thousand pigs has escaped!" said the reis. "My lord's anger will be great. Upon your head be it!"

Bunter snorted.

"How could I help it, you silly idiot, when he grabbed me through the window? Don't be a silly ass!"

The reis gave Bunter a long, grave look and retired without saying anything more. He had bad news for Lord Mauleverer when he returned, but the fault was not his. There was nothing more to be done, and the reis therefore dismissed the matter from his mind and returned to his narghile.

Billy Bunter rolled, snorting, to the deck.

Bunter-so far as he could see, at least-was not to blame in the matter. The prisoner had escaped-which was unfortunate, but not Bunter's fault. He reflected bitterly that the other fellows when they heard what had happened, would make out that he was to blame-as usual!

Still, Bunter was used to injustice.

Certainly, he wished that he hadn't gone near the prisoner, as it had turned out. But it was too late to think of that, so Bunter did not think about it. What couldn't be helped, couldn't be helped. And that was that! If those inconsiderate beasts hadn't gone off for days, leaving Bunter on his own, it wouldn't have happened. Besides, Bunter had other matters to think about.

The really pressing matter to be considered was whether Billy Bunter was going to spend his time on the tied-up dahabiyeh, with no company but his own, or join the fellows in their camp on Mr. Maroudi's plantation. Bunter considered that pressing question as he blinked at the sunset over the Libyan desert.

It was easy enough to join the Greyfriars party, if he liked. The camp was only two or three miles from the Nile, and Bunter knew where it was. Mr. Maroudi's place was called Beni-Hasa, and any donkey-boy on the bank would be sure to know it. He had only to mount a donkey and say "Beni-Hasa," and the donkey and the donkey-boy would do the rest. It was cooler now, and Bunter was utterly fed-up with the dahabiyeh and his own fascinating company. Also, he reflected, that if he butted in at the camp it might have an annoying effect on the other fellows-which was all to the good! It would show the beasts that he jolly well wasn't going to be left out of things.

Supper-an important matter-was pretty certain to be good. He knew what Mr. Maroudi's hospitality was like, and though the Egyptian gentleman was not there himself, he had sent orders to his people, and Bunter knew that Hassan had sent a messenger that morning to Beni-Hasa. Upon the whole, Bunter's fat comfort was not likely to suffer in camp-and, anyhow, if he didn't like it, he could ride back. All these important considerations having been duly considered, Billy Bunter made up his fat mind.

Having made it up, he rolled across the gangway to the bank.

"Donkey, sir!"

"Fine donkey, sir!"

"This magnificent donkey, sir--"

A dozen donkey-boys surrounded the fat junior at once. Billy Bunter carefully selected what seemed to him the quietest-looking donkey, and, with the help of the donkey-boy, scrambled into the red leather saddle.

"Where you go, sar? Ramesseum-Tombs of Kings-Tombs of Queens--"

"Beni-Hasa!" said Bunter. "You know Maroudi's plantation."

"Know Maroudi, sah! Know Beni-Hasa! Yes, sar!"

"Get on, then!"

The stick cracked on the donkey and they started. Billy Bunter cast a rather uneasy blink around him, remembering Hamza and Yussef.

But it was an hour since he, had seen the two Arab ruffians; they had long been gone. And there were plenty of people about. Bunter trotted away cheerfully, with the donkey-boy running behind, cracking his stick on the donkey.

The "City of the Dead" of the ancient Egyptian Thebes drew hardly a glance from Billy Bunter. He passed the "Tombs' of the Kings" without even knowing that they were there. He gave attention to his surroundings when the donkey clattered up a rocky hill-path and he had to hold on with both hands to avoid slipping off.

Clatter, clatter, clatter!

"Oh lor'!" gasped Bunter.

He rocked and swayed in the saddle.

The hills were low, but the path was not easy, even for a good rider. And Billy Bunter was the worst rider that ever was. And the small Egyptian donkey was feeling severely the terrific weight of the Owl of Greyfriars. Bunter had a strong suspicion that the donkey would throw him off if he could. He had, so to speak, been there before!

According to Billy Bunter, he was accustomed to backing magnificent hunters at Bunter Court.

But he had had rotten luck in backing Egyptian donkeys. He held on for his fat life as he came out on the rocky slopes on the farther side of the hills. A patch of green showed against the brown of the desert in the sunset-lit west, and the donkey-boy pointed with his stick.

"Beni-Hasa, sar!"

The plantation was about a mile farther on, and a rough donkey-track led towards it down the 'hill. Clatter, clatter!

"Yaroooooh!"

The donkey's hoofs slipped, and Bunter nearly took a header. He yelled to the donkey-boy.

"Here, you! Hold him! I'll get off!"

"Yes, sar!"

The donkey-boy held the animal, and Bunter dismounted. He decided to walk till the level was reached. Going down the hill was more risky than getting up, on donkey-back, and even Bun-ter could walk a half-mile downhill. He grunted and plodded on, and the black boy followed with the donkey.

Puffing and panting, the fat Owl reached the level at last, at the foot of the hill. The green plantation was only half a mile away now, gleaming against the brown desert in the last rays of the sun. The sudden twilight was at hand, but there was plenty of time to finish the ride before dark. But Bunter's donkey had his own ideas about that.

"Here, you! I'll get on now!" panted Bunter.

"Yes, sar!"

The donkey backed away.

"Bring that beast here, you dummy!" snapped Bunter irritably. "What's the matter with the silly brute?"

The donkey backed off farther. The donkey-boy shouted at the animal and brandished his stick, but that unfortunate donkey had had enough of his weighty rider. Perhaps he had supposed, when Bunter dismounted, that the fat junior was done with him. Anyhow, he was extremely unwilling to allow Bunter to mount again,

The donkey-boy grabbed at him, but the donkey jumped away and eluded the grab. With a clatter of hoofs, he dashed back the way he had come. Yelling, the donkey-boy dashed in pursuit.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

He sat down on a rock to rest, while the donkey-boy caught the donkey. But the donkey-boy did not catch the donkey. Angry yells and a brandished stick behind his whisking tail, perhaps, did not encourage the animal to be caught.

He clattered on, with his owner panting after him, and both of them disappeared from sight in a fold of the hills. Hoofbeats and yells died away in the distance.

Bunter sat and blinked in the direction in which they had disappeared. He was waiting for them to reappear.

Sunset deepened into dark. It was the brief twilight of the south, and night was at hand. It dawned on Bunter that the donkey-boy had not succeeded in catching the donkey, and that they were not going to reappear. That donkey was going all out for the Nile, and the donkey-boy was going all out behind him. And darkness dropped on the land of Egypt like a cloak, and the hills vanished from Bunter's sight.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

For the second time that day Billy Bunter was left on his own. But his last state was worse than his first! This time he was left on his own on a barren hillside, three miles at least from the dahabiyeh, and without the remotest possibility of finding his way back to it—even if his fat legs had been equal to the tramp across rough hills.

Billy Bunter sat and blinked in utter dismay.

There was no going back! That was certain!

He had to go on-on foot! And if he missed the track--

"Beasts!" groaned Bunter.

Mr. Maroudi's plantation was a cultivated patch on the edge of the desert. If Bunter missed the track, he was likely to go wandering into the Libyan Desert. He groaned.

The bright stars of Egypt were coming out in the sky. Eastward of Bunter, towards the Nile, the hills lay a black mass. There was no sign or sound of the donkey-boy, or of any other living being. Westward, in the gleaming of the stars, he was comforted to make out a dark mass which could only be the orange plantation. And he found, too, that the donkey-track that led to Beni-Hasa was very clearly marked—so clearly marked that even Bunter could hardly miss it in the bright starlight.

There was no danger, after all, of wandering into the remote recesses of the Libyan Desert. He had only to follow the donkey-track till he reached the Greyfriars camp, and if he missed the camp he would arrive at the plantation and its buildings. That was a comfort—but he had to walk half a mile at least, and he groaned as he started, after a long, long rest! He tramped on with bitter feelings in his podgy breast. This was the sort of thing a fellow had to stand, after all he had done for a set of ungrateful rotters! Likely as not, they had turned in already-fat lot they cared about Bunter! With deep wrath and indignation, and at the pace of a very old and very tired snail, Billy Bunter plodded along the rough donkey-track, stopping every now and then for a rest on a boulder.

The track wound among acacias and clumps of tamarisk bushes. Suddenly in the opening of some acacias, Billy Bunter spotted the starlight glimmering on a tent. He halted, gasping for breath, and ejaculated: "Beasts!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

BUNTER ALL OVER!

BILLY BUNTER stood in the starlight, blinking at the tent.

It was dark and silent; the occupants, evidently, had turned in for the night.

They had not waited supper for Bunter. True, they had not known that he was coming along.

But Bunter was hungry by this time and he reflected bitterly that the beasts did not care whether he had any supper or not.

In the starlight and the shadow of the thick acacias the tent was dim to the view. But Bunter noticed that it was not a large tent; certainly not so large as he would have expected, considering the number of the party. It looked as if he was not going to be so comfortable, after all, as he had taken for granted. Packed in a poky little tent-Bunter sniffed.

There was a gleam in Bunter's eyes behind his spectacles. He had had many trials that day, and his temper had suffered. Here he was, tired and hungry-and there were those beasts, sleeping as if he did not matter! It would serve them jolly right to loosen the tent-pegs and bring the tent down on their nappers!

It was easy enough-for evidently the occupants of the tent were fast asleep. Bunter grinned a sour grin. The only drawback to that justifiable little scheme of vengeance was that the fellows might kick him afterwards. Still, they would suppose that the tent had come down by accident-and Bunter was prepared to deny having been anywhere near it when it fell.

Bunter was tired, but not too tired to give these unfeeling beasts what they deserved. He crept cautiously towards the tent, over the rough ground.

The tent-flap was closed and fastened. As he listened near it he heard a sound of sleepers breathing within.

Fast asleep, the beasts-but they were going to wake up jolly suddenly! The fat junior crept stealthily round the tent, jerking out peg after peg.

There was a sudden collapse.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter.

The canvas billowed on the ground. In two places it was shoved up from underneath, evidently where two heads butted up at it. There was a muffled roar from the interior. Billy Bunter backed away. His idea was to retreat to a distance, and come on the scene when the juniors struggled out of the fallen tent-as if he had just arrived! Then even those suspicious beasts could hardly suspect that he had had a hand in the collapse of the tent! That programme was not carried out, however. At the second step, Bunter caught his foot in a trailing tent-rope, and went sprawling.

"Oooooogh!" he gasped.

He rolled down a rough slope, and brought up against the trunk of an acacia-tree, with a bump. There he lay gasping, quite winded.

From the wallowing canvas, extraordinary noises were proceeding. Obviously, the occupants of the tent had been awakened very suddenly, and were very startled, and still more exasperated. Two voices rang out into the night-only two, and neither of them was a Greyfriars voice. Bunter, as he sprawled gasping for breath under the shadowy acacia, heard those two voices-in amazement and dismay.

"Say, what's got this doggoned tent?"

"I'll say you never fastened them pegs safe, Colonel Jacks."

"Forget it, you pie-faced bonehead! I fastened them pegs as safe as any ornery pegs ever was fastened, Ephraim Skink!"

"I guess it looks like it, you gink! Hyer's this thundering tent down on our cabezas--"

"I'm telling you I fastened them pegs safe--"

"And I'm telling you you're the biggest bonehead from Boneheadville! Yep! You want to l'arn to fasten a tent-peg! Yep! You surely do!"

"You pie-faced geck--"

"You ornery gink--"

Two frantic figures were struggling under the wallowing canvas, as the two colonels slanged one another. There was a sudden yell.

"Great gophers! Keep your hoof out of my doggoned eye!"

"Keep your pesky eye away from my foot!"

"I guess I'll--"

"Aw! Can it, Colonel Skink! You surely do blow off your mouth a lot too much, and I'm telling you so."

"You pesky bonehead, if you'd fastened them pegs--"

"I'll say I fastened them pegs, sir, and I'll say that some guy has come along and hooked them out! Yep! And I'll say that I'm going to cinch that guy and give him ginger!"

A long, lean figure struggled, at last, out of the wallowing canvas. It was followed by a gasping fat figure.

Billy Bunter sprawled in the dark shadow of the acacia, almost frozen with terror. He realised now that he had made a little mistake. This tent, only too obviously, was not the Greyfriars tent.

Its occupants were not the Greyfriars juniors; but the two Yankee gentlemen of the felucca--and the lengthy gentleman, who was raving with wrath, was the very gentleman who had spanked Bunter on the dahabiyeh that morning! Bunter had not forgotten that hefty spanking! He hugged the shadow of the acacia, not daring to run for it into the open starlight.

"Say, you!" roared Colonel Jacks, glaring round him. "Say, where are you? I want to see the pie-faced gink that let down this tent!"

"Aw, don't I keep on telling you that you never fastened them pegs--" gasped Colonel Skink.

"You ornery pie-can, don't I keep on shouting that I fastened them pegs safe!" roared Colonel Jacks. "Don't I keep on yauping that some guy has moseyed along and let that goldarned tent down on us!"

"Waal, who'd do it, you gink?"

"One of them pesky sons of John Bull, what we had a rookus with on the Nile, Ephraim Skink! They're camping near by. I'll say--"

"Oh, guff!" said Colonel Skink. "You never fastened them pegs--"

"If you want to be gouged, Ephraim Skink, you'll keep yauping that I never fastened them pegs!" bawled Colonel Jacks. "I'll tell you that it was a pesky trick, jest to get our goat-yep! I'll tell a man, sir! And I guess I'm after that guy, sir, and if I don't spread him out over Egypt in small pieces, sir, you can call me a boob, sir."

The long-legged colonel, as he glared round in search of the suspected practical joker, did not see the fat figure crouching in the shadow of the acacia. But he caught a glimmer of Bunter's spectacles from the shadows, and gave a roar.

"Say, you! I guess you're my mutton."

The long legs whisked like lightning. Billy Bunter leaped up with a howl of terror.

Before the long-limbed American gentleman could reach the acacia, the fat Owl bolted back to the donkey-track, and raced away.

Tramp! tramp! tramp! came the colonel's pursuing footsteps after him. Both the colonels had a clear view of Bunter in the starlight, and recognised him.

"I swow!" ejaculated Colonel Skink. "I guess you touched the spot, Colonel Jacks-it was one of them pesky sons of John Bull--"

"I guess I got him!"

But G. W. Jacks had not quite got Bunter.

Bunter was going strong along the donkey-track. G. W. Jacks raced after him! Bunter had simply no chance in the race. He heard the footsteps thundering behind; he felt an outstretched bony hand graze his shoulder. In sheer terror, the fat junior stumbled over and fell. The next instant, Colonel Jacks was sprawling over him. His bony head hit the donkey-track, with a loud concussion.

There was a fearful howl from G. W. Jacks.

Bunter scrambled up.

Colonel Jacks, sprawling, was clasping his bony head with both hands, and howling with anguish. Bunter did not stay to listen. He circled round the damaged colonel, and raced on, and vanished.

G. W. Jacks hardly saw him go. His head, evidently, was damaged. His head was hard, but Egypt was harder. For several minutes the hapless colonel sat clasping his head, and emitting howls of anguish and wrath.

When he staggered to his feet, at last, the night had swallowed Bunter. Colonel Jacks limped back to his tent and his companion.

"You get that guy?" asked Colonel Skink.

"I'll say nope!" gasped Colonel Jacks. "But I'm going to get him! Them guys are camped up the road somewheres. You get hold of a stick, Colonel Skink, and mosey along with me!-I guess we're going to knock spots out the whole doggoned outfit! Yep! I'll say so, a few."

"I should smile!" agreed Colonel Skink.

And there was a stick grasped in a bony hand, and another stick grasped in a fat hand, as the two exasperated colonels started up the donkey-track to search for the camp of the Greyfriars party.

CHAPTER NINE

THE ENEMY!

HARRY WHARTON stirred, and opened his eyes.

He raised his head, and looked round him in the darkness of the big tent.

Some sound or movement had awakened him.

He could hear the steady breathing of his friends, still fast asleep. But the deep snore of Hassan, the son of Suleiman, sleeping on the prayer-rug outside the door-flap, was no longer to be heard.

Wharton smiled sleepily. Hassan slept on the rug outside, under the stars, to watch over the safety of his lordly gentlemen-but Wharton had heard him snoring before he dropped off to sleep himself. As the snore was not now audible, he concluded that the dragoman had awakened, and made some movement that had disturbed his slumber. He laid his head on the downy pillow again, and closed his eyes.

If he dreamed, he little dreamed of what was happening within a few yards of him, outside the tent-flap. Danger was not in the thoughts of the Greyfriars juniors.

Kalizelos, the Greek, had been in a Cairo prison, when Sir Reginald Brooke had trusted the juniors up the Nile in Mr. Maroudi's dahabiyeh. He had escaped and tracked them up the river of Egypt; but he was a safe prisoner, locked in a cabin on the Cleopatra; and so there was nothing to be feared from him. Had Wharton been aware that the Greek had escaped from the dahabiyeh, certainly he would not have felt so secure. But he had no suspicion of that.

He closed his eyes and dozed again; and if a faint sound came from without, he did not notice it.

But in the glimmer of the stars, there was a strange scene outside the tent; hidden from the juniors by the canvas flap, Hassan, the dragoman, would have done well to sleep with one eye open, as he had stated that he would do. Both his eyes were shut fast, when groping hands seized him in the gloom, and a dhurra sack was slid over his head, and pressed over his mouth by sinewy hands, blinding and silencing him.

That was why Hassan's snore had ceased; if the captain of the Greyfriars Remove had only known it!

Hassan was awake-wide awake-and struggling, silently, but savagely. He was a powerful man; and though he was a rogue to the fingertips, he was no coward, and under his smiling, beaming politeness, he had all the fierceness of his Arab race. But he ceased to struggle, as the keen edge of a knife was pressed to his ribs.

A cord was run round the sack, gripping it over his mouth to gag him. Then he was lifted to his feet, with the point of the knife touching his ribs. Not a word was spoken, not a whisper; but Hassan knew that if he gave the alarm, the keen blade would be driven home, and he would be a dead dragoman. He submitted to his fate with oriental passiveness, though watchful as a cat for a chance at his assailants.

With a grip on either arm, and the knife still pressing him, he was walked away silently. The dragoman was alarmed; but more astonished than alarmed. He did not think of the Greek, whom he believed to be still a prisoner on the dahabiyeh. He could only suppose that bedouin thieves from the desert had chanced on the camp, and that was surprising enough, for such outrages, though not unknown, were extremely rare so near to the Nile and Luxor. And not three hundred yards distant was the house of Mr. Maroudi's plantation manager, and the mud huts of two or three score of fellahin who worked for him.

Hardly a mile distant was the rest-house belonging to Thomas Cook & Co., the tourist firm. If his assailants were bedouin thieves from the desert, they were thieves with a more than usual amount of nerve.

He walked on quietly between his unseen conductors. They stopped at a distance of about a hundred yards from the tent, and the sack was taken from Hassan's head.

He blinked round him, with startled eyes.

He was standing under an acacia, shadowed from the bright starlight. But he could make out the two Arabs who gripped his arms-Hamza and Yussef. And he could make out a third man who stood by the tree waiting-and he caught his breath as he recognised Konstantinos Kalizelos. He understood it all now. The Greek's black eyes glittered at his startled face. Kalizelos spoke in Arabic.

"Dog of a dragoman! Speak low-your life is in my hands."

"That is known to me, O effendi!" said Hassan, in the same tongue. "But remember that I am under the protection of the great Maroudi, who will demand life for life."

"Maroudi is in Cairo," sneered the Greek.

"Can Maroudi, powerful as he is, save your life, jackal of the streets of Cairo?"

"Maroudi's arm is long," said the dragoman composedly. "His greatness has promised me reward and protection, for serving the Faringhees faithfully. If my life is taken, he who takes it will die under the kourbash."

Yussef and Hamza stood silent. The hawk-faced Arab was still holding the knife to the dragoman's side. But Hassan had no doubt that it was fear of the vengeance of Hilmi Maroudi, that held back the thrust. If the Greek did not fear the powerful Egyptian, his followers did.

"Enough!" snarled Kalizelos. "What is your jackal's life to me? It is the young English lord that I seek. Speak the truth to me, or the protection of Maroudi will not save you from having your lying tongue cut out, dog of a dragoman. The young lord is in the tent?"

Hassan made a sign of assent.

"His friends are with him?"

"All but the small fat lord, who remained on the dahabiyeh."

The Greek grinned sourly. He had good reason for knowing that the "small fat lord" had remained on the dahabiyeh.

"And the scarab?" asked Kalizelos, his black eyes glittering. "Is that in the keeping of the English lord?"

"I know not, effendi."

"You would have me believe that anything passes without your knowledge, you lying jackal!

Take care!"

"By the beard of the Prophet, I know nothing of the scarab, effendi," answered Hassan. "Do I even know why you seek it? It is a trifle in my eyes-I have seen many such. As for the fable that it will guide its possessor to the Eye of Osiris, what is that but an old woman's tale? I am a civilised Arab, effendi, I believe nothing."

The Greek gave a curt laugh.

"If you believed the tale, Hassan, you would have stolen the scarab long since, in spite of your fear of Maroudi," he said.

"It is true!" assented the dragoman. "For so large a sum as a king's ransom, I would dare Maroudi's vengeance, and even slay the young lord with my own hands." Hassan made that statement with perfect calmness. "Is it not written that the slaying of an unbeliever is pleasing in the eyes of the Prophet? But there is no truth in the tale, and if you believe it, effendi, your senses must be touched with madness."

"Enough!" snarled the Greek. "If the boy has the Golden Scarab, it will fall into my hands when I seize him. If it is hidden on the dahabiyeh, it shall be given to ransom his life, and the lives of his friends. The old man Brooke will give it freely to save him, when my message reaches him from the heart of the Libyan desert."

He snarled an order to the two Arabs, and they placed Hassan against the acacia, and proceeded to bind him to the trunk.

The dragoman's eyes burned. But he did not resist. The Greek had taken the knife from Yussef's hand, and he was ready to strike if the dragoman raised his voice. A shout might have reached the tent, but a shout would never have been uttered.

"Effendi!" said the dragoman quietly. "I am in your hands-and the young lords are at your mercy. But remember that Maroudi is powerful. The King of Egypt is not so powerful as he. In this land there is no corner that will hide you from his vengeance, if you harm the foreigners whom he has taken under his noble protection."

"Silence!" snarled the Greek.

At a sign, the dragoman was gagged.

The three rascals stood near him, in low-voiced consultation. Hassan watched them, with burning eyes. He had failed in his trust, and he feared Maroudi. To the Greyfriars juniors Hassan was a dragoman who was paid for his services; and they trusted him because they had found him faithful. They knew that he was a rogue, as a matter of course; but supposed that he was a rogue who knew on which side his bread was buttered. They never dreamed how much they owed to Hilmi Maroudi, and that it was fear of the Egyptian millionaire that kept Hassan true to his trust.

That fear was shared by Yussef and Hamza, and to a lesser extent by the Greek. It was fear of the Egyptian that had led Kalizelos to attack him in Cairo, when Wharton and Bob Cherry had saved Maroudi's life. Hassan, as he watched the three shadowy figures, and listened to their low muttering, was thinking with dread of being called to account by Maroudi for having failed to protect the schoolboys in his charge.

The muttering ceased at last. The three dim figures crept away in the gloom, in the direction of the schoolboys' tent. Hassan watched them go, with a heavy heart. His "lordly gentlemen" were at the mercy of their enemy now, and he could not help them or warn them. For his "lordly gentlemen," except from the point of view of backsheesh, the faithful Hassan cared nothing-but he cared very much for his own dusky person, and his face was troubled as the three shadowy figures flitted away in the starlight.

CHAPTER TEN

CAPTURED!

KALIZELOS drew aside the tent-flap, and stared into the dark interior of the tent. Behind him crept the two savage-faced Arabs, with long bedouin knives in their dusky hands. In the Greek's olive hand was an automatic. From the tent came a sound of steady breathing, and the Greek grinned with triumph. Before him lay the Greyfriars party, buried in slumber, without a suspicion of danger.

As the starlight streamed in at the opening, he could make out the sleepers, dimly and faintly-six of them, though he could not recognise them individually in the gloom. Harry Wharton & Co. were at his mercy-if they attempted to resist, the six unarmed schoolboys had no chance against three armed ruffians. Kalizelos' look was gloating. The dragoman, bound to a tree at a distance, could not help; there was no help for the Greyfriars juniors. Bob Cherry stirred, and raised his head from the pillow. A draught of the night wind, through the opening, had disturbed him. He opened his eyes, and blinked at the starlight-and at the dark figure that blotted it.

"What--" ejaculated Bob.

For a second he supposed that it was Hassan, looking into the tent. But the next moment he knew that it was not Hassan.

He bounded to his feet.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Wake up, you men!" shouted Bob.

"Eh-what?"

"What the thump--"

"What's the row?" came Lord Mauleverer's sleepy drawl. "Let a fellow sleep, old bean! It isn't mornin' yet."

"Kalizelos!" gasped Harry Wharton, his startled eyes turning on the olive face in the starlight. "My Hat! The Greek!"

"Kalizelos-here!" stuttered Nugent.

"Oh gad!" gasped Lord Mauleverer.

The juniors scrambled to their feet, wide enough awake now. They stared in amazement and dismay at the Greek, in the opening of the tent; and the two dark figures behind him, knife in hand.

"Yes-it is Kalizelos!" said the Greek. "Stand quiet-and do not think of resistance--I will riddle you with bullets if you lift a hand."

The bluish barrel of the automatic glimmered as he raised it.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton clenched his hand.

"You scoundrel! So you have escaped from the dahabiyeh!" he said between his teeth.

"As you see!" grinned the Greek. "I warn you not to resist. I am not here to shed blood, but if you give trouble I will shoot you down like a jackal in the desert."

The juniors stared at him. The apparition of the Greek took them utterly by surprise. Not for a moment had they dreamed that the desperado could escape from the locked cabin on the dahabiyeh. They had not counted on the fat fatuousness of Billy Bunter.

"Your lives are in my hands," said the Greek quietly. "Take care!"

"Hassan!" shouted Bob Cherry.

Kalizelos laughed.

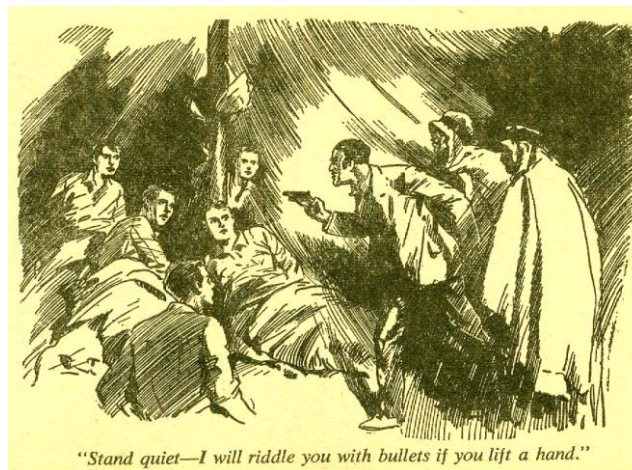
"Hassan is already taken care of," he said.

"Your dragoman is a prisoner, my young friend. Hassan was taken first of all. Step out from the tent."

"You scoundrel!" breathed Wharton.

The juniors exchanged glances, but they did not stir.

Kalizelos muttered in Arabic, and Yussef and Hamza entered the tent. They drove the schoolboys out at the point of the knife.



It was impossible to resist. The Greek was not keen to shed blood, whether from reluctance to commit so terrible a crime, or from a lurking fear of the vengeance of Hilmi Maroudi or of the law. Probably from a mingling of motives.

But he was in deadly earnest, and prepared for bloodshed if it was necessary to gain his ends.

Had the juniors flung themselves at him, as they longed to do, the automatic would have spat death on the instant. They could read as much in the glittering black eyes. With deep rage in their hearts the Famous Five filed out of the tent, driven by the bare knives in the hands of the Arabs. Lord Mauleverer followed them, yawning. His lazy lordship did not

seem at all excited. He only rubbed his sleepy eyes as he came out, and yawned portentously.

Between the tent and the donkey track the six juniors were lined up. A grunt in Arabic from Kalizelos and their hands were bound behind their backs by Hamza.

Then Kalizelos slipped the automatic back into his pocket, and at a sign from him the Arabs' knives disappeared.

He fixed his eyes on Lord Mauleverer. "My turn now, my lord," he said, with a grim smile. "Yaas," assented Mauleverer. "Every dog has his day, you know. But I wish you'd left your call till the mornin'. I'm frightfully sleepy!"

"The scarab, my lord!" said the Greek.

"Dear man," said Lord Mauleverer negligently, "do you know, I fancied you were goin' to mention that. Sort of obsession of yours, isn't it? Well, you can search me, as the gentleman from the United States would say."

Harry Wharton & Co. stood glumly silent. It had seemed only judicious to bring the Golden Scarab with them rather than to leave it on the dahabiyeh during an absence of days. But if the scarab was, as the Greek believed, worth a fortune of a quarter of a million pounds, that fortune was in the hands of the Cairo plotter now.

He had only to search.

Kalizelos looked at Mauleverer, long and hard. Then, with a muttered word to the Arabs to guard the prisoners, he went into the tent.

The juniors waited with grim faces. Only Lord Mauleverer did not seem to lose his cheery equanimity. To Wharton's astonishment, he even caught a wink from his lordship.

Kalizelos was a long time in the tent. It was evident that he was making a thorough search of the juniors' belongings.

But he emerged at last, with dark disappointment in his face. He strode straight towards Lord Mauleverer. Obviously he had not found the Golden Scarab in the tent, and he suspected that Mauleverer might have placed it in the pocket of his pyjamas-as the juniors also supposed must be the case.

The Greek did not speak, but he searched the schoolboy earl thoroughly. To the surprise of the Famous Five, the scarab did not come to light.

They would have supposed that Mauly had forgotten, after all, to put it in his pocket when he left the dahabiyeh. That would have been rather like Mauly. But they had seen him put it in his pocket. Yet the Greek's meticulous search had failed to reveal it, and they could only wonder whether Mauleverer had dropped it somewhere during the day's ride. In the circumstances they hoped that he had.

"Where is the scarab, my lord?" asked Kalizelos at last in a low, bitter voice.

"Find out, old bean," answered Lord Mauleverer coolly.

The Greek's hand slid into his pocket, where he had placed the automatic. Lord Mauleverer laughed.

"No, my lord," said Kalizelos, his voice trembling with rage. "No, I shall not blow your foolish brains out."

"I rather fancied not," agreed Lord Mauleverer cheerfully. "You'd have to ladle out a fearful lot of backsheesh to save your neck if you did-what?"

"That is not my reason, my lord. The scarab will ransom your life and your liberty. It is hidden on the dahabiyeh. Be it so! There, I cannot reach it. But it will be given to me for your ransom, my lord, unless the old man Brooke chooses to leave you to die a jackal's death in the desert!"

He rapped out an order in Arabic, and Hamza hurried away through the acacias. Kalizelos turned to the juniors again, with a bitter look.

"I have sent for donkeys," he said. "I have had time to lay my plans since I left your dahabiyeh. In ten minutes Hamza will return with donkeys, and you will ride with me into the desert. "

He waved his hand to the dusky west.

"Maroudi's plantation, where you have camped, is the last cultivated land in this direction," he said. "Beyond lies the Libyan Desert. In an hour we shall be far from all known tracks. The sands of the desert will hide you from all knowledge. We are not near Cairo now. We are far up the Nile. Here, we are on the border of the wilderness. Do you dream that the police, even the soldiers, will track you in the recesses of the desert?"

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry.

The juniors gazed at the bitter, savage face of the Greek. There was no doubt that he meant every word he uttered.

And there was no doubt that he could carry out his intention. Hardly a mile away the Nile rolled, with dahabiyehs and feluccas on its tide.

Across the Nile was the city of Luxor. Yet where they stood was on the very edge of the great African desert-wastes of trackless sand, where no man wandered save the roaming bedouin, drifting from oasis to oasis.

The land of Egypt consists only of the cultivated banks of the Nile, and all along the great valley a traveller may stand with one foot in cultivated land, the other in the desert.

Civilisation jostles primitive barbarism at every step. It seemed like some nightmare to the juniors. But it was no dream; it was terribly real. It was in the power of the Greek to carry them off into the untrodden heart of the desert, and that was his intention.

In silence they waited for Hamza to return with the donkeys. Lord Mauleverer broke the silence.

"Look here, you men, I'm not seein' you landed in this! Say the word and--"

The Greek's eyes glittered.

"Give up the scarab and I am done with you," he said. "I will leave you here, unharmed. You are nothing to me. It is the scarab and the Eye of Osiris that I seek. Give up the scarab--"

"Never!" said Harry Wharton curtly.

"But--" said Mauleverer slowly. He was not thinking of himself.

"Chuck it, Mauly! You're not giving in to that scoundrel!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"You all say the same?"

"Yes, ass!" said Bob.

"The samefulness is terrific!"

"Good men!" said Lord Mauleverer. And he said no more, and, in silence again, the Greyfriars juniors waited for the return of Hamza.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A SURPRISE FOR BUNTER!

BILLY BUNTER halted.

He had to halt.

He puffed, he panted, and he blew.

Had the bony paw of the long-legged colonel been fairly on his fat shoulder, Bunter would have had to halt.

Flesh and blood could do no more.

Bunter was always short of wind. What wind he had had been utterly expended in that wild race along the donkey track of Beni-Hasa.

He halted by a fringe of tamarisks along the track and panted for breath, and gasped and gurgled.

For a minute or two no sound reached his ears, save his own gasping and gurgling. He mopped perspiration from his fat face in streams. He wiped his spectacles and jammed them again on his fat little nose. He gasped and gasped and gasped.

Then he listened. But there was, so far, no sound of pursuit. He was glad to remember that the bony colonel had damaged his head when he smote the donkey track with it. He hoped that Colonel Jacks was too damaged to resume the pursuit. He hoped vengefully that he was severely damaged-awfully damaged. He almost hoped that he was quite brained!

If the beast was still after him, he was not at hand yet. Perhaps the two beasts were coming together. In that case the long-legged colonel would probably accommodate his pace to that of the short-legged colonel and Bunter would have breathing space.

Anyhow, he had to rest! If a lion of the Libyan desert had been behind him Bunter could hardly have put on a spurt.

Satisfied that there was no immediate danger in the rear, Billy Bunter breathed more freely.

He was fatigued and winded, warm and damp, feeling altogether extremely uncomfortable and frightfully exasperated. Having recovered his wind a little, he blinked about in the starlight for a sign of the Greyfriars camp, wondering dismally whether he might have passed it in his frantic flight from G. W. Jacks. Once he got into camp all would be well; even those beasts, ungrateful as they were to a fellow who had done so much for them, could hardly fail to protect him from the angry Yankees. But where was the camp?

A glimmer of white canvas, the flutter of a coloured flag from a tent-pole in the starlight, caught his eyes. Ahead of him, off the donkey-track and among the acacias, stood a great tent-any fellow but Bunter would have spotted it long ago. It was not fifty yards away, and clearly visible in the bright light of the stars of Egypt.

"Oh, good!" gasped Bunter.

This must be the Greyfriars camp. Bunter blinked inimically at the tent. He listened again, but still there was no sound from the rear. He stirred at last and crept along the donkey-track towards the big tent. The beasts were fast asleep, of course, and Bunter was going to wake them up, as he woke up the two Americans. But he did not want to make another mistake and get a fresh party of strange excursionists on his track. He was going to make sure this time that it was the Greyfriars tent before he pulled up the tent-pegs.

He crept with great caution among the tamarisks and acacias along the donkey-track, blinking at the tent as he advanced. A sound of voices reached his ears in the quiet night, and he paused and listened. The beasts were not asleep, after all! He spotted moving figures before the tent and blinked at them in astonishment. There was no light in the tent or in the camp, save that of the stars. But it was clear that the Greyfriars fellows were not in bed. And a voice that came through the silence made Bunter jump and thrill with sudden terror. He did not catch the words, but he knew the musical voice of the Greek, Konstantinos Kalizelos.

Bunter stood completely rooted among the tamarisks.

So many troubles had fallen on Billy Bunter since he had left the dahabiyeh that he had forgotten all about the Greek. He remembered him now.

"Oh lor'!" breathed Bunter, palpitating.

It dawned on his fat mind that the Greek had lost no time in making use of his freedom. No doubt Hamza and Yussef had joined him; most likely they had spied on the Greyfriars

party, and knew where the camp was. Anyhow, the Greek was there-that was certain. And Bunter realised what had been the result of his fatuous folly. Kalizelos and his confederates were there-which meant that the juniors were at the mercy of their enemies. For a long minute Bunter stood rooted with terror; then he moved to an opening of the bushes and peered at the camp, now not ten yards from him. He could see the juniors standing in a row, with their hands tied behind them-Lord Mauleverer and the Famous Five, evidently prisoners. He could see Kalizelos, the Greek, and Yussef, the Arab. Hamza was not there, neither could he see anything of the dragoman.

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter.

He was thankful that he had not run on as far as the tent. That would have landed him in the soup along with the others. As matters stood, no one in the Greyfriars camp knew, or suspected, that he was at hand. Kalizelos, if he thought of him at all, thought that he was still on the dahabiyeh. That was a comfort.

Had Billy Bunter been of the stuff of which heroes are made, no doubt he would have considered at once the possibility of helping the juniors out of their scrape. That did not occur to Bunter. It was obvious-to Bunter-that he could not help them, and he was thankful that his own fat person was safe so long as he kept in cover. He hugged his cover in the tamarisks and watched the strange scene through his big spectacles.

What it meant he could not make out. They appeared to be waiting for something. Bunter knew that Lord Mauleverer had taken the Golden Scarab with him that day, but he could guess that the Greek had not found it, or he would have vanished at once with his prize. Except to get possession of the mysterious scarab, he had no concern with the Greyfriars party, and did not care two straws about them. But what were they waiting for? The sound of voices had died away, and they were waiting in silence.

For what?

A clumping of donkeys' hoofs from the distance beyond the acacias answered the question.

Hamza, the scarred Arab, came into view in the starlight leading a string of donkeys. He led the animals up to the group standing before the tent. Bunter blinked on in amazement. The voice of the Greek came to his fat ears.

"For the last time, my lord! If you would save yourself and your friends from the desert, place the Scarab of A-Menah in my hands! A message to the dahabiyeh--"

"Nothin' doin', old bean!" came the quiet drawl of Lord Mauleverer.

"My lord, if you will ransom yourself and your friends with the Golden Scarab, I will trust to your word of honour and release you to fetch it and place it in my hands."

"Bow-wow!"

"What-what did you say?" exclaimed the Greek.

"Bow-wow!"

"Fool!" snarled Kalizelos.

He turned to the Arabs and snarled an order in Arabic. The two ruffians led the juniors towards the donkeys.

Billy Bunter understood now. They had been waiting for Hamza to bring the donkeys, and they were to be taken away, prisoners, into the wastes of the Libyan desert.

"Oh crikey!" breathed Bunter.

He could not help them! He did not even think of trying to help them. But he was utterly dismayed and horrified. His fat heart almost died within him as he realised the fate that hung over the Greyfriars juniors. For once, William George Bunter was not thinking wholly of himself. If there was a chance of getting help---

Somewhere on Beni-Hasa was the house of Mr. Maroudi's manager. But Bunter did not know where, or at what distance. A mile away was Cook's rest-house; less than that the custodians of the Tombs of the Kings. But they were too far away for help. Then into Bunter's fat brain flashed the recollection of the two Americans. Their camp was not distant-and in all likelihood they were following him along the donkey-track. Colonel Jacks and Colonel Skink, of course, were beasts; they were looking for Bunter to whop him. But they were white men, and surely--

Billy Bunter did not stop to think it out. It was the only chance of helping the Greek's prisoners-the only chance of saving them from vanishing into the wastes of the desert. He backed out of the tamarisks, crept to the donkey-track, and, after an anxious blink behind to make sure that the bushes screened him from the Greyfriars camp, he started back the way he had come, running as if his fat life depended on his speed.

CHAPTER TWELVE

U.S.A. TO THE RESCUE!

"CARRY me home to die!" ejaculated Colonel Jacks.

"Search me!" exclaimed Colonel Skink, equally astonished at what they saw.

The long colonel and the short colonel were tramping up the donkey-track, stick in hand, looking for the Greyfriars camp. Neither of them had the slightest doubt that the collapse of their tent was a "lark" of the English schoolboys.

They were wrathful, and they meant to find the schoolboys' camp, and wade in with the sticks and impress upon the minds of those sons of John Bull that they could not lark with impunity with citizens of the great United States.

They halted in sheer amazement at the sight of a fat figure racing towards them, with a pair of big spectacles flashing back the light of the stars.

"I guess it's that fat guy I took a tumble over!" gasped Colonel Jacks. "I'll say he's coming back to ask for it."

"I kinder calculate he's going to get it, too, where it will hurt!" said Colonel Skink.

"You've said it!" agreed Colonel Jacks.

And the two transatlantic gentlemen, grinning, waited for Bunter to come up. Why he was running back, fairly into their vengeful hands, was a mystery to them, but there was no doubt that they were glad to see him.

Bunter sighted them, but he did not stop, and did not dodge away into the bushes as he saw them, as they fully expected. He came puffing and panting on. And as he drew nearer, Messrs. Jacks and Skink discerned the terror in his face and stared at him curiously.

"Say, there surely can't be a lion around loose," murmured G. W. Jacks. "I'll say that fat guy has got the wind-up."

"If he ain't scared stiff I've never seen a scared guy!" said Colonel Skink. "I'm sure glad I packed my gun for this trip."

"They let on that you don't want a gun in Egypt these days," said Colonel Jacks, slipping his hand into his hip-pocket. "But that fat guy surely does look as if suthin's the matter with Hanner, Ephraim Skink, and I'm powerful glad that I packed my hardware."

Bunter came panting up. He gurgled as he came:

"Help!";

He staggered from sheer exhaustion as he reached the two Americans. G. W. Jacks put a hand to his fat shoulder to steady him. He was not thinking now of giving the fat schoolboy what he deserved. It was plain that the matter was serious.

"Say, bo', I guess you're safe hyer," said G. W. Jacks quite kindly. "Take a cinch on yourself, sonny! What's the rookus?"

"Spill it, son!" said Colonel Skink encouragingly.

"Help!" groaned Banter. "They've got them--"

"Who've got who?"

"My friends, the Greyfriars fellows-they're prisoners-they're going to take them into the-the desert!" gurgled Bunter. "A Greek villain and two Arabs-oh dear!"

Breath failed Bunter, but he grabbed the lean colonel's arm with one hand and pointed with the other, gasping spasmodically:

"Help-help them! Oh crikey!"

The two Americans stared at him blankly for a second. Then they exchanged a glance, and a bony hand and a podgy hand grasped a revolver from a hip pocket.

"I guess we chip in hyer, Ephraim Skink!" said Colonel Jacks briefly.

"You said it!" assented Colonel Skink.

Leaving Bunter spluttering helplessly, the two Americans ran up the donkey-track in the direction from which Bunter had come.

Colonel Jacks' long legs whisked like lightning; Colonel Skink's short fat legs went like machinery behind him.

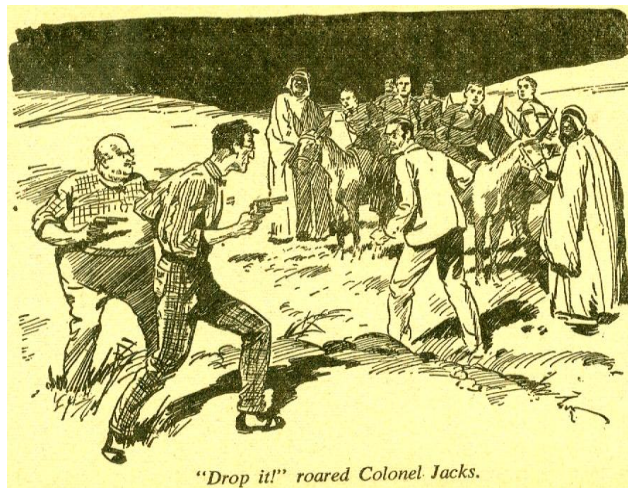
The long-legged colonel was the first to sight the Greyfriars tent, glimmering in the stars. He came through the tamarisks like a charging giraffe. But his friend, the fat colonel, was not far behind.

Kalizelos and Hamza were holding the donkeys. Yussef was forcing the juniors to mount them, heaving them roughly into the saddles as their hands were bound.

Colonel Jacks burst on the scene like a thunderbolt. If he had had any doubt of Bunter's startling statement he had proof of it now; a single glance told that the Greyfriars fellows were prisoners in lawless hands, and were about to be carried away on the donkeys. The starlight glimmered on Colonel Jacks' revolver as he charged up.

"Say you!" he roared, his powerful voice breaking on the silence like a thunderclap. "Say, I guess you want to let up on this stunt, and I'll say you want to let up sudden! Get me."

The juniors, amazed, stared round. The two Arabs started, and flashed out their knives. Kalizelos, gritting his teeth, spun round, his automatic leaping to his hand.



"Drop it!" roared Colonel Jacks.

"Drop it!" roared Colonel Jacks.
The Greek's weapon gleamed up.
Bang!

Undoubtedly it was fortunate, for the Greyfriars fellows and for G. W. Jacks himself, that the long-legged colonel had 'packed his gun' for his trip to Egypt. It was Colonel Jacks who fired, before the desperate Greek could pull trigger, and Kalizelos gave a fearful cry and staggered back, his pistol-hand sagging down. At that desperate moment there was no doubt that the Greek would have shot down the stranger who had butted in. But the long-legged colonel had got in first.

"Oh gad!" gasped Lord Mauleverer.

The donkeys, startled by the shot, reared and plunged. Kalizelos staggered against an acacia, his olive face white as chalk, his left hand pressed to his right shoulder, where the American's bullet had struck. Hamza and Yussef, knife in hand, leaped towards the long-legged American.

Bang, bang, bang!

Both the Americans were shooting now. Harry Wharton & Co. hardly knew what was happening. With their hands bound they could not control the excited, plunging donkeys, and they pitched helplessly off the animals, and sprawled on the ground, As they rolled over, some of them had a glimpse of Hamza and Yussef running for their lives. Bang, bang, bang! roared the six-shooters, and bullets knocked up the dust at the heels of the two Arabs as they fled.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. He sat up dizzily. The frightened donkeys were racing away, and Bob caught a glimpse of the Greek, wounded as he was, clutching at one of the fleeing animals with his sound arm. He saw Kalizelos drag himself desperately across the donkey's back, and the animal galloped away with him.

"Good gad!" stuttered Lord Mauleverer.

"What-who-"

"It's the jolly old Yankees!" gasped Bob.

Bang, bang, bang!

"Say, you!" roared Colonel Jacks, as he loosed off shot after shot. "Say, you want to hump it, you! You want to light out! You want to beat it! You want to beat it sry and sudden! Yep!"
Bang, bang!

The Greek and the two Arabs were "beating it" as "sudden" as they could. They had already vanished into the night. But the two excited colonels seemed to be enjoying the fireworks, and they emptied their "guns" after the vanished fugitives. Not till the last cartridge was expended did they cease to throw lead into space.

Then Colonel Jacks calmed down and chuckled.

"I'll say this was some circus, Ephraim Skink!" he remarked.

"I'll surely say so!" agreed Colonel Skink.

"I opine that them guys lit out like they was sent for!" chuckled Colonel Jacks. "And I'm sure glad I packed my hardware for this trip!"

"Search me!" agreed Colonel Skink.

The long-legged colonel strode towards the Greyfriars juniors. The fat colonel pumped in breath after his run.

G. W. Jacks looked at the juniors with a cheery grin on his bony, lantern-jawed visage.

"Say, I guess them guys had you'uns by the short hairs," he remarked.

"You guess right, old bean," answered Bob Cherry.

"The guessfulness is terrifically correct, my esteemed and ridiculous Yankeeish friend," said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

Colonel Jacks chortled, apparently entertained by that reply from the Nabob of Bhanipur. He drew out an enormous clasp-knife, opened it with his prominent teeth, and cut the schoolboys' bonds. With deep thankfulness, Harry Wharton & Co. found themselves free once more.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WHERE THE SCARAB WAS!

"I SAY, you fellows!"

Six juniors jumped.

A fat figure rolled up in the starlight, gasping.

Harry Wharton & Co. gazed in amazement at the Owl of the Remove.

"Bunter!" ejaculated Frank Nugent.

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

Bunter mopped his perspiring brow, gasping and panting. Billy Bunter had followed the two colonels to the spot-but at a safe distance. Not till he was sure that the enemy had been put to flight did the fat Owl venture on the scene. The juniors were amazed to see him; they had supposed Bunter to be sound asleep on the dahabiyeh. They little guessed, so far, how much they owed to the intervention of the Owl of the Remove.

"How on earth did that fat frog hop here?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Oh, really, Bull--"

"I guess that's the fat gink that put us wise!" said Colonel Jacks. "I surely opine I owe him a lambasting!"

"Here, you keep off!" exclaimed Bunter. "I say, you fellows, it's pretty lucky that I came after you-what? Where would you be now if I hadn't come?"

"What the thump--"

"I decided to come after you," explained Bunter. "I knew you'd land in some trouble without me--"

"You fat owl!"

"Looks as if I was right!" grinned Bunter.

"Those beasts had you all right, and if I hadn't spotted them and fetched these Yankee chaps where would you be I'd like to know."

"My hat!" Harry Wharton stared blankly at the grinning Owl. "Did Bunter bring you here, Colonel Jacks?"

"I guess he put us wise," said G. W. Jacks.

"We was arter him for pulling down our tent, and he came cavorting back, scared stiff, and told us about them guys. And we sure did raise the dust getting here, didn't we, Ephraim Skink?"

"We surely did, Colonel Jacks," answered Ephraim Skink.

"We don't know how to thank you, sir," said Harry. "You've saved us, and you'll believe that we're grateful."

"The gratitude is terrific and preposterous, esteemed colonel."

Colonel Jacks waved a bony hand.

"That's O.K., sonny," he said. "I guess we wasn't letting the rascals get away with this, was we Ephraim Skink?"

"We surely was not, Colonel Jacks," answered Ephraim Skink.

"And seeing what's happened we're letting you off the lambasting we was going to put across," added Colonel Jacks generously.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at him. They were genuinely grateful to the two Americans, and anxious to show that they were thankful for the immense service the colonels from the U.S.A. had rendered them. But if Messrs. Jacks and Skink had started in to "lambaste" the party, they would probably have met with a surprise.

"Yep!" assented Colonel Skink. - "Nary lambasting."

"But what-what have we done?" asked Harry. "You don't mean to say you were still bothering about that little accident on the Nile--"

"Aw, can it!" said Colonel Jacks. "Didn't you and that fat guy bring our tent walloping down on our cabezas--"

"Oh, my hat! Certainly not!"

"They wasn't in it, Colonel Jacks," said Ephraim Skink. "I guess it was that fat guy on his lonesome. We didn't see the other guys."

"Oh, sure!" assented G. W. Jacks. "I guess you've said it!"

"Bunter, you fat villain, have you been playing tricks on these gentlemen?" exclaimed Lord Mauleverer.

"Oh, no! I never pulled out the tent-pegs," said Bunter hastily, with an uneasy blink at the two colonels. "Besides, I thought it was your tent."

"Why, you pernicious porpoise!" exclaimed Bob. "You were going to pull down our tent--"

"Well, leaving a fellow on his own-serve you jolly well right!" said Bunter indignantly. "I've had a fearful time following you-my donkey ran away, and I had to walk, and --"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Of course, I thought it was your tent," said Bunter, "and I was jolly well going to bring it down on your nappers, blow you! How was I to know anybody else was camping here? Not that I did it, you know," added Bunter, blinking at Colonel Jacks. "The fact is I was nowhere near the place-I never even saw your tent--"

"Carry me home to die!" ejaculated Colonel Jacks, staring at Bunter. "I'll say that guy is some liar!"

"Oh, really, you know--"

"Where's Hassan?" asked Nugent suddenly.

"I say, you fellows, I'm fearfully hungry--"

"By gum! Where is Hassan?" exclaimed Bob. "He was gone when those ratters fetched us out of the tent? If they've harmed him--"

"We'd better look for him at once," said Harry. "That brute Kalizelos has done something with him--"

"I guess you better stay right here," said Colonel Jacks. "Them guys might be hanging round looking for another chance at you. I guess I'll mosey round and find your dragoman."

"You said it," said Colonel Skink.

The two colonels started to search for Hassan.

Harry Wharton & Co. went into the tent and dressed themselves. They were not thinking of sleep again that night. While they dressed Billy Bunter searched for provender, and, having found it, settled down to dispose of it internally.

"Jolly lucky that fat idiot turned up," remarked Bob Cherry. "If he hadn't roused out the Yankees--"

"The luckfulness was terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"But what became of the scarab, after all?" asked Nugent. "You had it in your pocket,

Maulu, when we left the dahabiyeh?"

"Yaas!" Lord Mauleverer grinned. "But it wasn't in my pocket, old bean, when that Greek Johnny looked for it. I put it in my pyjama pocket for safety when I turned in."

"But he searched you--"

"Yaas; but you see I've got a lot of presence of mind," explained Lord Mauleverer cheerfully.

"As soon as the sportsman woke us up I reached for that jolly old scarab at once, and, bein' in the dark, he didn't spot me. Did you hear me scratchin' while the Greek was talkin'?"

"Scratching! No!"

"Lucky you didn't, or he might have, too," said Mauleverer placidly. "You see, I slipped my little paw under that jolly old rug that's spread on the ground and scratched a little hole in the sand and left the scarab in it. An' it's there now."

"'Carry me home to die,' as Colonel Jacks would say!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"The presence of Maulu's preposterous mind was truly terrific," declared Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Lord Mauleverer turned back the Turkish prayer-rug that covered the floor. Under it was the sandy soil.

Maulu blinked at the sand.

"Blessed if I can see the place now," he remarked. "You see, I poked it under the sand and covered it, and now--"

"We'll jolly soon find it," said Bob.

The juniors chuckled. They realised that when Kalizelos had been speaking to them in the doorway of the tent Maulu, in the darkness, had been concealing the scarab of which the Greek was in quest. They had never suspected his lordship of possessing such prompt presence of mind.

Bob turned on an electric torch, and the juniors scraped up the sand till the scarab was revealed. There was a glitter of gold in the light.

"Yaas, there it is, safe and sound," yawned Lord Mauleverer; and he picked up the scarab of A-Menah and transferred it to his pocket.

"Dear old Kalizelos never guessed that it was under his feet when he was searchin' our clobber in the tent."

"I say, you fellows--"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Bursting?" asked Bob Cherry.

"I say, is there any more grub?"

"He's scoffed the lot!" said Bob, in wonder.

"Where on earth has he put it?"

"Oh, really, Cherry--"

"Poor old Bunter! He's only had enough for about seven or eight fellows," said Bob sympathetically, "He will have to endure the pangs of hunger till Maroudi's people bring along brekker in the morning!"

"Well, I've had a snack," said Bunter. "I can sleep now! I think I'll turn in. I suppose you fellows are going to keep watch."

"Naturally," answered Bob. "Could we find anything better to do than to sit round keeping watch while you snore?"

"All right, then!" said Bunter. "Mind you don't go to sleep-those beasts might come back, you know. You'd better get those Yankees to stay too-it will be safer! They're beasts, but they'll keep the other beasts off-see? Keep watch till morning, old chaps, and wake me when they bring breakfast-not before."

"On my head be it!" said Bob Cherry solemnly.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And Billy Bunter, having stacked away all the available provisions, rolled into the tent, rolled into the nearest bed, and in about ten seconds his deep snore was awakening the echoes of the land of Egypt.

Harry Wharton & Co. joined the two Americans in searching for the dragoman. In spite of Billy Bunter's injunctions he was left to snore unwatched. It was some time before Hassan was discovered, bound to the acacia in the deep shadow of the branches, and it was Bob Cherry who finally spotted him.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here he is!" roared Bob.

There was a faint mumble from the gagged dragoman. The juniors gathered round him and released him.

"My lordly gentlemen!" exclaimed Hassan, in great relief. "It is enormously enjoyable to behold you as safe as a house, as you say in the English language! Wahyat-en-nabi! O noble sars. I fell into the hands of those sons of dogs and pigs, and I was without power to aid my magnificent lords, for which reason my heart was very heavy! To see you in enjoyment of safety and freedom what is called in English a sight for sore eyes!"

Hassan returned to the camp with the juniors.

He left them there and hurried on to the plantation buildings to call a number of the fellahin to keep guard for the remainder of the night. The two Americans remained in the camp till Hassan returned with two or three dozen natives, armed with stout staves.

"I guess you-uns will be O.K. now," said Colonel Jacks. "But if there's any more trouble you put G. W. Jacks wise, and I guess we'll see you through. Ain't that so, Colonel Skink?"

"You said it!" agreed Colonel Skink.

"We're awfully obliged to you," said Harry Wharton. "If you hadn't chipped in we should be prisoners now, miles away in the desert. We really don't know how to thank you."

"That's all right, sonny," said Colonel Jacks affably. "I allow it's up to the U.S.A. to see John Bull through-yep! Didn't we win the War for you? I'll say yep! Good-night!"

"Didn't you which?" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Oh-ah-yes-quite-just so-my hat! Thanks no end! Good-night!"

And the long and the short colonel faded out, leaving the Greyfriars fellows grinning.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

BOLD BUNTER!

"READY, Bunter?"

"No!" hooted Billy Bunter.

"Come on, fathead!"

"Shan't!"

Billy Bunter did not "come on." William George Bunter was comfortable and lazy, and did not want to move. Donkeys and donkey-boys had arrived at the camp in the morning, and the Greyfriars party had ridden to the Tombs of the Queens, and other "sights" of the Theban Necropolis.

Whether their enemies were lingering in the vicinity they could not tell, but they knew that the Greek, at least, had been wounded, and it was likely that he was hors de combat for the time, at least. And in the day-time, with plenty of tourists, guides, and donkey-boys about, there was no danger to be looked for.

They returned to the camp of Beni-Hasa for lunch and rest, and in the afternoon prepared to start to the dahabiyeh on the Nile. Now that Kalizelos was free again, and once more on the track of the Golden Scarab, the juniors agreed that the camping-out had better be given up.

Hassan was urgent that they should return to the safety of the dahabiyeh. And it was in the care of the dragoman that Sir Reginald Brooke had trusted them up the Nile "on their own." In the camp, on the edge of the desert, Hassan pointed out that the enemy might swoop down on them in the night, perhaps in strong force.

A scrap with some gang of armed and savage bedouins, in the pay of the Greek, could only have ended one way, as the juniors admitted, so it was decided to go back to the houseboat.

Marvellous to relate, Billy Bunter was prepared to brave the dangers which the other fellows thought it only prudent to obviate.

Bunter was tired. He was fat. He was lazy. He had eaten enough lunch for three or four. He had napped only a couple of hours since lunch.

And the danger was not near at hand. So Bunter was not prepared to shift. No doubt, when it grew dark, funk would have supervened. But in broad daylight, with no enemy in sight, Bunter was as bold as a lion.

"It's sickening," said Bunter, glaring at the Famous Five through his big spectacles as he sat up on a rug under a shady tree. The beasts had disturbed him in a prolonged nap, so Bunter was naturally bitter. "I was against this idea of camping out-you know that. Now we're here, let's stick it out! What are you afraid of? I'm with you!"

"Get up, idiot!" said Bob Cherry.

"Shan't! Hassan can fetch Maroudi's men to keep guard to-night. And there's those Yankees, too," said Bunter. "And I've no doubt that Greek beast has cleared off-likely as not pegged out by this time, in fact. Anyhow, I'm here to protect you, same as I did last night. Keep a stiff upper-lip, and don't be frightened."

The Famous Five looked at him. Lord Mauleverer grinned. Billy Bunter sat and blinked with scorn.

"It's the limit," he said. "Never saw such a set of funks! Frightened at a shadow! I'm jolly well not going to be frightened away-I can tell you!"

"You piffing porpoise!" said Bob Cherry, with a deep breath. "You were scared out of your silly wits last night."

"Yah!"

"And if Kalizelos showed up to-night with some gang of Arabs from the desert, you'd have a fit."

"Yah!" repeated Bunter.

"Besides, we've invited those Americans to come on the dahabiyeh."

"Blow 'em!"

"They're going to ride back with us."

"Rot!"

Probably Billy Bunter would have been jerked off his rug, and bumped on the hard, unsympathetic surface of Egypt at that stage, but for the fact that the two Americans came up the donkey-track just then. Bunter had his back to the donkey-track, and did not see them coming.

His spectacles were fastened on the Greyfriars fellows with ineffable scorn.

"I say, you fellows, pluck up a little courage!" he admonished. "Be men, you know-like me!"

"My lordly gentlemen, the donkeys are ready!" said Hassan.

"You can shut up!" said Bunter. "We're not going! If you're frightened, you can clear off-see? If you fellows are frightened, run away as soon as you like! Leave me to face danger alone! I'm the man for it!"

"Ye gods!" murmured Bob Cherry.

"I must say I'm ashamed of you fellows," said Bunter. "Dash it all, have a little pluck! If there's any danger to-night, wake me up! I'll see you through! And now I'm going to sleep. You can't expect me to sit up in this heat, listening to you babbling about your funk. For goodness' sake, take example by me, and have a little pluck! Do I care for danger?"

Colonel Jacks and Colonel Skink had arrived under the tree. They stood looking down at Billy Bunter's portly back, listening to him, and grinning. After their experience of him the previous night, they seemed to find the fat Owl's valorous words entertaining.

"Why," went on Bunter, still blinking with devastating scorn at the exasperated juniors- "why, if those beasts showed up again this minute, do you think I should care twopence? Not me! I'd jolly well like them to, in fact! I'd show you fellows how to buck up!"

Colonel Jacks closed one eye at the juniors over Billy Bunter's unconscious head. Then, stooping behind Bunter, he suddenly grasped him by the back of the neck. His large, bony hand closed like a vice on that fat neck, and there was a startled yell from Bunter.

"Oooooop!"

"Dog of a Faringhee, die, by the beard of the Prophet!" roared Colonel Jacks, in Bunter's startled ear.

"Ow! Oooh! Help!" yelled Bunter, wriggling frantically. "I say, you fellows, help! Keep him off! He's got me! Yaroooooh!"

Billy Bunter had not the slightest doubt that he was in the grasp of a savage Arab. G. W. Jacks, evidently, had a playful sense of humour.

"Bismillah!" he roared. "Inshallah!"

"Yaroop! Keep him off!" shrieked Bunter.

"Help! Help! I say, you fellows, rescue! Help!"

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

The sudden evaporation of Billy Bunter's courage was too much for them. They shrieked.

"Help!" roared Bunter. "Leggo! Help! Yaroooooh!"

With that iron grip on the back of his neck Bunter could not turn his head, and see who was behind him. His terrified mind pictured a ferocious Arab, and he palpitated with horror. It might have occurred, even to Bunter, that if a ferocious Arab had seized him from behind, Harry Wharton & Co. would hardly have stood roaring with laughter. But William George Bunter was too scared to think of that, or anything else, save the iron grip on the back of his fat neck.

"Help! Rescue!" shrieked Bunter. "Oh crikey! Mercy! Spare my life! It wasn't me! Yaroooooh! Mercy!"

"Ha, ha, ha" shrieked the juniors.

"Buck up, Bunter!" chortled Lord Mauleverer. "You're not afraid of a jolly old Arab, you know!"

"Set us an example, old fat bean!" chuckled Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Help! Whoop! Yooooop! Mercy!" roared Bunter.

"Say, I guess that fat guy will have a fit!" drawled Colonel Skink. "He sure is some boob!"

G. W. Jacks, with a chuckle, released Bunter's fat neck. The fat Owl made a bound to his feet, and, without a backward glance, jumped away.

He dodged behind the juniors, yelling. "Keep him off! Oh crikey! Hassan, help! Harry, old chap! Bob, old fellow, help! Keep him off!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly owl!" roared Bob Cherry. "It's not an Arab! Shut up, you ass!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

From behind the Famous Five he ventured to blink at his assailant. His eyes almost popped through his spectacles as he saw the two grinning colonels. It dawned on Billy Bunter's fat brain that his leg had been pulled.

"You-you-you beast!" he gasped. "W-w-w-was it you collared me?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"I'll say it was," chortled Colonel Jacks.

"Haw, haw, haw!"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "I-I-I knew it was you, of course. I-I-I knew it was you all the time. I-I-I bet I made you think I was frightened! He, he, he!"

"I'll bet you did!" agreed Colonel Jacks.

"I'll say so," chuckled Colonel Skink.

"Well, are you ready to start now, Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton, laughing.

"No; I'm jolly well not!" Billy Bunter had recovered now. "And if you fellows are funky--"

"Bump him!" said Bob Cherry.

"I say, you fellows, leggo! Oh crikey!" howled Bunter, as the Famous Five grasped him, and he smote the sandy soil with a mighty smite.

"Yaroooh! I say, you fellows, I'm ready! I'm waiting! Whoop!"

Bump!

"Yow-ow-ow!"

"Now get on your donkey, and shut up!" said Bob. "If you say another word, you fat, funky frump, I'll jolly well kick you!"

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Thud!

"Ow!"

"Have another" asked Bob. "Another word, and--"

Billy Bunter did not say another word. He clambered on his donkey, and the Greyfriars party started for the Nile.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

VERY HOT COFFEE!

MOUSSA, the reis, greeted the Greyfriars juniors with grave salaams as they came on board the dahabiyeh.

From Moussa they learned how Kalizelos had made his escape; details which Billy Bunter had not thought it worthwhile to mention. It was probably only the presence of the visitors on board that saved the fatuous Owl from being kicked from one end of the Cleopatra to the other. But in the presence of the two transatlantic gentlemen, Bunter could not be dealt with as he deserved.

Bunter, unaware of his narrow escape, was by no means pleased by the presence of those two citizens of the United States. G. W. Jacks' little jest at his expense had roused his wrath, and he bestowed a good many inimical blinks on the long-legged colonel; which G. W. Jacks did not even notice. Indeed, he did not seem to observe Bunter at all; which added to the irritation of the most important member of the party.

Messrs Jacks and Skink were very pleased to pay that visit, for two good reasons-they had discovered that Mauleverer was a "real live lord," which was naturally very gratifying to true republicans; and they were going to get a lift on the Cleopatra up the Nile as far as Armant, their next stopping place, which saved the cost of hiring a boat. And the juniors, grateful for the help the two Yankee gentlemen had rendered in the hour of need, were only too glad to make as much of them as possible.

Bunter did not share that feeling in the least.

G. W. Jacks had chased Bunter up a donkey-track with the full intention of "lambasting" him. He had played a trick on Bunter, frightening him out of his fat wits. And he disregarded the fat Owl as if the fat Owl was a person of absolutely no account at all. Billy Bunter would have liked to punch G. W. Jacks' nose-though he did not think of doing so. He had not forgotten the spanking G. W. Jacks had given him, and he did not want any more. But as the dahabiyeh was cast off from the bank of the Nile, and while Lord Mauleverer was politely showing the visitors over Mr. Maroudi's magnificent houseboat, Bunter stated his views to the other fellows.

"I say, you fellows, I don't want those Yankees here," he said. "I can't make out what you've brought them on board for."

"Forgotten already what they did for us last night?" asked Nugent.

"Oh, rot!" said Bunter. "Nothing to make a song about! Besides, I did it all, really-I fetched the beasts and saved you from danger-I'd like to know what would have happened without me--"

"Without you, you fat idiot, Kalizelos would still be locked up in his cabin," growled Johnny Bull. "Shut up!"

"Well, I'm fed-up with those Yankees," said Bunter firmly, "and I can tell you, I don't want them here-especially that cheeky rotter Jacks. I've a jolly good mind to tell them so."

"Get ready to be dropped in the Nile if you do!" said Harry Wharton.

"The dropfulness will be terrific, my esteemed idiotic Bunter," assured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Bunter's fat lip curled.

"So you're putting those Yankees before me, after all I've done for you," he said. "Talk about a serpent's child being more ungrateful than a thankless tooth--"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, let 'em look out, that's all," said Bunter darkly. "That cheeky beast smacked me-and played a rotten trick on me, and I've a jolly good mind to punch his nose--"

"You'd want a ladder to get to it, old fat man," grinned Bob. "And he might spank you again. And we won't stop him next time."

"I'm not going to have a row with the fellow," said Bunter loftily. "But I can jolly well tell you--"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob, pointing to the bank, from which the dahabiyeh was gliding away. "Look!"

"Kalizelos!" exclaimed Wharton.

Under the palm-trees on the high bank of the Nile, stood the Greek, his right arm in a sling, his olive face pale. He had suddenly appeared through the palms, and was watching the dahabiyeh as it glided up the Nile. As he caught the eyes of the juniors turned on him, he shook his clenched fist at them, his pale face distorted with rage. Bob Cherry politely raised his hat in response, with a cheery grin. The Greek's brow grew blacker, and his jetty eyes burned.

"We're not done with that merchant yet," remarked Johnny Bull. "All Bunter's fault! Let's kick him."

"Beast!"

The Greek stood under the palms watching the dahabiyeh with bitter rage in his face. The palms, and the figure of the Greek, faded into the distance. He was still standing there, his burning eyes fixed on the group of schoolboys when the dahabiyeh glided round one of the many curves of the Nile, and he was lost to sight.

"I'll say this is some boat!" Colonel Jacks' nasal voice resounded. "Yep, I'll surely say this is some boat, and I guess it cost a heap of dollars."

"You've said it!" agreed Colonel Skink.

"Gentlemanly lords," said Hassan, "coffee is prepare on a balcony."

"Tea's ready," said Harry. "This way!"

They descended to the stern balcony, where Colonel Jacks stretched his long limbs in a long cane chair; and another chair creaked and groaned under the weight of Colonel Skink. The two American gentlemen were in high good-humour, and so were the Famous Five, and Lord Mauleverer beamed. Only Billy Bunter's fat face wore a frown. But nobody seemed to observe that William George Bunter was dissatisfied. So far as the two colonels were concerned, Bunter might have not been there at all; which was naturally annoying to a fellow who knew his own importance, if nobody else did.

"I'll say this is good coffee," said Colonel Jacks, having drained his seventh cup. "Yep! I'll certainly say so!"

A Nubian servant took the bony colonel's cup to refill it. Billy Bunter dropped into a chair beside Colonel Jacks. There was a gleam in Billy Bunter's eyes, behind his big spectacles. Also Billy Bunter had something in his fat hand.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, who was on Bunter's other side, gave a slight sniff, and glanced at the fat Owl's closed hand. He scented pepper.

"My esteemed Bunter--" murmured the nabob.

Bunter blinked at him.

"It's all right, Inky! I haven't got anything in my hand," he whispered. "If you think I went down to get a packet of pepper from the cook, you're jolly well mistaken. What should I want pepper for?"

"My only esteemed hat," murmured the nabob.

"Nothing of the sort," said Bunter airily.

"You needn't blink at me in that suspicious way, Inky! Mind your own bizney, see!"

Hurree Singh grinned.

He looked away from Bunter; but the corner of his eye was on the fat junior. Bunter's manner was so excessively sly, that it would have aroused the least suspicious person's suspicions had anyone observed him. Only the nabob, as it happened, was observing him; but the Nabob of Bhanipur was observing him very keenly indeed - out of the corner of his eye.

Colonel Jacks' cup was set before him again.

It was undoubtedly good coffee, made by Hassan's own hands; but it was Billy Bunter's idea that the bony colonel was not going to enjoy that cup, at all events.

"I say, you fellows!" exclaimed Bunter suddenly. "What's that on the bank? Is it an elephant?"

He pointed with his empty hand towards a fringe of date-trees on the bank of the Nile, near which some fellahin were working a shaduf. The tea-party looked round in the indicated direction, certainly not expecting to see an elephant wandering along the Nile. All eyes being off him-except the corner of one very keen eye-Billy Bunter reached out his other hand over the colonel's coffee-cup. The contents of the paper packet in his fat paw shot into the colonel's coffee.

Really, it was very slyly done; Billy Bunter was displaying uncommon wiliness. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh winked into space.

"Blessed if I can see any elephant!" said Bob Cherry. "There's a shaduf-is that what you took for an elephant, you owl?"

"The seefulness of an esteemed elephant is not terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"I guess you're ,dreaming, son," said Colonel Jacks. "I surely don't spot any pesky elephant."

The tall colonel stood up, to stare at the slowly gliding bank. Billy Bunter grinned, and took a sip of his own cup of coffee. The pepper was in Colonel Jacks' coffee now, and when he had finished looking for a non-existent elephant on the bank of the Nile, there was a surprise in store for him.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh touched the fat Owl gently on the arm.

"My esteemed Bunter," he murmured, "did you drop that hundred-piastre piece on the deck?"

"Eh? Yes!" said Bunter, promptly. "I had one in my pocket-in fact, I heard it drop! Where is it, old chap? It's mine!"

Bunter bent down, blinking eagerly for the Egyptian pound on the deck. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh reached out and changed Bunter's coffee-cup for that belonging to Colonel Jacks.

Both the colonels had stood up to stare at the bank, and did not observe his action. But Wharton and Bob Cherry observed it.

"What the thump--" began Bob.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh closed one eye, and Bob, puzzled, broke off. He realised that the nabob had had some reason for changing the coffee-cups, though he could not begin to guess what it was.

"I say, Inky, where's that quid?" exclaimed Bunter, still blinking anxiously at the deck. "I say, where did you see it?"

"The seefulness was not preposterous, my esteemed Bunter!"

"You silly ass!" roared Bunter. "Mean to say you were pulling my leg?"

"The pullfulness of your fat leg is terrific."

"Yah!"

Colonel Jacks sat down again, and lifted his coffee-cup. Billy Bunter watched him, with fascinated eyes, behind his big spectacles. The bony colonel gulped down the coffee, and Bunter watched for the explosion. But it did not come!

"I'll say that's pesky good coffee!" said G. W. Jacks.

"Oh crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Unless the bony colonel had an inside lined with zinc, Bunter simply could not understand it. He knew that he had dosed the colonel's coffee with hot red pepper, and he had expected something like an earthquake when G. W. Jacks swallowed it. Instead of which, the colonel smacked his lips over the coffee and pronounced that it was good!

Bunter was unaware, so far, that the peppered coffee-cup was now standing in the place of his own! That was a discovery he had yet to make!

"My absurd Bunter," murmured the nabob, "your excellent and idiotic coffee will be getting cold--"

Bunter snorted. His trick had failed-how, he could not imagine. Colonel Jacks evidently was none the worse for it. The fat Owl picked up his own cup, and gulped down the coffee. The next moment there was a fearful roar.

"Yurrrrrrrgggh!"

"My esteemed Bunter--"

"Urrrrrrrgggghh! "

Billy Bunter bounded to his feet. He spluttered and sputtered, gasped and gurgled, coughed and sneezed! Water streamed from his eyes, and he clasped both fat hands to his burning mouth. It was quite a large dose of pepper that Bunter had so slyly slipped into the coffee. It was hot pepper-frightfully hot pepper! He had meant it to give the coffee-drinker a shock - and it did!

"Yaroooh! I'm burned!" yelled Bunter. "Oh crikey! Oooooogh! Pip-pip-pip-pepper-- Yaroooooch!"

"Pepper in the coffee!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

Then he understood and roared: "Ha, ha, ha!"

"Say, bo', what's biting you?" exclaimed Colonel Jacks. "I'll say this is some rookus you're kicking up. Yep!"

"Sure!" said Colonel Skink.

"Oooooogh! Woooogh! Ooooch! Atchooh-shoo-oooh! Ow! Gug-gug-gig!" gurgled Bunter wildly.

"What the dickens--" exclaimed Nugent.

"Urrrrrrrrggggghh! "

Billy Bunter staggered away, spluttering, gasping, coughing, sneezing, and clasping his scorching mouth. How he had come to swallow the peppered coffee himself, Bunter did not know. But he knew that he had; Only too well he knew that! He staggered away, emitting sounds of woe and anguish, leaving some of the tea-party staring, and some of them grinning. And he stayed away-and was not even missed!