



Captain WILLIAM MORGAN BUNTER (1750 perhaps). The notorious galley and tuck-box pirate. (Taken from a reproduction of a print of a copy of a reproduction.)

BILLY BUNTER'S OWN

No. 3



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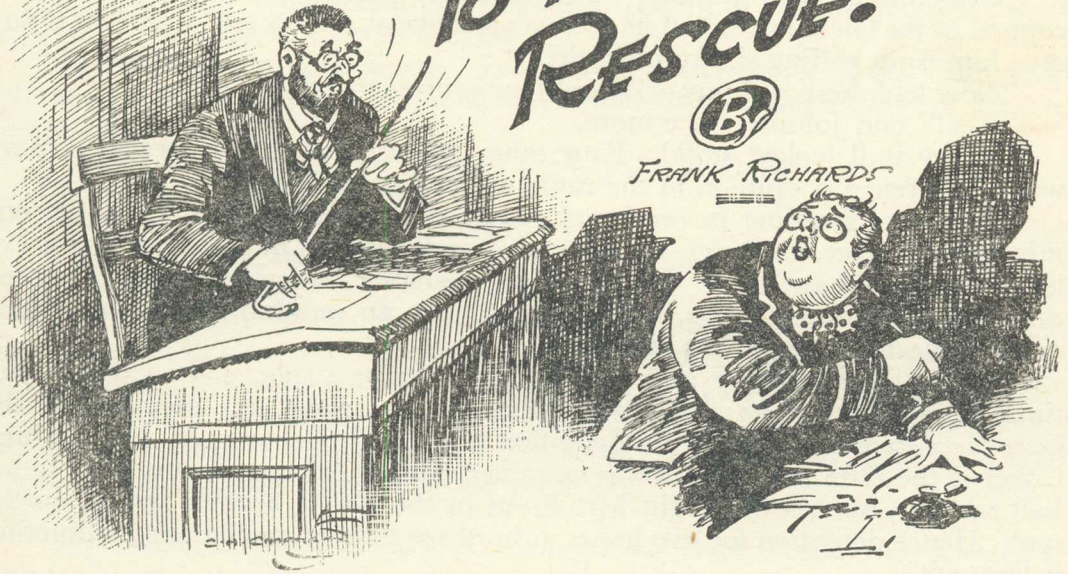
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WIBLEY TO THE RESCUE!



FRANK RICHARDS



I

BREAKING BOUNDS!

“Rot!” said Johnny Bull.

“Look here, Johnny—!” hooted Bob Cherry.

“I said rot!”

“My esteemed Johnny—!” murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“I said rot, and I mean rot!” said Johnny Bull.

“We shall be late for Mossoo!” said Harry Wharton.

“I know!”

“You want to be late for the detention class?” inquired Frank Nugent.

Johnny shook his head.

“No more than you do,” he answered, “but it can’t be helped. We were asses to forget the time, and come so far, when we’re due in the French class-room at three. We shan’t improve matters by breaking school bounds. We’ve got to go back the way we came.”

“It’s a short cut across the fields!” said Bob. “We cut along by the fence of the Cross Keys—”

“We don’t!” said Johnny.

“Sprint all the way,” said Harry Wharton. “Five minutes will see us clear.”

"That field's out of bounds," said Johnny.

"Never been out of bounds before, in your life?" inquired Bob Cherry, sarcastically.

"Sometimes," said Johnny, "but not in a quarter like this. Smithy was copped in that field once, and he spun a yarn about a short cut: but that didn't save him from getting six from Quelch."

"Now look here, Johnny—!" said four juniors together.

"Rot!" said Johnny, once more.

Johnny Bull looked stolid. Four other fellows looked exasperated. There was a difference of opinion in the ranks of the Famous Five.

They were standing in the frosty grass, on the bank of the Sark. On one side was the river, gleaming with ice in a wintry sun. On the other was a low hedge of frozen hawthorns. In the distance, among leafless trees, could be seen the roofs and chimney-pots of the Cross Keys: an unsalubrious resort strictly out of bounds for Greyfriars fellows.

It was a half-holiday: and on a half-holiday, as a rule, there was plenty of time to spare. But on this particular afternoon, these five members of the Greyfriars Remove were due for detention with the French master. Snowballing Coker of the Fifth in the quad was not a very serious offence: but when a snowball missed Coker, and caught Mr. Prout in the eye, it became serious on the spot. Hence detention for two hours, from three to five: in company with other delinquents.

Up to three o'clock, they were free as air. There was no reason why they shouldn't walk down the Sark: and they did. And finding that the ice was thick enough to bear, there was no reason why they shouldn't slide on it—which they also did.

Whizzing down the Sark, on the ice, they rather forgot detention. It was ten minutes to three when Harry Wharton suddenly remembered, and looked at his watch. And in ten minutes it was quite impossible to return up the river in time for Monsieur Charpentier at three.

But there was another resource. By cutting across the meadow intervening between the Sark and Friardale Lane, they could make it. That short cut would save well over half the distance.

But there was a lion in the path, so to speak—or rather, two lions. One was the fact that that meadow, adjoining the Cross Keys, was out of bounds. It was very easy, from that meadow, to climb the fence into the grounds of the Cross Keys, which fellows had been known to do. The other lion in the path was Johnny Bull, who was determined not to break bounds in that particular spot.

"Have a little sense," argued Johnny, as his comrades gave him exasperated looks, "suppose we're spotted in that field—"

"Bow-wow!" said Bob Cherry. "No prefects about."

"How do you know? Might be anybody about, on a half-holiday. We

could tell Quelch we were taking a short cut, like Smithy did. He didn't believe Smithy."

"Smithy was fibbing," said Nugent.

"I know that! That makes no difference. It's up to a fellow with any sense to keep out of suspicious circumstances."

"Oh, blow the circumstances," said Bob. "We're going to take that short cut, and we might as well go the long way round, as stand here chewing the rag. Come on, you men."

Bob Cherry made a move towards the hawthorn hedge.

Johnny Bull stood like a rock.

"Come on, Johnny!" urged Nugent.

"Get a move on, fathead!" said Harry Wharton.

Snort, from Johnny.

"You're captain of the Remove, Wharton, and Quelch's Head Boy. It's up to you not to kick over the traces, more than other fellows."

"Sermon may be taken as read!" interrupted Bob Cherry. "Johnny, old man, you talk like a picture-book: but we're not going to be late for Mossos, and get another detention. Two hours of French to-day is enough for me, and a little over: without landing another lot for Saturday."

"I tell you—!"

"My esteemed Johnny," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "the speechfulness is silvery, but the silence is the bird in hand that goes longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks. Come onfully!"

"Rot!" said Johnny Bull.

"Here's a gap in the hedge," said Bob. "Come on! Three or four minutes' sprinting, and we shall be through into Friardale Lane. Coming, Johnny?"

"No!" snorted Johnny.

Bob Cherry chuckled.

"Your mistake—you are!" he said. And suddenly grasping Johnny by his stocky shoulders, Bob propelled him into the hedge, through the gap, and into the forbidden field. Taken by surprise by that sudden manoeuvre, Johnny Bull found himself on the wrong side of the hedge, before he quite knew what was happening.

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh followed, laughing. Johnny Bull gave a roar.

"Let go! Let go, you fathead, or I'll punch your head!" He struggled in Bob's grasp, in the frosty field. However, he refrained from punching his head. The chums of the Remove did not punch one another's heads, even in the most exasperated moments.

"Lend a hand, Inky," gasped Bob. He had his hands full with Johnny.

"The lendfulness will be terrific!" grinned the nabob of Bhanipur. And his dusky grasp closed on one of Johnny's arms, and pulled him onward.

Johnny still resisted.

"Give him a push, you fellows!" called out Bob.

Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, chuckling, gave Johnny vigorous pushes in the back. Johnny Bull was sturdy and he was strong: and he was not going across the forbidden field if he could help it. But he had no chance in four pairs of hands: and he couldn't help it. The four rushed him onward, along the long fence of the Cross Keys, which extended from the riverside to Friardale Lane.

"Will you leggo?" roared Johnny.

"Not so's you'd notice it," answered Bob, cheerily. "You're not going to be late for Mossoo, old boy, any more than we are. Put it on."

"You're out of bounds now, old man," said Frank Nugent, laughing. "Better put it on, and get through, if you fancy that prefects are going to drop from the sky, or jump up out of the earth."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You silly asses—!" roared Johnny.

"Same to you, with knobs on," said Bob. "Travel, old man—I'm getting tired of lugging you about. We're half across already."

Johnny Bull breathed hard, and he breathed deep. But he was in for it now: the Sark was left far behind: and going back was as long a trip as going forward. So he made up his mind to it.

"Let go, you fatheads!" he gasped, "I'll come! But if we get landed in a row, jolly well remember that I told you so."

"Put it on!" said Harry Wharton.

The juniors fairly raced along that fence. Johnny's chums, as well as Johnny, were quite aware that the consequences might be troublesome, if they were spotted by master or prefect in that forbidden field, close by the fence of the most disreputable "pub" in the neighbourhood. They were not the kind of fellows whom their form-master, Mr. Quelch, would easily suspect of "pub-crawling". Nevertheless, rules were rules: and Quelch was a whale on discipline. They were very keen to get through, and out into the lane that led to Greyfriars School.

"Here we are!" panted Bob.

There was a gap in the hedge on Friardale Lane. They came up to that gap with a rush. At the same moment, a Greyfriars senior walked into it from the lane. It was Loder of the Sixth—a prefect! The meeting was too sudden and unexpected for the rush to stop in time. Five juniors crashed like an avalanche into Gerald Loder, and he went spinning back into the lane, and crashed, and over and round him stumbled and tumbled five panting Remove fellows.

II

LATE!

GERALD LODER sprawled on his back, gasping for breath. Bob Cherry rolled on one side of him: Hurree Jamset Ram Singh on the other. Frank Nugent was strewn across his legs. Harry Wharton staggered in

the frosty hedge: Johnny Bull sat down in the gap. The sudden and unexpected collision had, for the moment, knocked out all concerned.

Both parties had been taken quite by surprise. Harry Wharton and Co. certainly, could never have expected to see a Greyfriars Sixth-Form prefect turning into that forbidden field from the lane. Loder of the Sixth couldn't have expected five Remove juniors to come bolting out, as he turned in. The result had really been inevitable.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob, as he scrambled up.

"Oh, crumbs!" panted Nugent.

The juniors were first on their feet. Loder of the Sixth sat up, slowly. He seemed rather winded by the shock.

"Sorry, Loder!" said Harry Wharton. "We didn't see you—"

"The sorrowfulness is terrific, esteemed Loder!" gasped Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Hope you're not hurt, Loder," ventured Frank Nugent.

Loder sat and panted and glared. The bully of the Sixth was not a good-tempered fellow, at the best of times. Now he looked in the worst temper ever.

"You young rascals!" he gurgled. He clambered slowly and breathlessly to his feet. His eyes glittered at the five. "You've just come out of that field—you've been out of bounds."

Johnny Bull gave a grunt. His foreboding had been well-founded: there was a prefect about, and the delinquents had been "copped".

"Only taking a short cut, Loder," explained Harry Wharton, without much hope that that would satisfy Loder. "We've hardly time to get back to the school for the detention class, and so—"

"Where have you been?"

"Sliding on the Sark."

Loder sneered.

"You can tell that to Quelch!" he said. "He may believe you! I shall report all of you to your form-master. Now get back to the school at once."

"We were really only taking the short cut, Loder!" urged Bob.

"That will do!" snapped Loder. "I remember Vernon-Smith spun the same yarn last week, when Wingate spotted him here."

"It happens to be true!" said Harry Wharton, quietly.

"Get back to the school."

"Oh, come on," said Johnny Bull, sarcastically, "Loder wants us to get out of sight before he goes into that field."

"What?" roared Loder.

"Oh, my hat!" murmured Bob Cherry. "Is that it? Look here, Loder, you were just going into that field yourself—and it's as much out of bounds for the Sixth as for the Remove—" Bob jumped back, as Gerald Loder made a stride at him.

"Oh, come on!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, "we're late already."

The Famous Five turned their backs on Loder, and started for the school at a rapid run. Loder of the Sixth stood staring after them, with a black brow. It was not till the windings of Friardale Lane hid them from sight, that Loder stepped through that gap in the hedge again, and hurried along the fence of the Cross Keys: to a familiar spot where it was easy to clamber over.

"We're for it!" said Bob Cherry, breathlessly, as the running juniors came in sight of the school gates. From the old clock tower of Greyfriars, the hour of three was chiming.

"Late for Mossoo—and a report to Quelch to follow!" grunted Johnny Bull. "Think it was a good idea, now, to take that short cut?"

"Oh, rats!" snapped Bob.

"I told you so—!"

"Dry up!"

"Well, I did tell you so—!"

Bob checked his speed for a moment. It was a fact that Johnny had told his friends so! But it was a very irritating and annoying fact, to be rubbed in at the moment.

"We're late," said Bob, "so we can spare another minute to bang that silly ass's head on a tree."

"Oh, come on," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"Look here," hooted Johnny, "I jolly well told you—"

"Shut UP!" roared Bob.

Johnny grunted indignantly, but he shut up. The five juniors came breathlessly up to the school gates. The fattest figure at Greyfriars School was lolling in the gateway: and Billy Bunter blinked at the breathless five through his big spectacles, and grinned.

"I say, you fellows, you're late," he squeaked. "They're all in with Mossoo, except you chaps and Wibley—"

The five ran on.

Billy Bunter grabbed at Harry Wharton's sleeve as he passed.

"Hold on a minute, old chap," he exclaimed.

"Let go, ass—I'm late—"

"I say, it's important," gasped Bunter, "I say, it's awfully important, old fellow—do stop just a tick—I tell you it's important—"

Harry Wharton reluctantly came to a stop while his comrades cut on to the House. He turned impatiently on the fat Owl of the Remove.

"Well, what is it—quick!" he exclaimed.

"I'm expecting a postal-order—"

"What?" Wharton almost yelled.

"A postal-order, old chap! It hasn't come! I say, could you lend a fellow half-a-crown till it comes?" asked Bunter.

Harry Wharton did not reply in words. The important matter for which Billy Bunter was delaying him, when time pressed, was to extract a little loan

from him, till the arrival of Bunter's celebrated postal-order! Words were inadequate! He grasped the fat Owl by his fat shoulders, and sat him down in the quad.

"Yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as he sat.

Harry Wharton cut on after his friends, leaving Bunter sitting, and grabbing at the big spectacles that had slanted down his fat little nose.

"Beast!" roared Bunter.

Harry Wharton disappeared into the House. He rejoined his friends breathlessly at the door of No. 10 class-room, which was the domain of Monsieur Charpentier, the French master of Greyfriars. Outside that door, the Famous Five paused for a few moments to recover breath.

"Only five minutes late!" said Bob. "After all, Mossoo's a good little ass—he always goes easy."

Bang! came from within the class-room. It was the sound of a desk-lid dropping suddenly. Bob grinned. Desk-lids were wont to drop suddenly in a detention class taken by the French master. Mossoo was one of those luckless masters who are born to be ragged: a circumstance of which exuberant youth was liable to take thoughtless advantage.

Bang! bang!

"Taisez-vous, donc!" came Mossoo's shrill voice. "Ordair in ze class! You Skinner, you keep ze ordair. You Smeet, you sit down! You Todd, taisez-vous."

Harry Wharton opened the class-room door, and the five filed in. They entered with their meekest manners on, to have a placating effect on Monsieur Charpentier. After all, five minutes was not very late—fellows were often later than that, for a class presided over by the easy-going and long-suffering Mossoo. But they did not find the little French gentleman in his accustomed tolerant mood. He gave them quite a glare.

"So sorry we're a few minutes late, monsieur!" said Harry Wharton, in his politest tones.

"Cinq minutes!" snapped Monsieur Charpentier. "Is it zat you shall disrespect me—is it zat you zink it matter not? I give you feefy lines of se Henriade, each vun of you, to write out viz yourselves."

"We really couldn't help—"

"Zat vill do, you Vharton! Go to ze place."

Harry Wharton breathed rather hard, as he went to his place. Mossoo, it was clear, was not the "good little ass" he generally was, on this occasion. He was quite fierce, for once. It was rather like finding a wolf where one expected to meet a lamb!

"What's the matter with the little ass to-day?" Bob Cherry whispered to Vernon-Smith, as the juniors sat down.

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

"Goodness knows! He's quite rabid. Better mind your step."

"Smeet!" yapped Monsieur Charpentier. "You talk in ze class! You take vun hundred lines of ze Henriade."

Bang! It was Skinner's desk-lid again.

"Skinner! Zat is ze second time you make zat loud noise vix yourself—"

"An accident, sir!" drawled Skinner, "I—Yooooop!" Skinner's drawl changed suddenly into a yell, as a pointer rapped on his knuckles. "Ow! oh! ow!"

"I keep ordair in zis class, or I know ze reason vy not!" exclaimed Monsieur Charpentier, his little pointed beard almost bristling. "Now, zen, ve vill go on."

After which, there was something like order in the detention class. No more desk-lids banged, as the detained juniors improved, more or less, their knowledge of French irregular verbs.

III

BOOT FOR BUNTER!

BILLY BUNTER jumped.

He jumped almost clear of the Remove passage.

His little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles, as he jumped, at the doorway of No. 6 study.

Never, in fact, had William George Bunter been so startled and surprised.

While quite a crowd of Remove fellows were in detention that afternoon, Billy Bunter was at liberty to follow his own devices. Bunter hadn't taken part in that snowballing affair which had ended so unluckily for all the fellows who had. That was not because Bunter had any objection, in principle, to snowballing Coker of the Fifth. In fact Bunter would have been quite pleased to land a few good ones on the bulky person of Horace Coker of the Fifth Form. Coker had kicked him, more than once, and the fact that he deserved kicking did not console Bunter. It was sheer laziness that had kept Bunter out of the spot of trouble. Snowballing was an exertion: and Bunter disliked exertion in any shape or form. So when a snowball unfortunately landed in the eye of Prout, the master of the Fifth, and a whole mob of Removites were given detention for that little mischance, Bunter, who had been grinning on from a distance, escaped unscathed.

Frowsting over the fire in the Rag was much more enjoyable than French grammar in No. 10 class-room. But later in the afternoon, Billy Bunter heaved his weight out of an armchair in the Rag, and rolled up to the Remove passage. It was getting towards tea-time: and Bunter was always ready for a meal considerably in advance of time. And Bunter was aware that Micky Desmond had had a parcel that day, from the old folks at home in Ireland.

Bunter was interested in that parcel.

The three juniors who inhabited No. 6 in the Remove—Morgan, Desmond, and Wibley—were all booked for detention. That was lucky—for Bunter, not

for the three. For it meant that there would be nobody at home in No. 6, till Monsieur Charpentier dismissed his class at five o'clock. Billy Bunter, rolling up the Remove passage to No. 6, naturally expected to find that study unoccupied.

But as he blinked in at the doorway, he discovered that it was not so.

Morgan and Desmond were in the detention class. William Wibley, ought to have been, was not.

Wibley was there—standing in front of a tall looking-glass clamped on the wall beside the window. No. 6 was the only study in the Remove so provided: Wibley had installed that tall glass at his own expense. Wibley lived, and moved, and had his being, in amateur theatricals, and when he made up in one of his "character parts" he required a full-length view.

Billy Bunter frowned at his back.

Evidently, Wibley had forgotten detention with Mossoo.

That was not an uncommon kind of happening with Wib. When his mind was on his hobby, Wibley was liable to forget time and space, and everything else. Wib had been busy in the study that afternoon. The big property-box under the window was wide open, and half its contents sprawled about the room.

Trousers and coats and waistcoats lumbered the chairs, and on the table was a weird assortment of wigs and beards and moustaches, with sticks of grease-paint and other such concomitants of the histrionic business. Wib's skill in making-up was almost uncanny.

He could twist his features into almost any aspect, almost as if they were made of elastic. He could speak in any voice from the treble of childhood to the wheeze of old age. Sometimes he would give an "impersonation", causing much hilarity in the Remove, and one of his "character parts" was that of Monsieur Charpentier. It was Wib's boast that he could have impersonated Quelch himself, or even the Head, but for want of the necessary height. But he was as tall as the little French master, and the rest was easy to him.

Wibley might be so deeply interested in his latest theatrical "stunt" that he had forgotten detention with Mossoo: but Billy Bunter wasn't! Billy Bunter was interested in Micky Desmond's parcel from County Limerick: which, obviously, was out of his reach so long as one of the occupants of No. 4 was there.

So Bunter squeaked from the doorway, addressing Wibley's back:

"I say, Wibley, old chap, you're cutting detention! I—I came up specially to tell you, old fellow! You'll get toco from Quelch, if Mossoo reports you for cutting detention."

Wibley turned round from the tall glass.

It was then that Bunter jumped—almost clear of the floor, his eyes popping through his spectacles.

Wibley, seen from the rear, was just Wibley. When Wibley turned round, Billy Bunter naturally expected to see Wibley's face. But he didn't! The face

he saw was about fifty years old, with a little pointed black beard, a sallow complexion, and a good crop of wrinkles.

Bunter almost tottered.

"Wha-a-a-t—" he stuttered.

Really, it was startling, to see a middle-aged bearded face looking at him, and a schoolboy below it. A fellow who was fifty above, and fifteen below, was an uncommon and startling sight.

"Eh, what's that?" exclaimed Wibley.

It was Wibley's voice, if not his face.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "You—you silly ass! You—you made me jump out of my skin!"

The fat Owl grasped it now. Wibley was practising one of his impersonations. His face was made up to resemble that of Monsieur Charpentier. The weird thing was that it reproduced Mossoo to the very last feature. Bunter could almost have supposed that, by some spot of magic, Mossoo's head had been transferred to William Wibley's shoulders.

Wibley grinned.

"Do I look the part?" he asked, complacently.

"Eh? Oh! Yes! I say, you'd get into a row if Mossoo spotted you got up like that—or Quelch! But I say, you're late for the detention class. I say, Froggy's got his ears up to-day—you'd better cut."

Grunt from Wibley.

"Bother Froggy, and bother detention," he snapped. "I'd forgotten all about it. I suppose I'd better cut."

"I came up specially to tip you, old chap!" said Bunter, mendaciously. "I don't want you to get into a row with Froggy. I say, you'd better make haste."

Wibley seemed to think so too. He stripped off pointed beard and curled moustache, and proceeded to wash off grease-paint, in a basin on the table. He rubbed and cleaned and towelled, and in a few minutes Mossoo disappeared, and Wibley was himself again.

Then he cut out of the study.

Billy Bunter watched him go, with much satisfaction. As it was now a quarter to five, he had feared that Wibley might not think it worth while to turn up in Mossoo's class so very late: as indeed it hardly was. But Wib had rushed off without looking at the time: which suited Bunter.

As Wibley disappeared down the Remove passage, Billy Bunter rolled into the study. Grinning, he rolled across to the cupboard. He threw the door open, and blinked in through his big spectacles.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter.

There was the parcel from County Limerick. It had been opened at one end, and some of the contents taken out. But Bunter could see that most remained. No doubt Wibley and Co. were going to have a spread from that parcel, at tea-time: Micky was the fellow to whack out his supplies with his study-mates.

If that was the intention, Bunter was prepared to nip it in the bud. There was going to be a spread in that study—but it was going to be a spread for one, not for three: and William George Bunter was going to be the one.

Two fat hands groped in the parcel.

They came out, with a cake in one, and a bag of jam-tarts in the other. The fat Owl grinned happily. From a distance, the three-quarters chimed out from the clock-tower. It was a quarter to five. Bunter had fifteen minutes before the detention class were out. Much less than fifteen minutes would have been enough for Bunter. In these matters he was a quick worker.

Munch! munch! munch!

A jam-tart went down like an oyster. A huge bite at the cake followed. Standing at the cupboard, Billy Bunter enjoyed life.

But suddenly he gave an uneasy start. There was a patter of footsteps coming up the Remove passage.

“Oh, crikey!” breathed Bunter.



Munch, munch, munch . . .

He spun round from the cupboard in alarm. If it was that beast Wibley coming back for some reason—!

Alas for Bunter! It was!

Wibley came hurrying into the study. Why he had come back, Bunter didn't know. But there he was.

"I say, you'll get into a row, Wib!" gasped Bunter. "I say, why haven't you gone down to Mossosoo. You're late—"

"Too late to be any use," explained Wibley. "The quarter struck as I was going downstairs. Not much use turning up for a two-hour detention, one-and-three-quarters of an hour late, what?"

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, "I—I say, I—I'd go if I were you, Wib! Mossosoo ain't in a good temper to-day, and—"

"Rats!" said Wibley, "I shall get lines from Quelch, anyhow. Why—what—" He stared at the fat Owl. "Where did you get that cake?"

"Oh! I—I—I—!"

"Where did you get those jam-tarts?"

"I—I—I—!" babbled Bunter.

Even Billy Bunter, seldom at a loss for a fib, was quite at a loss now. It was, in fact, quite clear where he had got the cake and the jam-tarts: and why he was in the study at all.

Wibley came round the table.

"You fat grub-raiding octopus—!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, really, Wibley—"

"Take that!"

"Yaroooooooooh!" roared Bunter.

The cake dropped from one fat hand, the bag of jam-tarts from the other, as Bunter made a bound for the door. One kick was enough for Bunter. That, at any rate, was Bunter's own opinion. It did not seem to be Wibley's. Wibley rushed after him, letting out his foot again.

Thud! It landed hard.

"Yooo-hoop!" roared Bunter.

Thud! Wibley got in one more, as the fat Owl dodged out of the doorway.

"Yow-ow-ow! Beast! Wow!" floated back, as Billy Bunter departed on his highest gear.

Wibley, deep in his theatrical hobby, forgot Bunter's existence in about a minute: kicking Bunter was a trifle light as air, which he easily forgot. Billy Bunter did not forget it quite so easily. A booting is one of those things which it is more blessed to give than to receive. Wibley, dabbing grease-paint before his glass, forgot all about it—but Billy Bunter was still wriggling, and still wowing and yowing, on the Remove landing, remembering every one of those kicks quite distinctly, when five o'clock chimed out from the clock-tower, and Monsieur Charpentier's detention class poured out of No. 10 class-room: and a crowd of Remove fellows came up to the studies to tea.

Some Bunter ancestors. Showing, perhaps, how he acquired some of the finer points of his character.



Stone-age Bunter. Food is essential.



Simon de Bunter (Middle Ages) blows his own trumpet.



William Shylock Bunter. Generosity.



William Micawber Bunter. Something will turn up . . . even a postal order.

IV

"FOR it, or not for it?" said Bob Cherry.

"I wonder!" said Harry Wharton, slowly.

The Famous Five were standing in a little group, at the foot of the staircase. They were in doubt.

Now that the detention class was dismissed, they expected something to follow. If Loder of the Sixth intended to report them to Quelch, no doubt he had already done so: in which case, a summons to their form-master's study impended. But they did not yet know whether they were "for it" or not "for it".

"We were rather asses to take that short cut!" said Frank Nugent, shaking his head.

"Sort of!" agreed Bob.

"I told you so—!" began Johnny Bull. It was a fact that Johnny had told them so: and, being a fact, Johnny did not see any reason why it should not be mentioned. Its mention did not seem to cheer up his friends.

"For goodness sake, chuck it!" said Bob. "It's all your fault really."

"Mine!" howled Johnny, indignantly.

"Yes, yours! If you hadn't wasted time arguing, by the river, we should have got through before Loder butted in," said Bob. "Half-a-minute would have done it. So it's all your fault."

"Hear, hear!" grinned Nugent.

"Look here—!" hooted Johnny, spluttering with indignation.

"Oh, pack it up," said Harry Wharton. "It doesn't matter much whose fault it was—we're booked, if Loder's reported us. But has he?"

"Sure to!" said Nugent. "He doesn't love us an awful lot, even when we don't bang into him and send him sprawling."

"And the sprawfulness was terrific," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"But what was Loder doing there at all?" said Harry. "He was coming into the meadow as we were coming out. It's as much out of bounds for him as for us. He mightn't like Quelch to know."

Snort from Johnny Bull.

"We jolly well know Loder's game," he said. "He was going into that field to get over the fence into the Cross Keys yard. Lots of fellows know he smokes in his study, and know where he gets his smokes: and he knows that frowsy bookie, Banks, at that pub. If the Head knew what lots of fellows could tell him, Loder wouldn't be a prefect long—if he stayed at Greyfriars at all."

"Exactly!" said Harry Wharton. "We were taking a short cut—but Loder wasn't. If he's got any sense, he will say nothing about it."

"Well, if he reports to Quelch, he won't mention that he was going to the Cross Keys to see Banks about a horse," said Bob, grinning. "Rotten luck that he was there, just then. We won't take that short cut again."

"If you'd listened to me—!" began Johnny Bull.

"Dry up, old man."

"I told you so—"

"Bang his head on the banisters!" said Bob. "That's the only way of hearing the last of I told you so."

"Good egg!" said Nugent, heartily.

"The goodfulness of the egg is terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Look here—hands off—you silly asses—yaroooooh!" roared Johnny Bull, as his friends grasped him on all sides, and banged his head on the banisters, "I jolly well did tell you so, and—yooo-hoop!"

Bang!

"Stop that, you young asses!" Wingate of the Sixth came up, and the Co. released Johnny, who rubbed his head and glared at them. "You're wanted in your form-master's study—all of you."

"For it!" sighed Bob.

"What have you been up to?" asked Wingate.

"Taking a short cut," answered Harry.

The Greyfriars captain stared at him.

"No harm in that," he said. "What do you mean?"

"The short cut was along the fence of the Cross Keys," explained Nugent.

"Oh!" Wingate frowned. "Well, Quelch has asked me to send you in—cut off."

Not in the best of spirits, the Famous Five headed for their form-master's study: Johnny Bull rubbing his head as he went.

They found Mr. Quelch sitting at his table. The Remove master was looking grim. The juniors marched in meekly under the glint of the gimlet-eyes.

"Wharton! Nugent! Bull! Cherry! Hurree Singh!" Quelch rapped out the names rather like a succession of pistol-shots. "I have received a report from a Sixth-form prefect concerning you. You were out of bounds this afternoon."

"We were in a hurry to get back for Monsieur Charpentier, sir, and we took a short cut," said Harry.

"Were you in the meadow adjoining the disreputable resort known as the Cross Keys, at Friardale, or not?" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"Yes, sir—cutting across the field—"

"Quite so!" said Mr. Quelch. "You were aware that that meadow is out of school bounds, Wharton?"

"Yes, sir! But—"

"You, as my Head Boy, are in a more responsible position than other boys in my form," said Mr. Quelch, severely. "You should set your friends a good example, Wharton, not a bad one."

Johnny Bull did not speak. But his look was eloquent. As plainly as his tongue could have done, his look said "I told you so!"

"No doubt you had forgotten that, Wharton" rapped Mr. Quelch.

"I—I'm afraid I had, sir!" stammered Harry. "But—but we cut across the field at a run—it was only a few minutes—"

"I quite believe you, Wharton, but you should know better than to place yourself and your friends in suspicious circumstances."

Again Johnny Bull's look was very expressive. Quelch, really might have been echoing Johnny's own sage words!

"Only a few days ago, a boy in my form was caned for this very thing," went on Mr. Quelch. "Any boy found out of bounds in that quarter could say that he was only taking a short cut, as Vernon-Smith did."

"We're telling the truth, sir!" said Harry, quietly.

"No doubt!" said Mr. Quelch. "But you were out of bounds, precisely as Vernon-Smith was, and you have told the same story. There cannot be two weights and two measures, Wharton."

The five juniors stood silent. That sounded as if it was going to be "whops", as in Smithy's case. But Quelch's hand did not stray towards his cane.

He sat frowning at them.

The fact was, that Quelch was a judge of character, and he knew the Remove inside out. He knew that the Bounder had fibbed: and he knew that Harry Wharton and Co. were telling the truth. That naturally made a difference.

There was a long pause. The chums of the Remove waited anxiously. Whether it was going to be whops, or lines, or Extra School, or gating, none of these alternatives was exactly attractive.

The Remove master spoke at last.

"You have acted very thoughtlessly and injudiciously," he said, "but I believe what you have told me, and I shall excuse you on this occasion. You may leave my study."

Five faces brightened up quite suddenly. Really, it was like the sun coming out through the clouds.

"Oh! Thank you, sir!" said the five, in chorus.

And they lost no time in leaving the study.

"Jolly good luck!" said Bob Cherry, as they went down the passage. "Quelch is a downy bird—he knew we weren't cramming, like Smithy."

"The knowfulness was terrific," agreed Huree Jamset Ram Singh. "All's well that ends in the cracked pitcher going longest to the well, as the English proverb remarkably observes."

"Good old English proverb!" chuckled Bob.

"We're jolly lucky," said Johnny Bull, "and the next time you fellows want to take a short cut, out of bounds, you'd better listen to a chap with a spot of common-sense in his head. I told you—"

"Asking for another bang?" hooted Bob.

"You jolly well know that I told you so—!"

Bang!

Once more Johnny was grasped by his comrades, and his head tapped on

the passage wall. They tapped it once, twice, and thrice, and yet once more, and went cheerily on their way. After which, Johnny was too busy rubbing his head, to think of mentioning again that he had told them so!

V

HARD LINES!

“JE chante ce héros qui régna sur la France—”
 “Oh, blow!”
 “We’ve got to grind it out.”
 “Blow!”

It was the following day, after class. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent were in their study, No. 1 in the Remove. On the study table, propped open against the inkstand, was the “Henriade”, from which each of them had to transcribe fifty lines. Bob Cherry and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, in No. 13, and Johnny Bull, in No. 14, were getting down to the same task. The Famous Five had got off very luckily with Quelch, in spite of Loder: but they had not been so lucky with the French master.

As a rule, Mossoo was so easy-going that a fellow late for his class had no trouble to expect. But of late, for some reason best known to himself, the French master had been unusually morose and sharp in temper: and the five delinquents had had the benefit of it. Fifty lines of French was rather severe for being five minutes late for detention: and none of the five felt pleased about it.

However, the task had to be done. Most of the Remove had gathered in the Rag after class, where there was cheery talk of the coming Christmas holidays. Harry Wharton and Co. had to repair to their studies to write lines.

In No. 1 Wharton and Nugent sorted out a “Henriade” and impot paper, and sat down to it, not very cheerfully.

“Little beast!” remarked Nugent. Sad to relate, he was alluding to Monsieur Charpentier.

“I wonder what’s the matter with him,” said Harry Wharton. “Fellows have lounged in a quarter of an hour late, before now, and nothing’s happened. And we were only five minutes late.”

“We should have been on time, taking the short cut, but for Loder!” said Nugent. “He had to go blagging just at the wrong moment.”

“I suppose that was what he was up to.”

“Of course it was! Seeing Joey Banks about a horse!” grunted Nugent. “I wonder what Quelch would have said, if he knew that.”

“Oh, bother Loder, and bother Mossoo! We’ve got to push through this stuff,” said the captain of the Remove. “Go it.”

“Blow!” said Nugent.

They "went" it. Voltaire's epic was not, in itself, an unattractive work. But fellows who had to transcribe it found very little attraction in it, if any. In fact they found it very unattractive.

"Je chante ce héros qui régna sur la France," mumbled Nugent.

"Et par droit conquête et par droit de naissance," mumbled Wharton.

"Rotten stuff!" said Nugent.

"Putrid!" agreed Wharton.

"Blow Voltaire!"

"And blow Henry the Fourth!"

Never were two schoolboys more uninterested in Voltaire's chronicle of the fourth French Henry who was conqueror and father of his country!

However, they scribbled on. They wanted to get through, and get down to join the cheery crowd in the Rag. But there came an interruption. A fat face looked in at the door, and a pair of little round eyes blinked at them through a pair of big round spectacles.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Hook it, Bunter."

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Travel, fathead! We've got lines to do," snapped Nugent.

"Well, you shouldn't have been late," argued Bunter. "If you get in late for a class what do you expect?"

"Heave that cushion at him, Franky."

"I say, you fellows, you're for it!" said Bunter, with a wary eye on the cushion. "I thought I'd come and tell you—"

"Go and tell somebody else."

"Well, Loder's got it in for you!" grinned Bunter. "I heard him talking to Walker. I wasn't listening of course—I just happened to stop and tie my shoelace, and I heard them—"

"Buzz off!"

"Loder's wild," went on Bunter. "I say, he called Quelch an old fool."

"Wish Quelch had heard it, if he did!" grunted Nugent.

"He jolly well did!" chuckled Bunter. "He said he thought the old fool would give you fellows six all round, for being caught out of bounds at the Cross Keys, and instead of that he let you off. And he said—"

"Pack up the rest"

"He said if Quelch let you off, he wasn't going to, and you'd got it coming," continued Bunter, unheeding, "so you fellows had better mind your p's and q's. He said you floored him in Friardale Lane, getting out of that meadow in a hurry. I say, you fellows, what did you go to the Cross Keys for? Smokes? I know that's where Smithy gets his smokes."

"You fat chump!" roared Harry Wharton. "We were taking the short cut from the river, along the fence—"

"Oh, crikey! Did you tell Quelch that?"

"Of course we did, fathead."

"Did he swallow it?"

"You fat, frabjous, footling, fozling freak—"

"Well, it don't seem fair to me," said Bunter. "When I try to stuff Quelch, he always seems to spot it somehow: and now you fellows get by with a yarn like that! Tain't fair!" Bunter shook a fat head. "Why, when I told Quelch I hadn't had those biscuits from the box in Common-Room, he wouldn't believe a word of it, just because he knew I had. That's the sort of justice we get here! I jolly well think—!"

"Will you travel, you fat ass, or do you want this cushion on that pimple you call a nose?" demanded Nugent.

"I hope I'm not the fellow to stay where my company ain't wanted," said Bunter, with dignity, "but there's just one other thing—"

"Forget it."

"I say, my postal-order hasn't come," said Bunter, "if one of you fellows could lend me something till it comes—"

"I'll lend you this cushion!" said Nugent.

"Oh, really, Nugent—yaroooh!" roared Bunter, as the cushion whizzed across the study and impinged upon the best-filled waistcoat at Greyfriars School. "Ow, beast! I hope Loder will jolly well lick you, now, and I'm jolly glad you've got lines to do for that little beast Mossoo—"

"Buntair!"

It was a high-pitched voice in the passage, with a French accent. Billy Bunter almost forgot the bang of the cushion on his fat circumference as he heard the well-known tones of Monsieur Charpentier.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bunter.

Wharton and Nugent exchanged a glance across the study table. If it was Monsieur Charpentier in the passage, he had come along at a rather unfortunate moment for the Owl of the Remove.

Billy Bunter spun round in dismay.

His eyes almost popped through his spectacles, at a dapper little figure in a tight frock-coat, and a sallow face with a twisted moustache and a little pointed beard. What Monsieur Charpentier was doing, up in the junior studies, Billy Bunter did not know, and couldn't guess: Mossoo was about the last person he would have expected to see there.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter, "I—I didn't hear you coming, sir—I—I wasn't calling you a beast, sir—"

"Buntair! Viz my own ear I hear vat you say."

"Oh! No, sir! I—I was speaking about another beast, sir—not you at all, sir—quite another beast—!" gasped Bunter.

"Zat is not how you shall speak of a master, Buntair!"

"Oh! Yes, sir! No, sir! I—I didn't—I mean I—I wasn't—I was only saying—oh, jiminy!"

“Mauvais garçon! Go to your study, Buntair, and write vingt—zat is to say, twenty—lines of ze Henriade.”

“Oh, lor’!”

Billy Bunter rolled up the passage to No. 7 Study. The door of that study banged after him. The next moment, the dapper figure appeared in the doorway of No. 1, and Wharton and Nugent rose respectfully to their feet. They wondered what Mossoo wanted there. If he wanted his lines, he was too early for them: the imposition was not half-through yet. They stood up and gazed inquiringly at the dapper gentleman in the doorway.

“Is it zat I may come in, mes garçons?” asked the French-accented voice.

“Oh! Please do, sir!” said Harry.

The little gentleman trotted in, with his mincing gait. He glanced at the unfinished lines on the table.

“You are busy viz ze lines, yes?” he asked.

“Yes, sir! Not finished yet,” said Nugent.

“C’est ça! Continuez! I vill sit me in ze armchair and look at ze papair.”

To the utter astonishment of the two juniors, the dapper gentleman trotted round the table, to the study armchair, that stood before the fireplace. He sat down in it, and took from under his arm a copy of “Le Journal”. Wharton and Nugent gazed at one another blankly.

It was not uncommon to see Monsieur Charpentier perusing a newspaper from his native land, in Common-Room. But why he had chosen to come up to a junior study for that purpose, was quite a mystery.

But there he was, ensconced in the armchair, the high back of which hid him from sight. There he was, with “Le Journal” open on his knees. For some utterly unknown reason, apparently, he had selected No. 1 Study in the Remove to sit and read the news from la belle France.

“Well, my hat!” murmured Nugent.

Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

Neither of them could make out what it meant. They sat down to the table again, and resumed their lines, and there was silence in the study, broken only by the scratch of pens, and an occasional rustle from the newspaper in the hands of the little gentleman hidden by the high back of the armchair.

Then, suddenly, came another interruption. There was a heavy tread in the passage, and the rustle of the newspaper stopped, and the scratching of the pens stopped, at the same moment, as Gerald Loder, of the Sixth Form, strode into No. 1 Study.

VI

ONLY WIBLEY!

GERALD LODER stood looking at the two Remove juniors, as they rose to their feet once more. His look was not pleasant.

Wharton and Nugent eyed him, quietly. They remembered what the fat

Owl had said: which had not surprised them, for Loder was well known to have a long memory for offences. His look showed that trouble impended: and his official ash was under his arm. As a prefect of the Sixth, Loder was invested with "whopping privileges": and he was never slow to use the ashplant. But even the bully of the Sixth had to have a pretext: and the chums of the Remove could only wonder what pretext he had thought up now.

"You young sweeps!" said Loder.

Neither made a reply to that.

"You crashed me over in Friardale Lane yesterday afternoon, when I caught you out of bounds," went on Loder.

"We didn't see you coming through the hedge," said Harry Wharton, mildly. "If we'd known you were coming in, we should have been more careful coming out."

Loder's eyes glittered at him.

Both the juniors knew what was in his mind. The crash, no doubt, had angered him. But it was the fact that they had seen him in the very act of breaking school bounds, in a specially forbidden spot, that cut deep. A Sixth-Form prefect who indulged in "blagging" had to be very careful indeed about it: and Loder did not like juniors becoming acquainted with his manners and customs.

"I saw Greyfriars caps from the lane, and stepped into that gap in the hedge to see who it was there," said Loder. "I was bound to look into it, as a prefect, as you know very well."

Wharton and Nugent had no doubt that that was how Loder had put it to Mr. Quelch. It was not much use putting it so to them. They knew perfectly well that Loder had been going out of bounds when the crash happened: and they knew, too, that that was why he was looking for trouble now.

However, they said nothing, but waited.

They rather expected Monsieur Charpentier to rise, and look over the back of the armchair. But there was no sign from the French master. He remained invisible: and Loder, evidently, had no idea that he was there. He could not see him, from where he stood: and he could hardly have surmised that a master had chosen a junior study as a place to sit down and read his newspaper.

"You rushed out at me, and knocked me spinning," went on Loder. "I hear that your form-master let you off, for being out of bounds."

"Yes, Loder," said Nugent, meekly.

"We explained to him that we were only taking a short cut, Loder," said Harry Wharton.

"And got off!" said Loder. "Well, if Quelch chooses to let you off for pub-crawling, the old ass can do as he likes."

Wharton and Nugent caught their breath. Loder, certainly, would never have alluded to any Greyfriars "beak" as an old ass, if he had known that another master was within hearing.

"But I'm not letting you off," went on Loder. "You're going to get six all round for knocking over a prefect."

"We didn't see you—"

"That will do."

"It was quite an accident—"

"You needn't say any more." Loder slipped the ashplant down into his hand, and swished it on the air. "You first, Wharton! Bend over the table."

Harry Wharton set his lips.

"The accident wouldn't have happened, Loder, if you hadn't been going out of bounds," he said, very distinctly. "It's not our fault that you were going to climb over the fence of the Cross Keys to get to the back door of that pub."

"What?" roared Loder.

"You heard what I said."

"You—you dare—" Loder seemed to choke for a moment. Then he made a jump at Harry Wharton.

"Lodair!"

It was a sharp shrill voice: utterly unexpected to Loder of the Sixth. He jumped, as he stared round in the direction of the voice.

The little gentleman in the armchair had risen now. He was looking at Loder across the high back of the chair.

Loder's eyes bulged at the sallow face with its moustached and pointed beard. The ash almost dropped from his hand. Instantly it rushed into his mind that Monsieur Charpentier must have heard him speak of Quelch as an "old ass". He goggled at the unexpected face.

The dapper little man came mincing round the armchair. His eyes were fixed sternly on Loder's startled, scared face.

"Lodair!" he snapped.

"Oh! Yes, sir!" gasped Loder. "I—I never knew you were here, sir—I—I—I—" He stuttered into silence. He was quite amazed to find the French master in No. 1 Study in the Remove.

"Mais non! Je le crois bien! You speak not of Monsieur Quelch as one old ass, if you zink I hear you, Lodair."

"I—I—I—"

Loder began to wish that he had not come up to the Remove studies on the trail of vengeance. But how could he have guessed that the French master would be sitting in the armchair in Wharton's study?

"Zat is impertinence zat I must report to Monsieur Quelch, Lodair! Ze good Monsieur Quelch shall know how it is zat you speak of him, Lodair."

"I—I—I—" Loder stammered helplessly. What Quelch would say, and do, if he learned that Loder had spoken of him as an old ass, was quite alarming to think of. He might take Loder to the Head! Certainly the thunder would roll. Loder almost cringed at the prospect. "I—I—I spoke hastily, sir—I—I—"

didn't mean to—to—to—. I—I hope you won't mention the matter to Mr. Quelch, sir! I—I—I am sorry I—I said what I did—”

Wharton and Nugent exchanged a grin. Never had they seen the bully of the Sixth so utterly crestfallen.

“I zink zat you sould be sorry, Lodair, to speak of ze good Quelch as one old ass, and I zink zat Monsieur Quelch vill be very angry when I report to him zat you say so.”

“I—I—I—”

“But vy you come here, Lodair? You come to cane zese garçons because of one accident, n'est-ce-pas? Zat vill not do, Lodair. I go to Monsieur Quelch, and I say, is it zat zese garçons sall be cane, because of one accident, by Lodair who call you one old ass?”

“I—I—I will let them off, if you—if you like, sir!” stuttered Loder, “I—I will forget all about it, sir.”

“Bien! Zere is to be no cane for zese garçons, or for ze ozzer garçons zat knock you ovair, Lodair?”

“Yes, sir! No, sir! If you wish it, sir, I—I will certainly let them off for the—the accident yesterday, sir—”

“Verree well! In zat case, Lodair, I will not report to ze good Quelch zat you call him one old ass. Lay zat cane on ze table.”

“It's my ash, sir—”

“I have said lay zat cane on ze table, Lodair.”

Loder, in a state of mingled fear and fury, laid the ashplant on the table. The dapper little gentleman picked it up.

“Lodair, I vill not report to ze bon Quelch vat you have said. But you vas verree impertinent to call ze good Quelch one old ass, and I give you one stroke of ze stick for zat.”

“What?” almost yelled Loder.

Wharton and Nugent stared on, dumbfounded.

Whack!

Loder's own ash whacked across Loder's shoulders. It was a sounding whack, and rang far beyond No. 1 Study, almost like a pistol-shot. The bully of the Sixth tottered.

“Now allez vous en! Go you, Lodair, or I give you some more of ze stick! Allez vous en, toute de suite!”

Loder gave him a look. Loder was big enough, and hefty enough, to have crumpled up the French master of Greyfriars. He looked, for the moment, disposed to do it!

But prudence prevailed! He swung round to the door, and tramped out of the study, his face fairly convulsed with fury. His stamping footsteps died away down the passage to the stairs.

“Oh, my hat!” murmured Frank Nugent. Nugent, and Wharton, stared at the dapper little gentleman as if he fascinated them. Never had they been so utterly astonished in their lives.

He gave them a smile.

"Zat is all right, mes garçons," he said. "You vill not get zat ash from Lodair. Look out of ze door, mon bon Vharton, and make sure zat zat Lodair he is gone, and zen I tell you vy I come here viz myself."

Harry Wharton looked out at the door. Loder of the Sixth was gone—quite gone. Herbert Vernon-Smith was coming up the passage, and he glanced at the captain of the Remove.

"What's the matter with Loder?" he asked. "He's just passed me on the stairs, looking like a demon in a pantomime."

"He's just had a whop from his own ash!" gasped Harry.

"Eh?" The Bounder stared, "Pulling my leg?"

"Mossoo's here, and he gave him a lick with it."

"Oh, great pip!" Smithy stared into the study, amazed.

"Zat Lodair—he is gone?" came the high-pitched squeaky voice.

"Yes, sir," answered Harry. "Quite gone."

"Verree good! Now I tell you vy I come to zis study. I vant you garçons



Loder's own ash . . .

to see me, so zat you recognize me as Monsieur Charpentier. It is vat you call ze pull of ze leg."

The juniors could only gaze at him.

"You Vharton, you know who I am, n'est-ce-pas?"

Harry Wharton began to wonder whether the French master of Greyfriars was wandering in his mind!

"Yes, sir," he gasped. "You're Monsieur Charpentier."

"And you also, Nugent, you know zat too?"

"Yes, sir, of course," said the wondering Nugent.

"And you Smeet—vous aussi, you know zat?"

"Of course, sir," said Vernon-Smith. "We see you often enough to know you again, sir!"

"You so not zink zat I pull you ze leg? You so not zink zat perhaps it is not Monsieur Charpentier, but—"

"But what?" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Chap named Wibley!" said the French master, in quite a different voice, and three juniors jumped almost clear of the study floor, as he detached the little pointed beard from his chin, and grinned at them. "Just putting my make-up to the test, see? That's why I came here! Lucky for you fellows I did, as it turned out—what do you chaps think Loder would feel like, if he knew that it was Wibley of the Remove who licked him with his own ash?"

"W-w-w-w-Wibley!" stuttered Harry Wharton.

"Wib-wob-wub-Wibley!" stuttered Nugent.

"Wibley!" yelled the Bounder.

They stared at him. Even with the beard detached, they could not recognize William Wibley of the Remove. His make-up was really marvellous: he was Mossoo to the very life. But they knew the voice, if not the face. It was not Monsieur Charpentier who had trotted into No. 1 Study with his newspaper: it was the amateur actor of the Remove, leg-pulling.

As they stared at him, dumb-founded, a big pair of spectacles glimmered in at the door. Wibley hastily put a hand over his beardless chin.

"I say, you fellows—got any toffee?" squeaked Billy Bunter.

"Buntair!" Wibley was the French master again!

"Oh!" Bunter jumped. "I didn't know you were still here, sir! I—I—"

"Have you done zose zose lines, Buntair?"

"I—I—I—No, sir! I—"

"Go back to your study and finish zem, Buntair."

"Oh! Yes, sir!"

Billy Bunter rolled away, without making any further inquiries for toffee. Wibley's hand came away from his chin, with his moustache in it. Even yet he did not look like Wibley: he looked like a clean-shaven Mossoo.

"You spoofer!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"You fathead, Wibley!" said Nugent. "You took us in."

"And Loder too!" chuckled Wharton.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

There was a roar of laughter in No. 1 Study. The amateur actor certainly had taken the juniors in: never for a moment had they dreamed that he was not the genuine Mossoo. Neither had Loder of the Sixth! What Gerald Loder would think, and feel like, if he could know that he had taken that whop from his ash, at the hand of a Remove junior got up as Mossoo, was quite an interesting question. The juniors yelled with merriment as they thought of it. It was fortunate for the playful Wib that Loder was never likely to know!

VII

LODER IN LUCK!

LODER of the Sixth gave a sudden start.

He started so suddenly, that his cigarette almost slipped into his mouth. Fortunately, he retrieved it in time, grabbed it, and dropped it to the ground, crushing it under his heel. There was a very strict rule on that subject at Greyfriars: and a prefect of the Sixth Form could not afford to be seen breaking it.

Not that Loder had expected to be seen, in the quiet corner behind the elms to which he had retired to smoke that cigarette, after dinner. Loder was feeling quite at his ease there, leaning on a tree-trunk, smoking his cigarette, and pondering on the chances of Nobbled Nick for the two-thirty at Wapshot on Saturday. Loder had a "quid" on Nobbled Nick, with Joey Banks at the Cross Keys, and it was a matter of deep interest to him, whether his selected "gee" romped home at three to one, or whether that "quid" remained in the possession of Mr. Banks.

His ponderings on that interesting subject were interrupted by the sound of footsteps and voices: and his cigarette disappeared as if by magic. He scowled: and his scowl grew darker, as he recognized familiar voices: those of the Famous Five of the Remove. Loder's feelings towards those cheerful youths, of late, were extremely inimical. He would have been almost as glad to catch them out, with a pretext for handling the ashplant, as he would have been to see Nobbled Nick romp home on Saturday.

"Look here, Froggy's got it coming!" It was Bob Cherry's voice.

"Oh, rot!" came Johnny Bull's.

"Well, he is rather a little beast lately," said Frank Nugent. "He used to be a good little ass—now he's as acid as Hacker."

"More!" said Bob.

"The acidfulness is terrific."

"Well, he's got it coming!" said Bob. "Rapping fellows' knuckles with his dashed pointer in the French set this morning! Anybody here like his knuckles rapped?"

"Not a lot," said Harry Wharton. "But—"

"Is that what you've brought us here to jaw about?" asked Johnny Bull.

"Just that!" answered Bob. "Can't be too careful, when you're going to catch a beak in a booby-trap."

Loder caught his breath. The Famous Five had come to a halt, on the other side of his tree. Evidently they did not know that he was there. Had they walked on a few more paces, they would have seen him. As it was, they did not see him, or dream that he was in the offing.

His first impulse had been, to step into view, and order the juniors off, so that he could smoke another cigarette in peace, and resume his meditations on the chances of Nobbled Nick in the two-thirty. What he had caught of the talk of the juniors changed that intention. He remained where he was—silent, and listening. If the chums of the Remove had sought that secluded spot, to discuss a scheme, and plot a plot, for catching a "beak" in a booby-trap, it looked like Loder's chance, at last, to make those unsuspecting youths suffer for their sins. Certainly, Dr. Locke would have raised his eyebrows, very expressively, at the mere idea of one of his prefects acquiring information after the manner of Billy Bunter, by listening surreptitiously to what was not intended for his ears. But Loder had his own methods.

He remained quite still and silent, listening to the voices on the other side of the massive trunk of the old elm. He no longer regretted that his smoke, and his meditations, had been interrupted. He was deeply interested now.

Unconscious of Loder and listening ears, Bob Cherry rattled on:

"I can tell you, I'm jolly well fed up with Mossoo. Lines on Wednesday for being a few minutes late—"

"Well, we were late," said Johnny Bull. "And I told you—"

"Dry up, Johnny! Wibley cut detention and Mossoo reported him to Quelch. How often does he report a fellow? He's getting acid, like Hacker—and one Acid Drop is enough for Greyfriars. Now look at him in the French set this morning! Did I shuffle my feet?"

"You did!"

"Well, if I did, was that any reason for rapping a fellow's knuckles with a pointer?" demanded Bob, hotly. "Even Quelch only raps at a fellow with his chin, not with a pointer."

"He does seem to be an unpleasant little beast lately," said Harry Wharton. "May be something the matter with him."

"There's something the matter with his temper, at any rate!" said Bob. "He's given Bunter a hundred lines, just for mixing up his genders—"

"Well, Bunter did mix them up!" remarked Johnny Bull. "Bunter ought to know that la tour is feminine, not masculine—"

"Well, it shouldn't be," said Bob. "Blow their silly genders! What does it matter whether a tower is a boy or a girl in French?"

"Mossoo seems to think that it does," said Harry Wharton, laughing.

"He would!" said Bob. "Well, he gave Smithy and Redwing fifty lines each, because Smithy spoke to Redwing—"

"Fellows shouldn't talk in class," said Johnny Bull.

"Only Smithy did—Redwing didn't—but he got the lines all the same!" snapped Bob. "If you're going to stick up for a little beast with a temper as savage as a tiger's, Johnny Bull—"

"Well, look here—"

"Peace, my infants, peace!" said Frank Nugent. "What's the big idea, Bob? Get it off your chest."

"Mossoo's not going to bite all round, without something coming back to him," said Bob. "When he gets a bag of flour on his napper, it may do him good."

"Think that will improve his temper?" inquired Johnny Bull.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, it couldn't make it worse," said Bob, "and it will be a tip to him to draw in his horns. I've got the bag of flour all ready in my study."

"Better keep it there," suggested Johnny.

"If you're going to be a wet blanket, Bull—"

"Oh, go ahead, and don't mind me," said Johnny. "I think it's rot, but if you're keen on it, okay. It means a fearful row if we get spotted."

"The fearfulness will be terrific, my esteemed and idiotic Bob," murmured Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"I don't care!" snapped Bob. "At least, I mean, we'll be jolly careful, and take good care not to be spotted, of course."

Loder, behind the elm, smiled. He was beginning to enjoy this.

"If you fellows are on—!" went on Bob.

"Oh, any old thing," said Nugent. "After all, I don't see why Mossoo shouldn't get something back."

"Well, it's easy, really," said Bob. "We've got to keep it awfully dark, of course—not a word to any fellow outside ourselves, in case there's talk—and take special care that Bunter doesn't hear anything, and tattle it up and down the form. Least said, soonest mended, in a case like this."

"No doubt at all about that," agreed Harry Wharton, "but—"

"Oh, blow your butts!" said Bob, testily. "We're going to flour Froggy, as a tip to him to keep his pointer to himself, and it's jolly easy, so long as we're careful to keep it dark. Easy enough to keep an eye on Froggy, after class, the five of us on the job. We've got to make sure that he's in Common-Room, see? Then you fellows keep cave, while I nip into his study with the bag of flour. I fix it up over his door, and drop out of his window into the quad. Easy as falling off a form—if we're not interrupted! We shall have to be awfully careful about that, of course. But with five of us on the watch, it will be all right. And when Mossoo gets that bag of flour on his napper—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, is it a go?" asked Bob.

"It's a go!" agreed Nugent.

"The go-fulness is terrific."

"O.K.," said Harry Wharton.

"I think it's rot," said Johnny Bull, "but I'm on, if you like."

"That's settled, then," said Bob, "and mind, not a word—not a syllable—to any fellow in the Remove. That cad Loder's got his eye on us, and if he caught a word about it, he—Oh, great pip!"

Bob broke off suddenly, staring at a Sixth-Form prefect who came round the trunk of the elm. His eyes popped at Loder of the Sixth. The ghost of Gerald Loder could scarcely have startled him more.

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Nugent.

They gazed at Loder! The sarcastic grin on his face, told them that he had heard every word. They had retired to that quiet spot to plot the little plot: only to pour it fairly into the ears of their old enemy. Dumb, they gazed at Loder.

"Quite interesting," said Loder, sarcastically. "I've no doubt your form-master will be interested, too. Follow me to the House."

Harry Wharton's lip curled.

"So you were listening, behind that tree, Loder?" he said. "If you're going to report this to Quelch, are you going to tell him that you were eaves-dropping?"

Loder flushed. Even Loder, perhaps, was not very proud of his methods.

"I heard you by sheer chance, of course," he said, with a venomous look at the captain of the Remove. "That's enough from you, Wharton! Follow me to the House at once, all of you. Quelch let you off on Wednesday: I don't fancy you'll scrape out of this quite so easily. Follow me."

Loder stalked away towards the House.

Harry Wharton and Co. exchanged eloquent looks. There was nothing to be said. They had to follow Loder: to an extremely painful interview with their form-master. They were not looking their usual cheery selves as they followed him.

VIII

BOB CHERRY KNOWS HOW!

"Ow! wow! wow!"

"Bunter's signature-tune!" said Frank Nugent, with a faint grin.

But the grin was very faint. And no one else in No. 1 Study grinned. Five fellows, in that study, were in a sad and sorrowful state.

"Wow!" came from the passage. "Wow! Ow!"

Obviously, it was Billy Bunter.

Vernon-Smith's voice was heard:

"What's the trouble, fatty?"

"Ow! wow! That beast Loder—wow!"

"Well, don't make that row."

"Beast!"

Making a row, apparently, was a comfort to Bunter. He went on with it.

They were not making a row in No. 1 Study. But their feelings were deep—very deep. Harry Wharton was moving restlessly about the study. Bob Cherry was leaning against the mantelpiece. Nugent stood at the table, and Johnny Bull at the window. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was wriggling. Not one member of the Famous Five seemed to feel like sitting down. Indeed the prospect of sitting down, when the bell rang for class, was far from attractive. So long as they could, at all events, they preferred to stand.

They were not interested in Billy Bunter's woes, whatever those woes might have been. Their own woes were enough to go on with.

Mr. Quelch had dealt with those five members of his form faithfully—very faithfully.

They could hardly blame Quelch. Catching an obnoxious "beak" with a bag of flour on his head might seem, to junior schoolboys, something in the nature of a lark. To a form-master, and especially to a severe form-master like Henry Samuel Quelch, it did not seem like a lark at all. Loder's report had moved Quelch to action—drastic action.

They could say nothing in defence. Certainly, they had not intended a Sixth-Form prefect to overhear that little plot for making Monsieur Charpentier sorry for himself. But they had plotted the plot—they had intended to carry it out: but for Loder, it would have been carried out according to plan, and Mossos would have had the benefit of that bag of flour. Quelch took the sternest possible view of such a "lark".

They had had a royal jaw! That they could have endured with more or less fortitude. But Quelch had followed it up with his cane. Juniors who entertained such ideas on the subject of treatment to be meted out to beaks, required, in Quelch's opinion, a severe warning. He gave them one! Each of the hapless five had to bend over in Quelch's study, in turn: and to each in turn was administered six—six of the very best.

Hence their retirement to No. 1 Study, where painful wriggles would be unobserved, and painful ejaculations unheard.

"That rotter!" muttered Harry Wharton. His eyes were gleaming. "No good blaming Quelch—it was up to him, when he knew! But that skulking rat listening behind a tree—!"

"Sneaking worm!" said Bob. "Ow! ow!"

"The sneakfulness of the absurd worm was terrific," groaned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The painfulness is also great! Wow!"

"Wasn't he glad of the chance?" mumbled Johnny Bull. "Just pie to Loder:

he was fairly longing for a chance at us. Mightn't have been, but for what happened on Wednesday: and I jolly well told you—"

"Shut UP!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Well, I told you—"

Bob reached for the inkpot on the table.

"You just say that you told us so, and you get this!" he said, in concentrated tones. "Now, then!"

Grunt, from Johnny Bull! But he refrained from telling his chums once more that he had told them so! He did not want that inkpot.

"That rat!" muttered Wharton.

"That tick!" mumbled Nugent.

"We'll jolly well make Loder sit up for it, somehow," said Bob.

"Make sure that he isn't listening behind a tree, when you fix it up!" advised Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

"Oh, rats!" growled Bob.

Even Bob Cherry's sunny temper was suffering. It was true that they couldn't blame Quelch. Quelch had done his duty. But Loder—! A fellow who listened hidden behind a tree—! Billy Bunter did such things, and often and often had he been kicked for it in the Remove. A Sixth-Form pre. was not to be kicked! There was just nothing that could be done about it. Loder was a spying rat, no doubt: he did things that no other Greyfriars prefect would have dreamed of doing: their scorn for him and his knavish tricks was boundless: but it had to stop there—there was simply no getting back on a prefect of the Sixth!

"I say, you fellows!"

A fat and dolorous face looked in at the doorway. Five fellows glared at it. They were not in a cheery or hospitable mood.

"Buzz off, fathead!" grunted Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Shut the door after you."

"Oh, really, Wharton—!"

"Oh, cut!" exclaimed the captain of the Remove, impatiently. "We've had six all round from Quelch, and we're not enjoying it. Mizzle."

"Well, I've had six from Loder!" groaned Bunter. "I say, you fellows, did that beast lay them on? Wow!"

"Dear old Loder!" said Bob. "Does he like handling that ashplant of his? What did he whop you for, fatty?"

"Nothing!" groaned Bunter.

"Rot!" said Johnny Bull. "Even Loder has to have an excuse."

"I tell you it was nothing—" howled Bunter. "I never did a thing. I suppose a fellow can lean on the passage wall if he likes, without getting six from Loder?"

Harry Wharton gave a little attention, at that.

"Was that all?" he asked.

"That's all—wow! ow!"

"Well, if that's all, you can go to Quelch," said Harry. "Quelch would stop Loder fast enough, if he whopped a Remove man for nothing."

"Um!" said Bunter. "I—I—I'd go to Quelch, only—only—"

"Only what?"

"Well, Quelch mightn't believe that I wasn't listening to what Loder was saying to Carne!" mumbled Bunter. "You see, they were talking, just round the corner, and—and—and I couldn't help hearing—"

"You fat rascal!" exclaimed Harry, angrily. "You mean that you were listening round a corner, as usual! Serve you jolly well right."

"Beast!" mumbled Bunter.

"The rightfulness was terrific, my esteemed eavesdropping Bunter," said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Like Loder's cheek to whop the fat octopus for it, when it's in his own line," said Bob. "And what the dickens could it matter, if Bunter heard what one Sixth-Form swob was saying to another."

"Well, Loder fancied I heard him telling Carne that he was going out after lights out to-night," said Bunter. "I expect that was what made him so wild. I wasn't listening, of course—I just happened to lean on the wall, and I never thought they'd come round the corner and spot me—"

"You fat villain!"

"Loder asked Carne if he was coming too and Carne said no, it was too jolly risky," said Bunter. "Loder said it was safe as houses to step from a study window after lights out, and nobody would know a thing. Carne said it looked like being foggy to-night, and Loder said that was all the better. And—"

"You seem to have heard quite a lot, without listening!" remarked Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

"Wow! Then Loder came round the corner, and spotted me!" groaned Bunter. "He made me bend over and gave me six! Wow!"

"Serve you right!"

"Beast!" howled Bunter. "If that's all the sympathy you've got for a chap who's had six on the bags—"

"We've all had the same, old fat pippin," said Bob.

"The samefulness was terrific," mumbled Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. "And the layfulness on by the esteemed Quelch was preposterous."

"Ow! ow! ow! wow!"

"Go and ow-wow-wow-wow-wow! somewhere else, you fat frog!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Beast!"

Billy Bunter rolled on up the Remove passage, still "owing" and "wowing": perhaps in search of sympathy elsewhere.

Bob Cherry kicked the door shut after him, and then crossed to the window, and looked out into the quad. It was close on time for class, and many fellows

were coming towards the House. But Bob did not look down—he looked across, in the direction of the sea. What he beheld seemed to afford him satisfaction. A heavy mist was drifting in, wisps of it already rolling over the school: and Bob gave a nod, just as if that was what he wanted to see.

There was a gleam in his blue eyes, when he turned from the window at last.

“What Bunter heard Carne say was right,” he said. “It’s going to be foggy to-night.”

“Is it?” grunted Johnny Bull. He was not interested.

“It is!” said Bob. “Looks as if it’s going to be regular pea-soup. Thick as a blanket, very likely.”

“What about it?” asked Harry.

“Lots!” said Bob, impressively. “Do we want to give Loder something back for eavesdropping behind a tree, and landing us with six all round from Quelch—or don’t we?”

“We do!” agreed the captain of the Remove.

“Yes, rather,” said Nugent. “But what—”

“The ratherfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bob,” said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. “But how—”

“Well, if it’s foggy to-night and it jolly well looks like it, we’re going to,” said Bob, still more impressively. “And I know how.”

“Blessed if I see—!” grunted Johnny.

“You wouldn’t, till I explain,” said Bob. “We’re on Loder’s trail, you men, and we’re going to make him sit up and yelp, and I jolly well know how—”

Clang! clang! clang!

It was the bell for class.

“Hallo, hallo, hallo, there’s the dashed bell,” exclaimed Bob. “Well, never mind the bell for a minute or two—”

“Like to be late for Quelch, after he’s just given us six?” snorted Johnny Bull. “I’ve had enough from Quelch for one day, if you haven’t!” And Johnny marched across to the door.

“I tell you—!” hooted Bob.

“Come on!” said Nugent, following Johnny into the passage.

“I tell you I know how—!”

“Keep it till after class, old man!” said Harry Wharton. “It will keep all right! Can’t be late for Quelch!”

“Br-r-r-r-r!” grunted Bob.

He followed his chums from the study, and they lost no time in reaching the Remove form-room. If Bob Cherry knew how to make the obnoxious Loder sit up and yelp, his chums certainly were interested: but not to the extent of risking trouble with Quelch, of which they had already had enough to last them for a while. Bob’s big idea, whatever it was, had to wait till after class: but during class that afternoon, Bob was observed to grin a good many times, and heard to chuckle once or twice: indications that he was anticipating causing

Loder of the Sixth to sit up and yelp, and that he knew—or fancied he knew—how.

IX

SURPRISE FOR SMITHY!

"I WOULDN'T, Smithy!" said Tom Redwing, quietly.

"Wouldn't you?" sneered the Bounder.

"No! What's the use—?"

"Lots! I've got fifty lines from the little beast—"

"So have I—" said Redwing. "And you did talk in class—"

"And did Froggy always jump on a fellow for speaking in class?" snapped Smithy. "He's getting new manners and customs—taking Hacker for a model, it looks like. We know where we are with Quelch—but a beak has no right to be a lamb one day and a tiger the next!"

Redwing shook his head. The change in the French master at Greyfriars, who had always been good-tempered and tolerant, was not exactly pleasant to the recipients of his outbursts of irritation. Fellows had always taken it easy with Mossoo, and now they were brought up sharp at a word, or less than a word. Nobody liked it—the Bounder least of all.

"I fancy there's something amiss with him," said Redwing. "It isn't like him to be like Hacker. May be ill, or something."

"Rot!" said Smithy, decisively. "I know he gave me fifty lines of French, and I know he rapped my knuckles, and I know that I've got something to give him back for it."

"No good hunting for trouble, Smithy! Some fellows in the form got six all round from Quelch to-day, for that very thing—"

The Bounder laughed.

"I shan't talk it over, like that ass Cherry, with a pre. parked behind a tree listening-in," he said, sarcastically. "There won't be any trouble, old pippin—I'm not telling Loder like Cherry did! Mossoo keeps his overcoat hanging up in his study: and next time he goes to put it on, and finds the pockets full of gum, he may wish he hadn't been quite so free with his dashed pointer."

"I wouldn't, Smithy—"

"I would!" said Vernon-Smith: and he opened the drawer of the table in No. 4 Study, and took therefrom a large bottle of gum. It made rather a bulge, when he slipped it into the inside pocket of his jacket.

"Look here, Smithy—!" urged Redwing. "Chuck it, old man! It looks to me as if old Mossoo's got something on his mind—some worry or other—"

"I'll give him one more!"

"Might have had bad news from home, or something," said Redwing. "We all know about his relations in France—"

"Don't we?" grinned Smithy. "He bores all the other beaks to tears, in Common-Room, showing them photographs of little Adolphe, and little Henri, and little Charlot, and little Annette—pah! Wibley does him a treat—'Zat iz ze little Adolphe, mon neveu—zat is ze little Henri, mon ozzer neveu—'" The Bounder chuckled. "Well, if his dashed nephews and nieces are worrying him, that's no reason why he should worry us."

"But look here, Smithy—"

"No time, old man—I've got to make a call, while the beaks are in Common-Room. Speech taken as read!"

With that, Herbert Vernon-Smith walked out of No. 4 Study, and closed the door on Tom Redwing and his remonstrances.

He strolled down the Remove passage, and went downstairs. It was tea-time in Common-Room, and he had no doubt that Monsieur Charpentier would be there, with the other masters, and that Masters' Studies would be safe for a visitor. But he was very cautious. Nobody was in the corridor when he tapped at the door of the French master's study and opened it.

Had Mossoo been at home, the Bounder had a French exercise ready, in his pocket, as an excuse for his call. But the study was vacant, and he slipped in, and closed the door.

Outside, the December evening was dark, with a glimmer of snow here and there. But though the light was not on in Mossoo's study, there was plenty of light from the fire, which had been banked up. Mossoo suffered severely from the British climate in winter: and he was wont to pile up a fire, and keep his window clamped tightly shut, having a truly continental dislike for fresh air. The room was, in fact, almost like an oven: and Smithy certainly would not have liked to stay in its stuffy atmosphere long. But he did not intend to stay long—a few minutes would be enough to transfer the contents of the gum-bottle to the pockets of Mossoo's overcoat, hanging on a peg on the inside of the door.

The firelight, flickering on Smithy's face, showed a cheery grin there, as he extracted that big bottle of gum from his jacket. He uncorked it, and stepped to the hanging overcoat. With the gum-bottle in his right hand, he opened one of the coat-pockets wide with his left.

It was at that precise moment, however, that Smithy discovered that there was something amiss with his calculations—as the door-handle turned.

He gave a startled jump, and almost dropped the gum-bottle.

So far as Smithy knew, there was no reason whatever why Monsieur Charpentier should not stay full time at the tea-table in Common-Room. Generally he was a chatty gentleman, who liked to talk so long as listeners were to be found. But of late, Mossoo did not seem to be quite his usual self, in many ways. Anyhow he had come back to his study: and the door opened, shutting Vernon-Smith against the wall behind it.

Smithy caught his breath.

For the moment, he was hidden by the wide-open door. But that was not

likely to last long. He was fairly caught—caught as surely as Harry Wharton and Co. by Loder! He had, after all, hunted trouble—and found it.

“Zat you step in, mon bon Quelch!” came the high-pitched voice of the French master.

Smithy set his teeth. Not only had the “little beast” returned early to his study, but he had brought Quelch with him—Smithy’s own form-master. Smithy had jeered at the misadventure of the Famous Five that day. It looked as if he was booked for a similar “six” now.

The game seemed up! But again there was a respite. Smithy expected Mr. Quelch to come into the study with Mossoo, and the door to close. But Quelch’s voice came back: terribly close at hand:

“The room is somewhat warm, Monsieur Charpentier! I will remain here.”

“Comme vous voulez, monsieur.”

The Bounder, behind the door, breathed with relief, as Monsieur Charpentier trotted in alone. Quite unlike the French master, Quelch was a whale on fresh air. His study window was seldom quite closed, even in the severest weather. Quelch’s healthy lungs simply could not stand the close, stuffy, over-heated atmosphere of the French master’s study: and he remained in the doorway. The consequence was, that the door had to remain wide-open: and Smithy behind it, was still concealed from view.

It was a respite, at least. There might be a chance that Mossoo would go, when Quelch went. Smithy was not going to show up till he had to, at all events. He remained as still as a mouse behind the door, the uncorked gum-bottle still clutched in his hand.

The French master’s first action was to stir the fire, and Smithy had a momentary glimpse of his coat-tails. Luckily he did not look round. The stirring of the fire made the room hotter than ever, to the satisfaction of Monsieur Charpentier, though not to the Bounder’s—he was perspiring behind the door. However, it made it all the more assured that Quelch would not step in, which was a consolation.

“You had something you wished to say to me, monsieur?” Quelch was polite: but the Bounder could guess that he was not eager to linger. Even in the doorway, the atmosphere was a little too tropical for Quelch.

“Mais oui, monsieur!” piped Monsieur Charpentier. “But I like not zat you stand on ze feet—”

“That is quite all right, monsieur! What is it—?”

“I have ze bad news, Monsieur Quelch.”

“I am sorry to hear it.”

“Zat little Adolphe—he is verree ill!” sighed Monsieur Charpentier. “I have ze letter, and anouzzer letter, and anouzzer and anouzzer, and it is one verree great trouble on ze mind. C’est un bon garçon, ce petit Adolphe, mon neveu—un très bon garçon. Ven I have anouzzer letter to-day, I hope to find zat he is all left—”

"All right?" hinted Mr. Quelch.

"Mais oui—it is not zat it is all left, but zat it is all right! I hope to hear zat he is all right, but he is all wrong, monsieur! I zink zat it will be all left—zat is to say, all right—if I go ovair ze Channel vhen ze school he break down—"

"Break up?"

"Oui, oui, when ze school he break up for le Noël—for Kissmass. But now I zink zat I must go vizout waiting till ze school break down—zat is to say, break up—ze petit Adolphe so verree ill. I zink zat I must ask ze good Dr. Locke for leave."

"Oh!" said Mr. Quelch.

"It is one verree big trouble on ze mind, monsieur! It vake me in ze night, and I do not sleep. Quelque-fois, monsieur, sometimes, I stay up verree late, and valk about in ze quadrangle, to make me go sleepy, because of zat big trouble on ze mind. I do not like to ask ze head-master for leave, so near ze end of ze term, mais que faire? Vat can do? Zey tell me zat le petit Adolphe he ask for his oncle! Que faire?"

Mr. Quelch coughed.

"Certainly it would be somewhat awkward, so close on the end of the term," he said, "but I am sure, monsieur, that you would find the head-master quite sympathetic."

"You zink so, mon bon Quelch?"

"I am sure of it," said Mr. Quelch. "I certainly advise you to explain the matter to Dr. Locke, and I feel sure that he will consent at once to your leaving for France. Other arrangements can be made for your absence—I will myself take the junior set in French—"

"Oh, monsieur, zat is too good."

"Not at all," said Mr. Quelch. "I am sure that the matter can be arranged, monsieur, and I should certainly speak to the Head without delay. And now—" Quelch coughed again, "if you will excuse me, I have some work to do in my study—"

The Bounder heard footsteps recede down the passage.

Quelch was gone! No doubt he was sympathetic: but he had had enough of the stuffiness. Smithy drew a deep breath. If Mossoo went, too—!

He heard the French master moving about the study. Then he heard a muttering voice:

"Ce petit Adolphe! Le pauvre enfant! Helas!"

That mournful mumble touched a soft spot in the Bounder's by no means soft heart. For once, Smithy was feeling a little ashamed of himself.

He knew now that Tom Redwing had guessed correctly: poor little Mossoo had something on his mind. The illness of a small nephew of whom he was fond was more than enough to disturb deeply an effusive emotional little gentleman like Monsieur Charpentier. It was, perhaps, no wonder that he had been somewhat irritable and impatient of late, with that worry on his mind.

If he went, and left the way of escape open, Smithy silently resolved to take that bottle of gum with him—unused. Mossoo had enough to worry him without gum in his overcoat pockets. He heard the mumble again:

“Je m’en vais! Tout s’arrange, comme dit le bon Quelch—Je m’en vais le samedi.”

At that point, Monsieur seemed to remember that the door was still wide open. Mossoo loathed open doors, almost as much as open windows. He stepped across to it and threw it shut.

“Oh!” gasped Smithy.

“Ma foi!” ejaculated Monsieur Charpentier, staring blankly at the Bouncer, thus suddenly revealed. “You Smeets, vat you do here?”

He did not need a reply to that question. The uncorked gum-bottle in the Bouncer’s hand was a sufficient answer.

A moment ago, Mossoo had been looking pensive and mournful. Now his face blazed with sudden anger. He spun round to the table, and grasped up a pointer. Then he spun back to Vernon-Smith.

“You Smeets—mauvais garçon—bad boy—you come here to play ze trick, viz ze gum, n’est-ce-pas? Très mauvais garçon—verree bad boy!”



“Ma foi!” ejaculated Monsieur Charpentier.

For a moment, it looked as if Monsieur Charpentier was going to handle the pointer, even more vigorously than Quelch was wont to handle the cane.

But the next moment his expression changed. The sudden anger died out of his face, and he threw the pointer back on the table. The Bounder watched that action in astonishment.

"Smeet!" said Monsieur Charpentier, quietly.

"Yes, sir!" stammered Smithy.

"I lose ze temper in ze class, and I rap you ze doigts—ze fingers, n'est-ce-pas? Zat is vy you come here viz gum! It is not left—zat is to say, it is not right, zat ze master lose ze temper in ze class! I sall not punish for zis, Smeet! Allez-vous-en."

"Oh!" breathed Smithy.

"Zat you go, Smeet!" Mossoo opened the door again. "It is all left—zat is, all right, and you may go! Allez."

The Bounder, hardly believing in his good luck, stepped into the doorway. There, he turned back:

"I'm sorry, sir!" he said, and his tone was sincere. "I'm really sorry, sir, and I hope you'll pardon me a silly trick."

Monsieur Charpentier stared at him, for a moment. Then he nodded, with a faint smile.

"C'est ça," he answered. "I am verree worry, Smeet, or I lose not ze temper in ze class. I say nozzing more about it, Smeet—it is all left!"

"Thank you, sir!"

Vernon-Smith went down the passage, and the French master's door closed after him. There was unusually thoughtful expression on Smithy's face, as he went: and he was more than glad that the gum was still in the bottle!

X

PLOTTING A PLOT!

"I SAY, you fellows—"

Billy Bunter had more to say than that—much more. But he did not say it. Bob Cherry picked up half a loaf from the table in No. 1 Study. Billy Bunter had just time to jump back into the passage, dragging the door shut, before it whizzed. It thudded on the door.

"Beast!" howled Bunter, through the keyhole.

Then he departed. He was annoyed, and he was indignant. His visit to No. 1 Study had not been without an object. Bunter's postal-order had still failed to arrive, and he was in search of a little loan to tide him over. But Bob's prompt action was rather too discouraging for the fat Owl to proceed with that matter, important as it was. He rolled away indignant.

In No. 1 Study, five juniors were gathered round the table, though they had finished tea. A deep discussion was going on there: and the matter under discussion was not one to which other ears were wanted to listen—especially the fat ears of Billy Bunter.

"Bother the fat ass!" grunted Bob. "We've got to be careful about this. If that fat chump puts his head in again, I'll let him have this cushion, right on the boko! Look at the window, you fellows—is it getting thick?"

The juniors glanced round at the study window. There was no doubt that it was getting thick. Fog mingled with the December dusk. It was thick already, and looked like getting thicker.

"Thick enough," agreed Frank Nugent.

"The thickfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bob," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "But—"

"Chuck it at that!" said Bob. "I've heard enough buts." He cast an aggrieved glance round at four faces. "I've told you the idea—ain't it a winner?"

Over tea in No. 1 Study, Bob had propounded the big idea, which had had to wait till after class. Bob was rather proud of that idea: but four members of the Co. seemed a little dubious.

"Um!" murmured Harry Wharton.

"Um!" repeated Johnny Bull.

"You don't seem to be wildly enthusiastic!" said Bob, sarcastically. "Look here, do we want to make that cad Loder sit up and yelp, or not?"

"We do!" agreed Harry.

"We know that he's going out of bounds to-night, sneaking out at his study window. We've had that, from Bunter. What's the matter with getting out of the dorm, quietly, and waiting for him there? He won't see a thing in the fog—"

"Shall we?" murmured Johnny Bull.

"Oh, don't be an ass," said Bob. "We shall hear him, and we shall see enough to let him have it. Just a glimpse will be enough."

"That's so," said Harry. "But—"

"Just a glimpse mightn't be enough," said Johnny Bull. "Might get the wrong party, in the fog."

"Talk sense!" snapped Bob. "Who's going to be walking around in the quad, on a foggy night, after lights out?"

Johnny Bull made no answer to that. It was highly improbable that any inhabitant of Greyfriars would be out of the House, at a late hour, on a cold dark, foggy December night. In fact, it was fairly certain that Loder would be careful to leave his nocturnal excursion until it was certain that nobody else would be about.

"Anybody would think you fellows would jump at a chance like this," said Bob, still aggrieved. "We can't get back on a pre. as a rule. This is the chance of a lifetime. Loder won't see a thing, and he can't do a thing afterwards. I've got a pot of green paint from Gosling's shed, too! Loder's going to get it!"

There was a chuckle in No. 1 Study. The idea of Loder of the Sixth getting the green paint, was entertaining.

"He can't get after us," continued Bob. "He won't want all Greyfriars to know that he got out of his study window late at night. He will just have to crawl back, and spend the rest of the night cleaning off paint—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"He won't know a thing," said Bob. "The spying rat isn't listening behind a tree this time. Keep it awfully dark, of course—and—" Bob broke off, as the door-handle turned. "Oh, my hat, that fat blitherer again—he gets the cushion this time."

The cushion whizzed across the study as the door opened. With that deep, dark plot under discussion in No. 1 Study, Billy Bunter, always superfluous, was more superfluous than ever. There was a crash in the doorway.

"Oh!" came a startled roar.

"Take that, Bunter, you—Oh! I didn't know it was you, Smithy!" exclaimed Bob, blankly. Bob had taken it for granted that it was Bunter again. It seemed that he had taken a little too much for granted. It was not Bunter. It was Herbert Vernon-Smith who was tottering in the doorway, the cushion falling at his feet.

"You mad ass!" roared the Bounder. "What do you think you're up to?"

"I—I—I thought it was Bunter—" stammered Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the rest of the Co.

"You thought!" snorted Smithy. "Catch you thinking! You footling, fozzling, blithering, blethering fathead—"

"Sorry, old man—"

"Trot in, Smithy, old bean," said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Only a mistake—you can't expect old Bob to look before he leaps—"

"Well, I thought it was Bunter again—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Br-rr-r!" growled the Bounder. He kicked the cushion aside, and came into the study, and threw the door shut after him. His unexpected reception in No. 1 had evidently not pleased Smithy! However, he had, apparently, come there with something to say, and he was going to say it.

"It's about Mossos," he said, abruptly.

"Little beast!" said Bob. "He won't get that bag of flour now. But we'll jolly well rag him in the next French set."

"You won't," said Smithy.

"Won't we?" exclaimed Bob, belligerently. "And who says we won't, you cheeky ass, I'd like to know."

"I don't think you'll want to, after what I've got to tell you," said Vernon-Smith. "He caught me in his study with a bottle of gum, and let me off. But before he copped me, I heard him talking to Quelch, and I know now what's been the matter with the little ass. You've heard about that horde of relations of his—"

"Who hasn't?" said Nugent.

"Well, one of them, some kid he calls Adolphe, is ill, and that's what's on his mind, from what he said to Quelch. He's worried about the kid. Soft old ass to worry about his dashed relations, if you like, but—"

"I shouldn't call him a soft old ass, for that," said Harry Wharton. "Poor old Mossoo! So that's it?"

"He's going before the term ends," went on the Bounder. "He was muttering something about going before he copped me. I know he's been rather a Tartar lately: but now we know the reason, I think we can stand a yap or two without getting our ears up. We're not exactly angels, in the French class, if you come to that."

"Not quite!" said Nugent, laughing. "Poor old Mossoo! I daresay he had enough to worry him, without fellows slamming desk-lids, and coming in late—"

"Well, what about it?" said the Bounder. "He's cutting off in a day or two, to see about that sick kid in France, and my idea is to bar all rags from now on."

Five heads nodded in unanimous agreement.

"That's a go," said Harry.

"The go-fulness is terrific."

"I'm jolly glad I never gave him that bag of flour, after all," said Bob Cherry, soberly. "Mossoo always was a good little ass. If we'd had the least ideas that he was upset about a sick kid at home—"

"Well, you know it now," said Smithy. "No more rags, what?"

"Not the ghost of one," said Harry.

"Okay, then." With that, the Bounder quitted No. 1 Study, having said what he had come to say. He left the Famous Five looking rather serious. It was rather unlike the hard, cynical Bounder, to give much consideration to others: and it surprised them a little. Certainly they were more than ready to follow his lead, in making things as easy as possible for Mossoo, in the circumstances.

"Poor old bean," said Bob, remorsefully. "We do give him a few spots of bother in the French set, you know, and if he's upset about a sick kid—oh, blow! Thank goodness he never had that bag of flour."

"Hear, hear!" said Nugent.

"Well, I said it was rot, at the time!" remarked Johnny Bull. "If you'd listen to a chap when he talks sense—"

"If you're going to say that you told us so—!" roared Bob.

"Well, didn't I?"

"Never mind that," said Harry Wharton, hastily. "Keep to the subject—we were talking about Loder. Get back to Loder."

"Well, that's all cut and dried, now," said Bob. "If you fellows are going to back me up, you've only got to say so. I'm glad Froggy never had that bag of flour, as it turns out, but that doesn't make any difference about Loder—did he spy and listen behind a tree, and get us six all round from Quelch, or didn't he?"

"He did!" agreed Nugent.

"The didfulness was terrific," said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, "and the painfulness for the obnoxious Loder is the proper caper, in my idiotic opinion."

"I'm on," said Harry. "What about you, Johnny?"

"Getting out of dorm after lights out is pretty serious," said Johnny, in his slow and thoughtful way. "I'd like to paint Loder as much as you fellows would: but rules are rules. I think it's rot."

Bob Cherry breathed hard. Bob was quite fixed in his determination to make the unpopular prefect "sit up and yelp", now that opportunity knocked, as it were. Certainly it was the only chance that was ever likely to occur, of "putting paid" to a prefect of the Sixth Form: and Bob had no use for solid common-sense from Johnny.

"If you funk it—!" he snorted.

"Who funks it?" roared Johnny Bull.

"Well, if you don't, back up, and not so much chin-wag!" snapped Bob.

"Back up, Johnny," said Harry Wharton. "This Co. always sticks together—and Loder is a rat, anyhow."

Johnny Bull grunted expressively.

"I said it's rot, and I think it's rot," he retorted, "but if you fellows are keen on it, I'm backing you up. If you're going to play the goat, I'll play the goat. But I think it's rot, all the same."

And so it was settled.

XI

LATE HOURS!

"**C**E pauvre petit Adolphe!"
Mossoo was muttering.

It was late. Dark December night cloaked Greyfriars School: and in the winter darkness, the fog eddied over the quad. Not a single light glimmered in the many windows of the House, with the solitary exception of Monsieur Charpentier's. The last stroke of eleven had died away in the foggy night. Long since, all forms at Greyfriars had gone to bed and gone to sleep: and the Staff had all followed their example, excepting the worried and troubled little French gentleman.

Mossoo, as he had told Mr. Quelch, was often sleepless of late. He was a stranger in a strange land: his heart was at home in la belle France. Quite a considerable portion of his salary went across the Channel for the behoof of beloved relatives. Other members of the Staff were kind enough to Mossoo, perhaps in a slightly patronizing way: and he was as a rule a cheerful little gentleman, patient and long-enduring under the trials of junior "sets". But present circumstances made him sad and sleepless: and he often heard the

chimes at midnight, unwilling to go to bed and lay a sleepless head on his pillow. Now he was walking about his study, thinking of the little Adolphe, and of his intention of asking the Head for leave to go before the end of the term. Quelch had assured him that he would find Dr. Locke sympathetic and amenable: but the timid little gentleman still hesitated to prefer his request, and had not yet done so.

"Que faire?" he murmured. "Que faire?"

He went to the window at last, and looked out. The December night did not look inviting. But he was tired of walking about his study, unwilling to go to a sleepless bed, and he decided to take a turn in the quad, as he had often done of late at all sorts of hours.

He stepped to the peg on the door, and lifted down the overcoat that had so narrowly escaped Smithy's gum-bottle. Having encased himself in the overcoat, wrapped a thick muffler round his neck, and buttoned the coat up to his ears, he put on his hat, and left his study, turning out the light.

There was a door on the quad, at the end of Masters' passage. All lights were out in the House at that hour, but a pale glimmer came in at windows. Mossoo walked down the passage quietly—he was a considerate little gentleman, and did not want to disturb anybody—and let himself out.

Even had Mossoo liked the British climate—which he very much didn't—he would not have found that night attractive. It was cold, it was dark, and it was foggy: and the quad was utterly dark and silent. But his only hope of sleep was to walk himself into a tired state: and he proceeded to walk, on the path under the study windows.

He walked the length of the House, and back again, passing Masters' Windows, and the Sixth-Form study windows—all dark, all closed. Little as Mossoo liked fresh air, it was doing him good, and he felt better as he walked to and fro. The fog did not trouble him, pacing a path of which he knew every inch. He walked, and walked, and walked, and felt better.

Suddenly he halted, startled.

At that hour of the night, past eleven o'clock, the last sound Mossoo would have expected to hear, was that of a window opening.

But that was what he heard, and he stared round in astonishment. Even in the mist, he could see the glimmer of the Sixth-Form windows, and it was one of the Sixth-Form windows that was opening.

"Mon Dieu!" murmured Monsieur Charpentier.

He stared at that window. He knew whose window it was—that of Gerald Loder, of the Sixth Form. Why the name of all that was surprising and unexpected, Gerald Loder was opening his window at that hour, was a mystery to Monsieur Charpentier. He stood and stared.

Up went the sash of the window: slowly, cautiously, making little sound. But little as the sound was, it was distinctly audible to the French master, in the silence of the night.

Head and shoulders appeared in the open window.

Loder of the Sixth looked out. At that hour, on a cold winter's night, Loder certainly did not expect any person belonging to Greyfriars to be abroad. He had left it late, to make sure of that. Of Mossoo's worries, and of his nocturnal ramblings, Loder of course knew nothing. He would as soon have expected to see Dr. Locke himself looming up in the mist, as the French master. But he did not expect to see anyone. It was his habitual caution that made him stare round watchfully, before getting out of the window. Sixth-Form studies at Greyfriars were also bedrooms: and it was easy for Loder to get out of bounds, when the spirit moved him so to do. But he had to be extremely careful about it. It was the "sack", short and sharp, if Loder's predilection for the chimes at midnight had become known to his head-master. Loder was as stealthy as a cat, when he paid surreptitious visits to his sporting friends at the Cross Keys at late hours.

He leaned out, and looked round. He gave a sudden start, as he discerned a dim form, barely visible in the mist. So sudden was his start, that he banged the back of his head on the raised sash, and uttered a sharp yelp.

"Ooooooh!"

Monsieur Charpentier stepped closer to the window.

"Lodair!" he exclaimed.

Loder rubbed the back of his head, and glared out at the French master with dilated eyes. The ghost of a French master could hardly have startled him more.

"Lodair! Is it zat you get out of zat vindow, at zis hour of ze night!" exclaimed Monsieur Charpentier, startled and shocked: to such an extent that he even forgot le petit Adolphe for the moment.

Loder caught his breath. He was startled and terrified: but he tried to pull himself together. His eyes fairly burned at Mossoo.

"Is—is—is that you, Monsieur Charpentier?" he gasped.

"Mai oui! C'est moi."

Loder gritted his teeth. Gladly he would have leaned out of the window again, and smashed Mossoo's hat over his head. He was caught in the act—by that little blighter of a French master, who only the day before had given him a lick with his own ash—at least, Loder believed that he had, being happily unaware of Wibley's remarkable stunt. Loder would have given much at that moment, to crash a heavy fist down on Mossoo's hat. But he could not, of course, venture to do so.

"Lodair! Zis is verree serious. You get out of zat vindow, isn't it? At zis hour! You break ze bounds, Loder."

Loder, in the midst of his fury, was glad that he had not actually stepped out before he saw Mossoo. Only his head and shoulders had emerged, and he hoped that a little hard lying would see him through.

"Oh, no, sir!" he answered, as calmly as he could. "I was—was—was just looking out for a minute, sir—"

"You look out of ze vindow, at zis time of night when tout le monde is quick asleep!" said Mossoo, probably meaning fast asleep.

"Oh! Yes! I—I heard something," stammered Loder. "I—I heard a—a footstep, sir, and—and I thought I'd look out and see what it—it was—"

Monsieur Charpentier eyed him very dubiously. It seemed improbable that his light footfalls, on the path under the windows, could have reached Loder, through a closed window: especially if Loder had been asleep in bed, as he ought to have been. Still, perhaps it was possible.

"I—I was—was startled," said Loder. "I—I never thought of a master wandering about at this hour, sir—I—I thought of—of burglars—"

"Pouf!" said Monsieur Charpentier.

"As—as it's only you, sir, I—I'll go back to bed," muttered Loder.

"I zink you had better, Lodair!" said Monsieur Charpentier, very drily.

Loder stepped back, and closed the window. Inside the window, he shook a savage fist. His intended excursion that night was washed out—completely washed out. He dared not make the venture now, with that little idiot of a French master wandering about! His sporting friends at the Cross Keys had to expect him in vain.

In the worst of tempers, Loder went to bed, which was undoubtedly the best place for him at that time of night. And if he dreamed, he certainly did not dream of what might have happened to him, in the shape of green paint, if he had carried on!

Outside, Monsieur Charpentier shook his head very seriously. However, Loder's explanation had been more or less plausible: and Mossoo was not the man to make trouble if he could help it. He dismissed Loder from his mind, as le petit Adolphe came back into it: and resumed his pacing up and down the path under the study windows, his thoughts far away in France. The half-hour chimed from the clock-tower, and Mossoo was still pacing—his thoughts still far away in France—destined to be brought back to England, and Greyfriars, by a sudden and unexpected happening!

XII

NOCTURNAL!

"OH!" ejaculated Bob Cherry.

He started up in bed, in the Remove dormitory.

Bob had not intended to go to sleep at all. He had been going to keep quite wide awake, and call the other members of the Co. at the appointed hour. Like many good intentions, that one was not carried out: somehow or other, he had slid off into slumber, without intending to. He awakened with a chime in his ears: but what hour was chiming, he did not know, till he looked at his

watch by the glimmer of a match. Then he discovered that it was half-past eleven.

"Oh!" repeated Bob.

He jumped out of bed. It was late: much later than he had intended. It was a cold night—very cold. But those circumstances did not deter him. A pot of paint was hidden in the ivy outside the House, all ready for the enterprise planned for that night: and Loder of the Sixth was going to get it, according to plan.

"Mmmmmmmmm!" mumbled Harry Wharton, as he was shaken by the shoulder. He opened his eyes sleepily and stared into the dark.

"Time!" whispered Bob.

"Oh, all right."

Not very willingly, the captain of the Remove turned out. Frank Nugent was the next to be shaken, and he opened reluctant eyes.

"Turn out!" whispered Bob.

"Urrrrgh!" mumbled Nugent. "What's the time?"

"Half-past eleven."

Nugent sat up in bed.

"You silly ass! You were going to call us before eleven! What's the good of turning out at half-past?"

"Better late than never."

"If Loder's going, he will be gone before this!" argued Nugent. "Better get back to bed, old chap."

"If he's gone, he will come back, I suppose? He's not going to stay the night at the Cross Keys, is he? It doesn't matter whether we catch him going out or coming in, so long as we do catch him."

"Oh, all right!" mumbled Nugent, and he turned out. Bob Cherry proceeded to wake Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, and there was a yawn from the nabob of Bhanipur.

"Turn out, Inky!" whispered Bob.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh sat up and shivered.

"My esteemed Bob—!" he murmured.

"Don't jaw and wake the dorm, old chap! Just turn out."

"The coldfulness is terrific," murmured the junior from India's coral strand. "And the warmfulness of the bed is preposterously comfortable. Why not let the ridiculous Loder rip?"

"Don't feel like turning out?" asked Bob.

"Not at all-fully."

"I'll help, old fellow." Bob Cherry grasped the nabob's bedclothes, and whipped them off the bed. "That better?"

"Ooooooooooh!" gasped Hurree Jamset Ram Singh shuddering with the cold. He turned out and groped for his clothes.

Johnny Bull was last on the list. He awakened, with a grunt, as Bob shook him. He glared at Bob, in the gloom.

"Idiot!" he said. Having thus expressed his opinion of Bob and his enterprise Johnny turned out, and proceeded to dress in the dark.

Nobody seemed to enjoy turning out at nearly midnight on a cold December night. However, they were all out now, and hurrying on their clothes. It was half-past eleven: much later than the time for which the expedition had been planned. Still, as Bob had said, it mattered little whether Loder was caught going or coming. If he had not yet started, they would catch him going out: if he was gone, they had only to wait, lurking in the foggy dark, and catch him as he came back. In either case they would catch him: so that was all right.

The Famous Five were very quiet, as they dressed. They did not want to wake the rest of the Remove.

True, no man in the Remove was likely to give them away, if trouble followed the painting of Loder of the Sixth. But it was very much safer to keep the whole thing dark. Painting a Sixth-Form prefect was, as even Bob realized, a rather serious matter: and fellows who painted Loder could not be too careful about it.

Luckily, there was no sound of stirring in the long row of beds. Regular breathing of sound sleepers could be heard, and from Billy Bunter's bed came the more or less melodious rumble of a snore.

"You fellows ready?" whispered Bob. Bob was keen to get on the war-path.

"Ready, fathead!" grunted Johnny Bull. "May as well get on with it, if we're going to play the giddy ox."

"Look here, Bull, if you don't want to come—"

"Of course I don't."

"Then roll back into bed, and be blowed to you."

"Rats!"

"Quiet!" whispered Harry Wharton. "If this gets tattled up and down the form, we shall be for it—it would get out sooner or later—"

"Come on, then, and don't jaw."

Bob Cherry led the way. The door was opened silently, and five juniors flitted out like ghosts in the dark. The door was closed as silently, behind them.

They trod away cautiously by dark staircases and passages.

The House was sleeping: not a light glimmered anywhere. All was dark and silent, still and chill. The bare thought of Quelch hearing a footfall, and coming out to investigate, was dismaying. But Quelch was not likely to hear fellows stealing cautiously on tiptoe.

Silent almost as spectres, they groped, at last, into the junior lobby. The lobby was locked and bolted for the night: but that presented no difficulties from the inside. Bob struck a match and Harry Wharton turned back the key, and withdrew the bolts.

The match went out. In the dark, Bob drew the door open. A chill draught came in from the foggy night.

"All serene!" whispered Bob.

"The serenity is not very terrific, my esteemed Bob," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, shivering.

"Looks thick outside," muttered Nugent.

"The thicker the better," said Bob, cheerily. "But keep together—don't you fellows get lost in the fog."

The Famous Five pushed out at the door, and Bob drew it shut. Outside, it certainly was a little thick. Still, that was all the better, from the point of view of juniors who were going to rag a Sixth-Form prefect. Whether Loder would venture to report an episode occurring out of the House at nearly midnight, they did not know: he would certainly have to think up some plausible excuse for having been out of doors at such an hour. But in any case, caution was indicated. They did not want to be recognized—very much indeed they did not. There was little danger of that, in the fog.

Bob Cherry groped in frozen ivy, and disinterred a paint-pot, full to the brim with green paint. He chuckled softly.

"Loder will like this, on his napper!" he murmured.

"We shall like it later!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, don't be a Jonah!" growled Bob. "Think Loder will report himself to the Head for being out of bounds in the middle of the night? He won't dare say a word about it."

"Think he won't get round that?" snorted Johnny. "Might say he heard us, and came out to see what was up. Loder's never short of a lie—he'd have been sacked before this, if he was."

"Well, let him yell it from the house-tops, if he likes—he won't know who did it!" grunted Bob. "Stop croaking, old man, and come on."

Johnny Bull grunted, but he came on. Five dim figures flitted in the mist, heading for the windows of the Sixth-Form studies. It seemed to all of the five that it was most probable that Loder was already gone, and that they would have to wait for his return, under his study window, till he came back from the Cross Keys. It was not an attractive prospect, in the chilly mist: but they were landed on it now, and had to make up their minds to it.

But, as it happened, they were not scheduled to wait! As they came tiptoeing on the gravel path under the study windows, a sound came to their ears. It was the sound of a footfall!

"Hold on!" breathed Bob. "Listen!"

They held on, listening intently. Every ear caught the light footfalls, coming along the path. In the darkness and mist they could see nothing. But they could hear.

"Loder!" breathed Harry Wharton.

"The ridiculous Loder!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Bob Cherry's eyes gleamed.

"Couldn't have happened better," he whispered. "Whether he's going or coming, here he is—quiet! Coming right towards us—asking for it! As soon as he's near enough, rush him, and tip him over—I'll do the rest."

"Quiet!"

In a breathless group, they listened. The footfalls came nearer and nearer. Something dim and shadowy loomed in the fog.

As it loomed, they rushed.

In the twinkling of an eye, a shadowy form was grasped, and tipped over on its back. Four pairs of hands were more than enough. A fifth pair of hands held the paint-pot, ready! In another twinkling, that paint-pot was up-ended over an upturned face, and the contents streamed out.

"Gurrrrrrrrrrgggh!"

It was a horrible, suffocated gurgle, from the recipient of the paint. Probably the startled victim had opened his mouth for a yell. It sounded like it—that horrible gurgle indicated that some of the mixture had gone in.

"Wurrrg! Oooogh! Ooooooooooooooooooogh!"

It had all happened in a couple of twinklings! In a third twinkling, the



The paint-pot was up-ended.

Famous Five were in full retreat. Bob Cherry hurled an almost empty paint-pot into space, and they flew. Wild and frantic gurglings and splutterings followed them from the foggy darkness. But those sounds faded out, as they flitted in at the lobby. The door was hastily closed, locked, and bolted.

"Quick!" breathed Bob. "Somebody will hear that row he's making—the beaks will be up! Quick!"

His comrades did not need that advice. They cut along passages, they whizzed up stairs: it was only a matter of seconds, before they were in the Remove dormitory again: breathless but secure. They whipped off their clothes and plunged into bed.

"Safe as houses, you men!" breathed Bob, from his pillow.

"Quiet!"

Sounds could be heard in the House. There could be no doubt that somebody had awakened. Opening of doors, and footfalls, and a vague sound of distant voices, could be heard.

"There's going to be a row!" murmured Johnny Bull.

"We're all right," said Bob.

"Quiet!" repeated Harry Wharton. "If they come nosing round the dormitories, we're all fast asleep."

"What-ho!" chuckled Bob.

They lay and listened. It was ten minutes later that the door of the Remove dormitory was opened from outside, and the light switched on. Five pairs of very wakeful eyes were clamped shut.

Mr. Quelch's voice was heard, in subdued tones:

"Is any boy here awake?"

There was no answer to that question. Without seeing Quelch, the Famous Five were aware that he was scanning the row of beds, to make sure that all were occupied. Then the light was switched off, the door closed softly, and Quelch was gone. Silence followed, broken only by the snore from Billy Bunter's bed.

"We're all right!" repeated Bob, in a whisper.

"Let's hope so!" grunted Johnny Bull.

"Oh, go to sleep, fathead," said Bob. "Loder's got what was coming to him, and we're all right. Go to sleep and dream of Loder trying to get that paint off his chivvy."

There was a subdued chuckle. Sounds were still heard vaguely in the distance, but the Famous Five did not listen to them. They settled down to sleep and their eyes did not open again till the rising-bell was clanging out in the morning. The fog had cleared, and it was a bright frosty day: but its brightness was fated to be dimmed for the chums of the Remove.

XIII

WHO PAINTED MOSSOO?

“SACK for somebody!” said Vernon-Smith.

There could be little doubt about that!

The news was all over Greyfriars in the morning. Some of the masters and prefects, who had been awakened from slumber, had known over-night. But in the morning all the school knew.

It was heard with amazement, by all: but by five members of the Remove, with absolute consternation.

Harry Wharton and Co. indeed, could hardly believe it when they heard it. It seemed to them wildly impossible, and too awful to be true.

But it was true! It was only too true! It was unexpected, unnerving, but it was awfully true! It had happened!

Some person or persons unknown—very fortunately, unknown!—had collared Monsieur Charpentier, taking a walk in the quad at a late hour, up-ended him, and smothered his head and face with green paint!

When the news reached the Famous Five, they gazed at one another, with pale and startled faces, and went out into the quad to get away by themselves.

“Mossoo!” said Bob Cherry faintly, when they were out of hearing of other ears.

“Not Loder!” moaned Nugent.

“It can’t be—!” muttered Bob. “How could Mossoo be there—right under the Sixth-Form windows, at nearly midnight—”

“He was!” said Johnny Bull.

“We couldn’t see who it was, in the dark and the fog, but how could it have been Mossoo?” groaned Bob.

“The howfulness is terrific!” murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, “but the Mossooffulness is preposterous. It was the esteemed and ridiculous Mossoo that we collarfully bagged and tipfully upended in the idiotic fog, and if the absurd Head gets wise to it—!”

“The sack!” said Harry Wharton.

“The sackfulness will be terrific!”

“Oh, crumbs!” mumbled Nugent.

“We never knew—!” groaned Bob. “Poor old Mossoo! I wouldn’t hurt a hair of his head—he’s not got many to hurt, poor old chap. We thought it was Loder—”

“Larking in the fog is a silly mug’s game,” grunted Johnny Bull, “and I jolly well told you so—!”

“Pack that up!” hooted Bob.

“Well, I did tell you so—!”

“Shut up, Johnny, for goodness sake,” said Harry Wharton. “Look here, you chaps, we’ve played the giddy ox, and landed Mossoo instead of Loder.

Goodness knows how it happened he was there—but he was: and we took him for Loder in the fog, and it can't be helped! There would have been a row if it had been Loder—but there will be an awful, fearful, frightful row, as it's turned out to be a beak. If it comes out, it's the sack. It mustn't come out."

"It was a mistake, after all—!" said Bob.

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders.

"Think that would make any difference with the Head—if we told him we smothered a master with paint, intending to smother a Sixth-Form pre. with it?" he asked.

"Um!" said Bob. "No, I suppose not. Mum's the word."

"Not a word—not a syllable—not a whisper!" said Harry. "We're all sorry, but we can't tell poor old Mossoo so. Luckily, not a fellow knows that we were out of the dorm last night. Not a fellow's going to know. If it gets out, we shall go home before the school breaks up for Christmas—and stay there! Mum's the word all round."

"The mumfulness will be terrific."

"It's just sickening," mumbled Bob. "It was all planned so jolly well—not a hitch anywhere, except that we got Mossoo instead of Loder—"

"Quite a bit of a hitch, don't you think?" inquired Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

"And Loder gets off, too!" sighed Bob.

"Never mind Loder!" said Johnny, with a glare. "You start any more big ideas about Loder, and we'll scalp you. You ought to be scalped anyway."

"Quiet—here comes Smithy," muttered Wharton.

The Bounder came up to the group of juniors in the quad. His brows were knitted.

"This is pretty rotten, you fellows," he said. "I'd like to get on the track of the fellows who ragged poor old Mossoo last night. I know he's been a bit of a Tartar lately: but smothering the poor old bean with paint—ugh! From what I hear, three or four fellows were in it—Mossoo seems to have been collared right and left, from what they're saying. But who—?"

"The who-fulness is terrific," murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"If it was Remove fellows, we'll get to know," said Smithy, "and I jolly well know I'll punch their heads for it, too. I call it a rotten dirty trick. It's the sort of thing Skinner and his gang might do—they've had their knuckles rapped in the French set—but they'd never have the nerve—"

Harry Wharton shook his head.

"I'm sure it wasn't Skinner and his gang," he said, gravely.

"Fourth Form chaps, perhaps," said Smithy, with a nod. "Or they might be Shell men—goodness knows! Dirty trick on poor old Froggy. They'll be sacked when it comes out, that's a comfort."

"Is it?" murmured Bob.

"And the pre's will root them out all right!" said the Bounder. "They're after them like hawks—they'll jolly well root them out, bank on that."

"Think so?" gasped Nugent.

"Bank on it!" said Smithy, confidently, and he walked on: leaving the Famous Five exchanging expressive glances. They did not find Smithy's assurance that the prefects would root out the culprits either grateful or comforting.

"I say, you fellows—"

"Oh, buzz off, Bunter!" hooted Bob. The hapless quintette were in no mood for Billy Bunter.

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Hook it, fathead!" growled Johnny Bull.

"I say, you fellows, who do you think did it?" asked Bunter. "Think it was Loder?"

Five fellows jumped, at that suggestion.

"Loder!" stuttered Bob.

"Well, somebody did it, and it must have been somebody who had it in for Mossoo," argued Bunter. "And you know what happened the other day—Loder getting a whop from his own ash—!"

"That was Wibley playing the goat, fathead."

"Yes, we know that—but Loder doesn't!" said Bunter, sagely. "Loder doesn't know a thing about Wibley making up as Mossoo, you know. He thinks it was Froggy gave him that whop! Looks to me as if it was Loder—"

"Fathead!" said the Famous Five, together.

"Well, that's what it looks like to me," declared Bunter. "From what I hear, it happened under the Sixth-Form windows, quite near Loder's study. Goodness knows why Froggy was there—but he was: and I rather fancy that Loder saw his chance, and mopped that paint over him. You see, I jolly well know that Loder was up last night because I heard him telling Carne—"

"It wasn't Loder, you howling ass."

"Well, I jolly well think it was!" said Bunter. "He's beast enough—didn't he give me six, making out I was listening round a corner—I say, you fellows, don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you!" howled Bunter.

But the Famous Five did walk away, having had enough of William George Bunter's theories on the subject. The fat Owl rolled away to propound his views to more willing listeners.

"Nobody knows at any rate!" remarked Bob Cherry. "Not even Bunter! He thinks it was Loder—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Smithy thinks it might be somebody in the Fourth or the Shell! They won't get anybody!" said Bob. "We've only got to keep it dark. Hallo, hallo, hallo, here's old Wib—who do you think painted Froggy last night, Wib?"

William Wibley laughed.

"You!" he answered.

Bob jumped almost clear of the ground. His comrades stared at Wibley,

blankly. Wibley was a wonderful man at theatricals, at making-up, at impersonation of almost anybody: but nobody had ever supposed that he had detective gifts before. His answer was surprising.

"Me!" gasped Bob.

"Wasn't it?" grinned Wibley.

"What's put that idea into your head?"

"I fancy it will be put into a good many heads, when that smear of green paint on your sleeve is noticed," answered Wibley.

"Wha-a-a-t?"

Bob stared at his sleeve. His comrades stared at it. Bob had been careful in the handling of that paint-pot. But apparently he had not been careful enough. There was undoubtedly a green smear on his sleeve. It was not conspicuous: but it was there: and it had caught Wibley's eye, in the gleam of wintry sunshine.

"Oh!" gasped Bob. The next moment he was rubbing at that smear.

"What did you fellows do it for?" asked Wibley. "Mossoo's been rather a little beast lately, but mopping paint over him—!"

"We took him for Loder, in the fog!" breathed Harry Wharton. "It was—a ghastly mistake! That's all."

Wibley whistled.

"That won't help you much, if it comes out," he said. "Better keep it parked."

"We'd thought of that, already," said Nugent, with a faint grin.

"Not a word, Wib!" said Harry.

"Not a syllable!" agreed Wibley. "Why, you fatheads, it would be the sack—the Head simply couldn't do less. The long jump just before Christmas—!"

"Don't!" groaned Nugent.

There was the clang of a bell. Harry Wharton and Co. joined the crowd of Removites heading for the form-room. They noted that Mr. Quelch looked over his form very, very keenly: never had his eyes seemed so much like gimlets, to five members of his form. But those gimlet-eyes did not rest specially on them—Quelch had no suspicion. Indeed, he probably did not think that the delinquents were in his form at all.

The secret was safe: they had only to keep silence. Only Wibley knew, and they could depend on him. But it was not a happy morning for the chums of the Greyfriars Remove.

XIV

THE FAT IN THE FIRE!

"I SAY, you fellows—!"

"Kick him!" hooted Johnny Bull.

"Yaroooh!" roared Billy Bunter.

He retreated promptly and indignantly, from No. 1 Study, banging the door after him with a bang that woke all the echoes.

Harry Wharton and Co. did not seem in a mood for Bunter!

It was Saturday afternoon. From the study window, they had watched a taxi from Courtfield leaving, with a little French gentleman seated in it. Mossoo, evidently, had obtained the leave he required from the Head, and was off for France: the taxi bearing him to Courtfield station to take his train for Dover.

Five faces were grave, as they watched him depart. The chums of the Remove were sorry enough for that hapless error in the fog, and would gladly have asked Mossoo's pardon for it before he went—had it been practicable. But the disastrous secret had to be kept.

Mossoo was gone! They were not going to see him again till next term—if, indeed, they were at Greyfriars at all next term! They could not help feeling a lingering doubt about that.

Nothing had come out. Nobody had any suspicion, so far. But the episode was too awfully serious to be allowed to die away. Masters were watchful, wary: keen to detect the culprits. Prefects were on the prowl. Everybody was discussing the mysterious occurrence. Everybody was keen to know who had done it. There was endless speculation about the unknown offenders. And the Famous Five, who would not willingly have harmed a hair of Mossoo's head—not a single one of the few he had left!—were the unknown offenders!

Having watched Mossoo's taxi turn out at the gates, the Famous Five exchanged rather dismal glances.

"That rotten fog the other night—!" sighed Bob Cherry. "But for that, we should never have— A bag of flour wouldn't have been so bad—but a pot of paint—!"

"We didn't mean it," said Nugent, "but—we did it!"

"The didfulness was terrific."

"Who'd have dreamed that Mossoo would be out of the House—" said Bob. "A fellow couldn't guess that one."

"I told you it was rot!" remarked Johnny Bull.

"Don't tell us again!" implored Bob.

"Well, I told you so—!"

It was at that point that Billy Bunter rolled in at the doorway. He rolled out faster than he rolled in, when Bob Cherry reached out with a long leg, and the largest foot in the Remove contacted the tightest trousers in that form.

Bunter retired indignantly, banging the door.

"That fat tick!" growled Bob. "If he got hold of a word of this, it would be all over the Remove in half-an-hour—"

"And all over the school in an hour!" said Nugent. "For goodness sake, not a word when Bunter's in the offing, or the fat will be in the fire."

"We can't be too jolly careful," said Harry Wharton. "Nobody would give us away if you come to that: but once it was known and talked about, you can bank on it getting to the pre's sooner or later."

"Loder would like to know!" remarked Nugent.

"Wouldn't he just!" said Bob. "It's all Loder's fault, really. Blow Loder."

"Blow him terrifically!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Least said soonest mended," said Harry. "There's nothing we can do, except keep it dark."

"If anything came out—!" muttered Bob.

"Okay so far, at any rate," said Nugent. "And Christmas is coming—and it will all be forgotten next term. Next term we'll all be as good as gold in the French set, to make it up to poor old Mossoo for the paint."

"Yes, rather," agreed Bob.

"The ratherfulness is terrific!" concurred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The goodfulness of our esteemed selves will be preposterous."

"So long as we can keep it up, at any rate!" added Bob: hedging a little, as it were.

"We've got to keep it awfully dark," said Johnny Bull. "And look here, Bob, no more bright ideas about getting back on a pre. Next time you get a pot of paint for Loder, I expect you'll land it on Quelch—or the Head! I told you at the time it was rot—"

Bob Cherry pushed back his cuffs.

"Are you going to say again that you told us so?" he asked. "If you are, better guard with your left."

"Well, look here—!"

"Oh, don't rag!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "We'll let Loder rip, after this, and be blowed to him! All we've got to think about is keeping it dark that it was us who mopped the paint over Mossoo last night—"

The captain of the Remove was suddenly interrupted.

The study door flew open, and a fat figure rolled headlong in, yelling. Wibley followed it in, as the juniors stared round in surprise.

"Yaroooh!" yelled Bunter. "I wasn't listening—Keep off, you beast! I—I'd only stopped to tie my shoe-lace—"

Wibley looked across at the juniors at the window.

"You fellows talking about anything private?" he asked. "Bunter's heard it, if you were."

"Oh, crumbs!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"He had his ear to the keyhole, as I came down the passage," explained Wibley, "so I kicked him into the study."

"I wasn't!" yelled the sprawling Owl. "I didn't—I never—I'd just stooped to pick up a pin—" Billy Bunter sat up, and blinked apprehensively at the Famous Five, as they came towards him. He had reason to be apprehensive. "I—I—I say, you fellows, I—I wasn't listening—I'd only stooped to pick up my hanky and I never heard a word you fellows were saying—not a syllable! And I ain't going to tell anybody that it was you chaps who painted Mossoo—I—I—I wouldn't—"

"You fat villain!" breathed Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry—!"

"You listening worm—!"

"Oh, really, Nugent—"

Wibley whistled.

"Was that it?" he asked.

Harry Wharton gave a hopeless shrug of the shoulders.

"That was it!" he said. "It will be all over Greyfriars now. The game's up."

"The upfulness is terrific."

"I—I—I say you fellows, I—I never heard!" babbled Bunter. "I—I wasn't anywhere near the keyhole, and I never heard you say a word about mopping the paint over Mossoo last night. I—I didn't really! And—and I ain't going to give you away! I—I ain't going to say—Yaroooh! Help! Yow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Boot him!" roared Bob.

"Yaroooooooh!"

The game was up: there was no doubt about that. Once tattled by Bunter up and down the House, it was only a matter of time—probably a very short time—before it reached official ears. And that the loquacious Owl would babble so exciting a spot of news up and down the House, there was no doubt whatever. Five feet landed on Bunter all together, and he roared frantically, and squirmed to the door. Wibley added another, as he squirmed out of the study: and it lifted Bunter into the passage.

The fat Owl rushed down the passage: and into Vernon-Smith and Skinner, who were coming up from the landing. All three staggered from the shock.

"You fat ass!" roared the Bounder. "Look where you're running."

"Ow! wow! I say, Smithy, keep them off!" howled Bunter. "I say, I ain't going to tell anybody that it was Wharton who mopped that paint over Mossoo—"

"What?" gasped Smithy.

"Wharton!" exclaimed Skinner.

"I ain't going to say a word—keep 'em off!" gurgled Bunter. "Wow! Stop kicking me, Bob Cherry, you beast! I tell you I ain't going to say—wow-ow-wow—wow—wow!"

Bob had emerged from the study, to add one more. The fat Owl, yelling, fled for his fat life. Vernon-Smith and Skinner stared after him, and then stared at Bob's flushed face.

"You!" exclaimed Smithy.

Bob tramped back into No. 1 Study without replying. Skinner, grinning, went on up the passage, to spread the news in other studies. Vernon-Smith stared into No. 1, with a knitted brow.

"So it was you fellows mopped that paint over Froggy," he said. "If you want to know what I think about it—"

"Nobody does!" snapped Bob.

"I'll tell you all the same! It was a rotten trick—"

"Oh, don't be a silly ass, Smithy!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "It was a bungle in the fog—we were after Loder—"

The Bounder stared at him, blankly, for a moment. Then he burst into a laugh.

"Well, you must be blithering idiots," he said.

"Thanks! Shut the door after you."

The Bounder, still laughing, followed Skinner up the passage: apparently amused to learn that it was a bungle in the fog! Bob Cherry kicked the door shut after him. Nobody in No. 1 Study was amused!

"The fat's in the fire now, you fellows," said Wibley.

"Don't we know it?" grunted Johnny Bull.

"The knowfulness is terrific, my esteemed Wibley."

"Look here, there's a chance yet!" said Wibley. "Cut off to Mossoo at once, before it gets out, and tell him the whole story. He's been a Tartar lately, but he's a good old boy really, and he might put in a word for you—make him understand that it was a mistake in the fog, and that you never meant it for him, and he might go easy—"

"Jolly good idea, if it wasn't too late!" said Bob. "You see, Mossoo's gone—we saw him clear off in a taxi ten minutes ago."

"Oh!" said Wibley. "That's washed out, then."

"Sort of!" said Nugent.

"Looks as if we're washed out, too," said Bob. "Interview with the Head, and the chopper—what a life! Here, let's get out into the open air, anyway—no good waiting here for the chopper to come down."

"Hold on a minute," said Wibley.

"Well, what?" asked Harry, impatiently.

"Mossoo might lose his train—he's just the duffer to lose a train—"

"What about it, if he did?"

"If he did he might come back, mmmm—"

"Why should he?"

"Well, he might—"

"Rot!" said Johnny Bull.

"Look here, I've got an idea—!"

"Take it home and boil it," said Bob Cherry. "Come on, you fellows—let's get out."

The Famous Five tramped out of No. 1 Study. They were not interested in Wibley's idea, whatever it might have been: the impending "chopper" absorbed all their interest. Wibley was left in the study, with a very thoughtful expression on his face: and the Famous Five went out into the frosty air of the quad. There was snow among the elms, and some fellows were snowballing: but the hapless five were not thinking of snowballs. They were thinking of what was coming to them: and how soon would it come: and they found that quite enough to occupy all their thoughts.

XV

IN SUSPENSE

"So it was you!" said Coker of the Fifth.

Coker was the umpteenth Greyfriars man to make that remark.

The news was spreading: and evidently it had passed beyond the Remove, and reached the senior forms. It was half-an-hour since Billy Bunter had been booted out of No. 1 Study. His fat chin had been in perpetual motion since: in other matters, the fat Owl was slow, but when it came to wagging his plump chin, he was a quick worker.

Bunter, certainly, had no idea of giving the culprits away to beaks or prefects. Even the booting wouldn't have led Bunter to that. But keeping so exciting a spot of news to himself, was a sheer impossibility. Bunter had to talk or burst. The Remove were soon buzzing with the tale: and fellows in the Fourth and the Shell were not long in learning that a whole crowd knew who had painted Mossos the night before. Up and down Greyfriars fellows were saying to one another: "Know who did it?" "Yes, Wharton's gang!" Only too well the hapless five knew that it could be only a question of time before it came to the prefects' ears. It might be hours, or it might be minutes. But it was coming.

Dozens of fellows came up to them in the quad, singly or in twos and threes: till they were tired of explaining that it had been a bungle in the fog, not meant for Mossos at all. Indeed they were tired of the subject: more than tired. They were strolling, in a far from merry bunch, near the door of the junior lobby, when Coker of the Fifth came up in his turn.

"You young ruffians!" said Coker, in his most magisterial way.

The Famous Five glared at him. They had had more than enough, and they did not want any more from Horace Coker.

"Oh, buzz off, Coker," said Harry Wharton.

"Take your face away!" snapped Bob Cherry. "Don't you know that it gives a fellow a pain?"

"Young hooligans!" said Coker. "You'll jolly well be sacked for it. I've a jolly good mind to smack your heads all round, myself."

"Try it on!" snorted Johnny Bull.

"The smackfulness might be a boot on the other leg, my esteemed and ridiculous Coker," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"You're asking for it," said Coker, darkly. "And I can jolly well say this— Oh! Ow! Wooooooh!"

The door of the junior lobby, behind Coker, opened, and Wibley of the Remove came out, carrying a large bag. Wibley was swinging that large and heavy bag in his hand, and perhaps by accident, it contacted Coker. It contacted him quite suddenly and hard, and Coker, taken by surprise, pitched forward, with a yell, and stumbled over on his hands and knees.

"Ha, ha, ha!" came from the Famous Five.

"Oh! Ah! oh! Oooogh!" spluttered Coker, as he sprawled.

Wibley, grinning, cut off, swinging the bag. Coker of the Fifth scrambled up, and glared round. But he had no chance to pursue Wibley. Harry Wharton and Co. collared him, as one man, tipped him over, and Coker sprawled again. This time he did not get up so rapidly. The Famous Five were not in a mood, just then, to "suffer fools gladly". They rolled Coker over, stuffed handfuls of snow down his neck, and finally walked away, leaving him in a breathless and bewildered state.

They were feeling a little better, as they strolled in the quad again. Ragging Coker had cheered them up a little.

"I say, you fellows." A fat squeak reached their ears. Billy Bunter, with about a dozen fellows round him, was still telling the tale. "I say, it was Wharton's gang that painted Mossoo—I heard them talking about it in their study—"

"Pryin' little beast!" said Lord Mauleverer.

"Oh, really, Mauly—"

"Don't yell it out, you fat ass!" said Tom Brown.

"Who's yelling it out?" demanded Bunter. "I'm only telling you fellows. I ain't going to tell Quelch! But I say, it was Wharton's gang—they got out of the dorm last night, you know, and I heard Wharton say—yow-ow-ow-ow-ow!" Billy Bunter wound up with a wild howl, as Bob kicked him, in passing.

The Famous Five walked on, leaving the crowd round Bunter laughing.

"All over the shop!" growled Johnny Bull. "I wonder how long it will be before Wingate, or Gwynne, or Loder, hears something—"

"Not very long, at this rate," said Harry.

"The longfulness will not be terrific," sighed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "The esteemed Quelch will want us soon."

"That was a good idea of Wib's, if only Mossoo hadn't gone!" said Nugent. "But—he's gone."

"Too late!" sighed Bob. "I say, I wonder whether this is our last walk round Greyfriars! Think the Head will sack us?"

Temple, Dabney, and Fry, of the Fourth, came up.

"So it was you lot!" said Temple. "You ought to be bunked."

"Oh, rather," said Dabney.

"Looked out your train home?" asked Fry.

Once more the Famous Five found relief in a ragging. Temple, Dabney, and Fry, were suddenly strewn on the earth, and the Famous Five, leaving them in the same breathless and bewildered state as Coker, walked on. A few minutes later, Hobson of the Shell came up to speak.

"If you fellows want to know what I think of you—!" began Hobson.

It became obvious at once that the Famous Five did not want to know: for they collared Hobson, and bumped him down on the quad.

As they walked on, leaving Hobby for dead, as it were, a study window opened, and a sharp voice called:

"Wharton!"

It was Mr. Quelch, frowning from his study window. The chums of the Remove almost felt their hearts missing a beat!

"It's come!" muttered Bob.

"Quelch's heard!" breathed Nugent.

"We're for it!" said Johnny Bull. "Well, I told you so—!"

"Come on!" said Harry, quietly: and the five juniors came up to the study window, under the grim stare of the gimlet eyes. They had no doubt that it had come!—the "chopper" at last!

"Yes, sir!" said Harry. "You called us—"

"I did, Wharton! Kindly be more circumspect in the quadrangle!" said Mr. Quelch, severely. "I do not approve of horse-play, Wharton! Bear that in mind."

The study window closed again with a snap.

"Oh!" gasped Bob. "He—he—he saw us tipping Hobby over—that's all!" He gasped with relief.

Once more they walked on. It was only a false alarm: Quelch had not heard yet! There was a respite!

"Blessed if I don't feel like going to Quelch, and getting it over," said Frank Nugent. "It's got to come."

"No use asking for it," said Johnny Bull. "While there's life there's hope. I'm not in a hurry to go up to the Head."

"Bet you we shall be called up before tea-time," said Nugent. "Hallo, there's Loder—I—I wonder if he wants us."

Again the hapless five felt a qualm. But Loder of the Sixth passed on, with nothing more than an inimical glance. Loder had heard nothing, yet.

The suspense was really painful. Still, they did not feel like anticipating matters. They walked in the quad, feeling themselves the cynosure of more and more eyes. The minutes dragged.

"Let's get out," said Bob Cherry, at last, "I've had enough of this. If Quelch wants us, Quelch will keep till we come in."

"Let's!" agreed Harry.

They walked down to the gates. Gosling, at his lodge, eyed them. They heard a crusty mutter:

"Young rips!"

From which they guessed that Gosling had heard!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" exclaimed Bob Cherry suddenly.

"What—?"

"Mossoo!" gasped Bob.

"Oh, my hat!"

A taxi was turning in at the gates. Within sat a passenger—a dapper little

gentleman with a sallow face, a twisted moustache, and a little pointed beard. The Famous Five stared blankly.

"Mossoo!" breathed Harry Wharton.

"Froggy!" gasped Johnny Bull.

"The esteemed and ridiculous Froggy!"

They stared after the taxi, as it ran on to the House.

"Lost his train," said Bob. "Why, Wibley said he might lose his train, and come back! And—he has! O what a little bit of luck! It's a chance, you men—a bit of a chance, at any rate! Come on!"

All the Famous Five realized that it was a chance, if only the ghost of one. They raced after that taxi.

XVI

SPOT OF LUCK!

"MONSIEUR Charpentier—!"

"If you please, sir—"

"Just a minute, sir—"

The taxi had stopped at the House. The dapper little gentleman had stepped out. He was telling the taxi-driver to wait, when the Famous Five came breathlessly up. They all burst out at once. Monsieur Charpentier glanced round at them. He gave them a nod and a smile.

"So glad you came back, sir!" gasped Nugent.

"The gladfulness is terrific, honoured sahib."

"If you'd spare us a minute, sir—"

"Just a minute or two, sir—"

"C'est ça! Vat is it, zen? I lose me ze train," said the little gentleman. "Zat train, he is lose, et je suis de retour, n'est-ce-pas? I come back viz me, before zat I go to catch ze next train, isn't it?"

There was a fat squeak in the offing.

"I say, you fellows! Froggy's come back."

Billy Bunter did not, perhaps, intend that to reach French ears. But it did: and Mossoo slewed round, and stared at the fat Owl.

"Vous Buntair!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, crikey! I—I—I mean, yes, sir," gasped Bunter. "I—I didn't call you Froggy, sir—I—I never do, like some of the fellows, sir—"

"I hear you viz mine own ears, Buntair! Allez! Go you to your study and write out twenty lines of ze Henriade."

"Oh, really, sir—"

"Allez-vous-en, vous mauvais Buntair."

Billy Bunter rolled reluctantly into the House. Not that he was going to do

those lines! Mossoo's departure, it seemed, was delayed: but he was due to depart that day. He wouldn't be able to ask for those lines! Bunter rolled in—but not to write lines!

Mossoo turned to the Famous Five again.

"Is it zat you vish to speak to me, mes garçons?" he asked. "Parlez, donc! J'ecoute."

His manner was very kind and genial. That was a relief to the Famous Five. In that mood, there was hope.

"Thank you, sir!" said Harry Wharton. "We—we—we want to confess something, sir, and ask your pardon."

Mossoo raised his eyebrows.

"Eh bien!" he said. "Is it zat you do somezing! In zat case you go to le bon Quelch—"

"No, sir, we—we've got to tell you. It was we who—who—who—" Wharton stammered. It was not easy to get it out.

"Vat zen?" asked Monsieur Charpentier.

"Cough it up, old chap!" murmured Bob.

It had to be coughed up! Wibley had suggested that owning up to Mossoo might work the oracle, so to speak: and but for the French master's departure, the Famous Five certainly would have tried it on. Now that he had unexpectedly returned, it was their chance—and their only one.

"It was we who—who—who did it, sir—" stammered Harry.

"Who did vat?"

"Last night, sir!" said Bob, helping Wharton out.

"The—the paint, sir—!" stammered Nugent.

"We never meant it for you, sir!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "We—we never knew you were out of the House, sir—it was a lark on—on a—a fellow we thought might be out—not you, sir—"

"Never dreamed it was you, sir!" chimed in Bob.

"It was that fog, sir—!" said Nugent.

"The fogfulness was too terrific for the seefulness, sir!"

"And—and we're sorry—"

"Awfully sorry, sir—"

"The sorrowfulness is preposterous."

"If you'd overlook it, sir, as it was all a mistake—"

"Just a rotten bungle in the fog, sir—"

All the Famous Five were speaking at once now. They regarded Mossoo anxiously as they poured out the tale. Was there a chance?

More than a dozen fellows had gathered round, and they listened, as well as Mossoo. Skinner winked at Snoop.

"If they think Froggy will swallow that paint, they've got another guess coming!" he murmured. And Snoop grinned and nodded.

But the expression on the Gallic face rather encouraged the Famous Five.

Mossoo had a look of surprise at first: then he frowned: and then gradually his frown faded out, and he looked again. Vernon-Smith whispered to Tom Redwing:

"By gum! Looks as if he's going easy!"

"I hope so," said Redwing.

Harry Wharton and Co. certainly hoped so! Mossoo, and his kindness of heart, were their last hope! Was there a chance?

"Mon Dieu! Zen it was you!" said Monsieur Charpentier, at last. "You speak to me to own down to zat—"

"Own up, sir!" murmured Bob.

"Oui, oui, you say to own up, not to own down!" agreed Mossoo. "Zat is left! It was verree, verree wrong vat you shall have done—zat paint, on vat you call ze napper, he is verree unpleasant—you make me to vash, and vash, and vash ze head, to get off zat verree nasty paint—"

"We're awfully sorry, sir—"

"Never meant it for you, sir—"

"Wouldn't have dreamed of it, sir—"

Monsieur Charpentier smiled. Evidently, he was moved by the plea of the anxious five. He smiled and nodded.

"Zen I forgive you," he said. "You sall come viz me to ze bon Quelch, and I vill explain to him zat you own down—zat is to say own up—and zat all is forgive, and nozzings more to be said."

Five faces brightened up, like summer sunshine coming out through winter mists.

"Thank you, sir."

"The thankfulness is terrific."

"C'est ça, c'est ça!" said Monsieur Charpentier. "Come you now viz me to ze bon Quelch and all is left—zat is to say, right!"

"Oh, certainly, sir."

Monsieur Charpentier tripped into the House. Gladly the Famous Five followed him. They left a crowd of fellows round the doorway in a buzz. Herbert Vernon-Smith gave a prolonged whistle.

"Some fellows have the luck!" he remarked.

"He's a good old chap," said Redwing.

"Yes—he let me off that time in his study, but—but—well, mopping paint over him was too thick!" said Smithy. "Blessed if I thought Mossoo would go easy about that! But—he has!"—He whistled again. "Spot of luck for them, that he lost his train and came back. He's just the old ass to lose a train, but what the dickens did he come back for, instead of waiting at the station?"

"Lucky he did! Quelch will have to go easy if he asks—"

"Blessed if I make it out," said the Bounder, puzzled. "He's had ample time to catch another train—but he's come back here, just as if he came specially to get those fellows out of the soup!"

The Bounder shook his head. The utterly unexpected return of Monsieur Charpentier was an amazing spot of luck for the Famous Five, there was no doubt about that. Really, it seemed too good to be true! He had returned, unexpectedly—still more unexpectedly, he was prepared to forgive the episode of the paint, and to see the delinquents through with their form-master. And that Monsieur Charpentier was many miles away, in the train for Dover, and that a Remove fellow named William Wibley had borrowed his identity for the afternoon, was an idea that was likely to occur to nobody!

XVII

THE CLOUDS ROLL BY

MR. QUELCH laid down his pen, with a faint frown, as a tap came at his study door. On the study table, before him, several volumes were open. One was the Odes of Quintus Horatius Flaccus, with Dillenburger's notes in Latin on the same: a most attractive volume—to Quelch! Another was Wickham's edition—with Wickham's notes. Still another, was Professor Verrall's great work on Horace, elaborating his remarkable Murena theory!

In the midst of this attractive and fascinating company, naturally Mr. Quelch did not want interruptions!

The tap at his door was not welcome. Saturday was a half-holiday to the Remove master, as well as to the Remove. Quelch, deep in the delights of Horace, had forgotten the twentieth century, and was 'way back in 23 B.C. The tap at his door brought him back, with rather a jump, over the centuries, right up to date. His voice had a slight edge on it, as he rapped:

"Come in!"

The door opened, to admit a dapper figure. Quelch gazed at the sallow complexion, twisted little moustache, and little pointed beard, which he had supposed to be at Dover by that time.

"Monsieur Charpentier!" he exclaimed, in surprise.

"Mais oui—c'est ça, mon bon Quelch." The little gentleman gesticulated with both hands. "I lose me ze train, isn't it? Zen I remember zat I have forgot somezing, and come back for zat zing. Yes!"

Quelch raised his eyebrows a little.

He was not surprised at Mossoo losing a train. He was not surprised at Mossoo having forgotten something, and returned for it. Such things were just like Mossoo. But he did not see why Mossoo, having lost his train and returned for something forgotten, had barged into his study, and interrupted Quintus Horatius Flaccus.

"Quite so, monsieur!" said Mr. Quelch. "But—"

"Entrez!" said Monsieur Charpentier, with a glance back from the study through the open doorway, into the passage. "Entrez donc, mes garçons."

To Quelch's astonishment, five members of his form trailed in. He stared at Harry Wharton and Co.

Mossoo's visit was slightly surprising. But why he had brought in with him five members of Quelch's form, was more than surprising. Quelch stared at the Famous Five, and then at Mossoo again.

"Why are these boys here, monsieur?" he asked.

Harry Wharton and Co. stood silent. It was for Mossoo to speak. They could only wonder, hopefully, what the effect would be on Quelch.

Mossoo gesticulated again.

"Zey confess, mon bon Quelch," he said. "Zey come to me, ven zat I arrived back viz myself, and own down—"

"Own down!" repeated Mr. Quelch, blankly.

"Zat is to say, own up!" amended Mossoo. "Zey own up, and explain zat it is all one mistake in a fog—"

"A mistake in a fog!" repeated Mr. Quelch.

"Ze fog, last night, he is verree zick, n'est-ce-pas! Aujourd'hui—to-day—he clear off, but in ze night he is verree zick," explained Monsieur Charpentier. "Zat is how it come to go. Zese garçons mistake me for anozzer person owing to zick fog, and zat is how I get ze paint."

"Paint!" stuttered Mr. Quelch. He began to understand.

A very grim expression came over Mr. Quelch's face. So far, it had been a deep mystery who had painted Mossoo in the foggy night—to him, at least. He had not supposed that the offenders were in his form at all. Now he learned that they were!

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch. "Is it possible? Wharton, am I to understand that it was you—you and your friends—who were guilty of last night's outrage—"

"We never meant, sir—!" stammered Harry.

"We couldn't see Mossoo in the fog, sir—!" faltered Bob Cherry.

Mr. Quelch rose to his feet. His brow was like thunder.

"It was you!" he snapped.

"Yes, sir!"

"You were out of your dormitory, out of the House, at almost midnight— You threw a quantity of paint over a member of Dr. Locke's staff—!"

"We—we took him for somebody else in the fog, sir!" gasped Nugent. "We—we thought that a—a—a fellow was out of the House, and—and we meant it for him, sir—" Nugent tactfully refrained from adding that the "fellow" was a Sixth-Form prefect.

"What! What! Another boy was out of the House at such an hour?" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, sharply.

"Oh, no, sir! We fancied that he was, but he wasn't after all, and it was Mossoo that we ran into the fog, and—and—"

"All a mistake, sir—!" said Bob.

"Upon my word! You will all come with me to the head-master immediately," said Mr. Quelch. "I shall—"

"Mais non, Monsieur Quelch!" interrupted the dapper little gentleman. "Mais non—pas du tout! I forgive zem."

"Monsieur Charpentier!"

"Zey come to me—zey own down—zat is to say zey own up, and I tell zem zat all is forgive!"

"Impossible, Monsieur Charpentier! Such an offence—such an outrageous action—impossible! I am surprised that you should think of it—very much surprised indeed! I cannot allow—"

Mossoo gesticulated with both hands.

"Mon bon Monsieur Quelch, je demande pardon—I ask ze pardon for ces garçons—for zese boys! It is I who an mop viz ze paint, and I zink it is for me to forgive zem zat mistake in ze fog. You vill grant me zis vish, monsieur! I vill zrow myself at your feet—I vill implore—I vill weep—"

"For goodness sake, do nothing of the kind, monsieur!" exclaimed Mr. Quelch, hastily. "I—I—I—if you are prepared to pardon these boys for the outrageous action of which you were the victim—"

"Mais oui! Yes! I pardon zem! You vill pardon zem also, mon bon ami, else I weep at your feet—"

Mr. Quelch breathed hard. The prospect of the excitable and emotional little gentleman weeping at his feet seemed to alarm him.

"Very well, monsieur! Since you, the victim of their outrageous action, ask their pardon, they shall be pardoned, and I—I will explain to Dr. Locke."

"Merci, monsieur! Zank you."

The gimlet-eye turned on the silent five.

"Wharton! Cherry! Bull! Nugent! Hurree Singh! You are pardoned, at Monsieur Charpentier's intercession, for that outrageous act. You will each take an imposition of five hundred lines, for leaving your dormitory after lights out. The matter is at an end. Go!"

"Thank you, sir!" gasped five fellows together.

"Zousand zanks, sair!" trilled Monsieur Charpentier. "Mon bon Monsieur Quelch, I zank you, and I kiss you ze hands. Allez, mes garçons—it is all left, now."

It was all right, at least: and gladly the five delinquents filed from their form-master's study. In the corridor, they exchanged eloquent glances.

"Luck, what?" murmured Bob Cherry.

"The luckfulness is terrific!"

"Good old sport, Mossoo!" said Johnny Bull. "I'll jolly well punch any fellow's head who rags in the French class next term."

"Hard!" agreed Nugent.

"We'll give Mosso a cheer when he goes," said Harry.

"Yes rather! Vive la France, and then some!" grinned Bob.

The Famous Five had lines on hand. But lines did not matter. The clouds had rolled by—they were not going up to the Head—the dire consequences of that error in the fog had faded away—and all was calm and bright! With cheery faces, they went out joyfully into the frosty quad.

XVIII

AMAZING!

“HALLO, hallo! hallo!”
“Loder!”

“Too late!”

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Of late, the Famous Five had not felt much like laughing. But they felt like it now—and they laughed, a merry peal.

They had joined the crowd outside the House. Fellows were congratulating them on their narrow escape. They were looking, and feeling, on top of the world, when Loder of the Sixth came into the offing. His eyes were grimly on them, as he came, and they knew what the expression on his face meant. Loder, at last, had heard!

But he had heard too late!

Mossoo's unexpected return to Greyfriars, his intercession with Quelch, had saved the situation! Loder was not aware of that—yet! All that he knew was, that Monsieur Charpentier had come back: the taxi was still waiting at the House steps. He was quite unaware of what had passed in Quelch's study.

It was amusing, from the point of view of the Famous Five. A surprise was coming to Gerald Loder.

He came striding up. The Famous Five watched him, with smiling faces, as he came. Other fellows round them grinned. They could all see that Loder had the news at last—too late to be of any use to him.

“Wharton!” rapped Loder.

“Yes, Loder” answered Harry, with great meekness.

“I've just heard what seems to have been tattled up and down the school for some time. From what I hear, you were in that affair last night—the five of you.”

Loder's look was fairly gloating. Loder was not always a whale on duty, as a prefect. But he was going to enjoy doing his duty this time—taking five delinquents to their form-master.

“Have you heard that, Loder?” asked Bob.

“Isn't it true?” demanded Loder.

“Oh, yes, it's quite true!” answered Harry. “We mopped the paint over Mossoo last night. We mistook him for a fellow we thought was going out of bounds to call at a pub!”

Loder jumped.

“Wha-a-t?” he ejaculated.

"The fog, or something, kept that fellow indoors, and we mopped it over Mossoo, by mistake in the fog," explained Harry.

Loder caught his breath. He knew now what would have happened to him, had not Mossoo warned him off that nocturnal excursion.

"Guess who the fellow was, Loder!" said Bob Cherry.

Loder's eyes gleamed at the cheery five.

"I don't think a yarn like that will help you much," he said, between his set lips. "I'm taking you to Quelch now—and Quelch will take you to the Head—"

"We've been to Quelch," said Harry, "and we're not going to the Head, Loder. Monsieur Charpentier has pulled us through. He asked Quelch—"

"That will do!" snapped Loder.

"But it happens to be true," said Harry, laughing. "Mossoo begged us off, and it's all over. You can go and ask Quelch, if you like."

Loder stared at him. He could hardly believe it. It seemed incredible to him that Monsieur Charpentier, who had been smothered with green paint the night before, could have begged off the offenders. Yet the cheery smiling faces of those offenders indicated that the clouds had rolled by.

"It's impossible!" he gasped, at last.

"Ask Quelch!" smiled Frank Nugent.

"He couldn't possibly—!"

"Only he has!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo, here he is!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as a dapper little figure came out of the House. "Ask Mossoo, Loder."

Loder stared round at Mossoo, as he tripped down the steps to the waiting taxi. He hurried across to him, as he stepped into the cab.

"Monsieur Charpentier!" he exclaimed. "Stop a minute, please."

"Vat is it, zen? I have one train zat I go to catch—!"

"I have found out who it was attacked you last night, Monsieur Charpentier—who threw the paint over you—!"

"Vraiment? Zat I already know, Lodair, since zose garçons own down to it. Zat is all forgive and zat is all ovair."

Loder gritted his teeth.

"But you can't let it pass like that, Monsieur Charpentier," he exclaimed. "Those young rascals—"

"Zey are verree good garçons, Lodair, and I zink zat it is you who are one rascal!"

"Wha-a-a-t?" stuttered Loder. He stared blankly at the little gentleman. A crowd of fellows stared at him, too.

"Mais oui! I zink you are one rascal, Lodair!" Monsieur Charpentier, sitting in the taxi, leaned out, to address his final remarks to Loder of the Sixth.

"I zink you are one peeg, Lodair."

"Look here—!" roared Loder.

"Mais oui, you are one peeg, and one rascal, and I pull you ze nose!" said

Monsieur Charpentier: and to the utter amazement of all beholders, he reached out, gripped Loder's nose between finger and thumb, and gave it a vigorous tweak. The Greyfriars fellows, staring on, wondered whether they were dreaming.

"Oooogh!" spluttered Loder, staggering back.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Smithy.

"Is he potty?" said Skinner. "Tweaking a man's nose—"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Loder, almost dazed, clasped his painful nose with his hand. The taxi moved off, gliding away to the gates. Loder, his hand still to his nose, stood staring after it, in quite a dizzy state.

"Come on!" said Bob Cherry, and the Famous Five cut after the taxi. They wanted a last word with Mossoo, and to give him a cheer as he went.

The taxi slowed and turned out at the gateway. It halted in the road. Harry Wharton and Co. came up with a rush. The sallow face with its pointed beard looked out from the taxi window, with a smile on it.

"Mossoo—!" exclaimed Harry. "We—we want to thank you just once more—"

"Zat is all left, mon garçon."

"It was good of you, sir," said Nugent.

"The goodfulness was great, and the thankfulness of our absurd selves is preposterous!" exclaimed Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Zat is all left—or is it zat you say all right?"

"All right, sir!" grinned Bob.

"Zen it is all right! I have somezing to say to you, mes garçons, before zat I go to catch ze train." Mossoo leaned from the window, and lowered his voice, "What price pulling Loder's nose, what? Don't often get a chance to pull a pre's nose! Ha, ha! See you chaps later, at calling-over."

The taxi drove on.

Harry Wharton and Co. stood quite still, dumb with amazement. For Mossoo's last words had not been spoken in Mossoo's squeaky voice. They had been spoken in quite a different voice: a voice familiar to Remove ears—the voice of William Wibley!

They stood dumbfounded, till the taxi disappeared in the distance. Then they looked at one another.

"Wibley!" said Harry Wharton, quite faintly.

"Not Mossoo at all—Wibley!" breathed Bob.

"Who'd have guessed—"

"Who'd have dreamed—"

"Oh, suffering cats and crocodiles! That's why he begged us off—it's old Wib that begged us off—"

"Great pip!"

The Famous Five went back into the quad, in quite a dazed state. They knew now why Wibley had gone out, that afternoon, with a packed bag—to

change, and make up as Mossoo, in some secluded spot. They knew now that Monsieur Charpentier had not missed his train. He was on the Channel, by that time, on his way to France and le petit Adolphe!

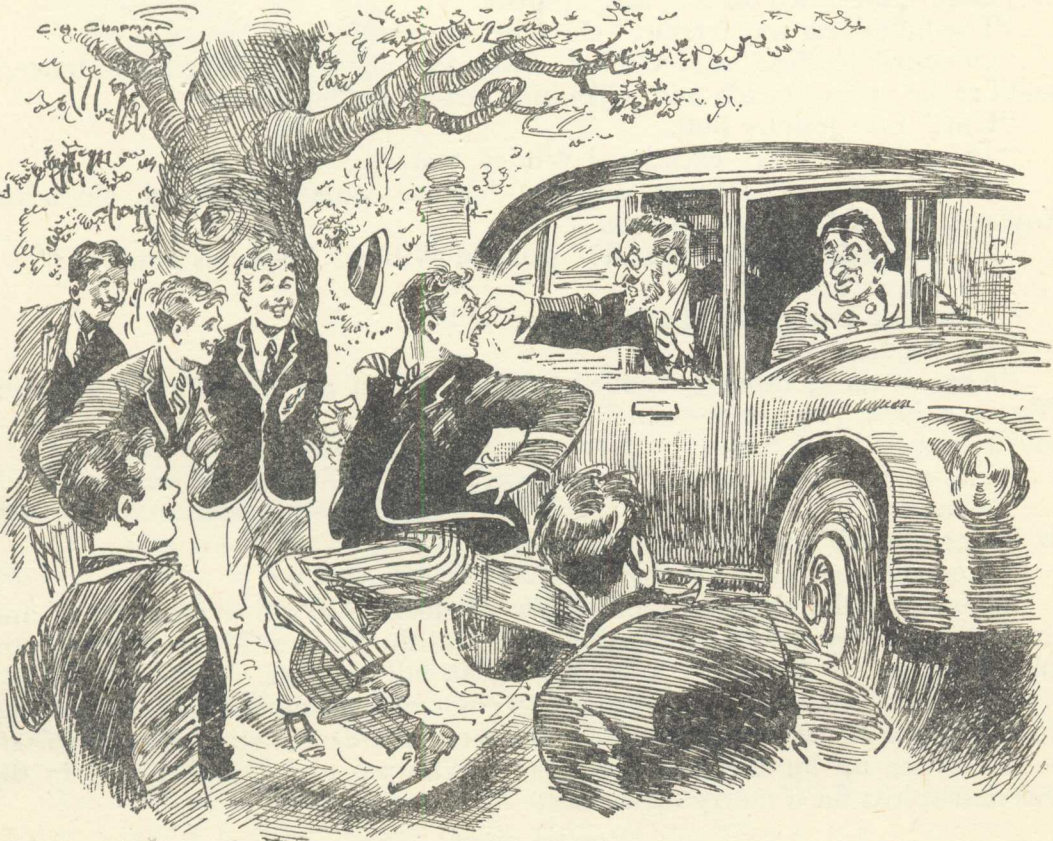
It was not Monsieur Charpentier—it was Monsieur William Wibley—who had arrived in that taxi: and not a fellow at Greyfriars had had the remotest suspicion that it was not the genuine Mossoo—even Quelch's gimlet-eye had failed to penetrate the disguise of the amateur actor of his form!

Even now they knew, the chums of the Remove could hardly believe it! They walked back to the House like fellows in a dream!

XIX

ALL SERENE!

WILLIAM WIBLEY presented his customary aspect, when he turned up for calling over in hall. The Famous Five gazed at him: and he responded



... he reached out and gripped Loder's nose.

with a cheery wink. Looking at Wibley, they could still hardly believe that, only an hour or two ago, they had taken him for Monsieur Charpentier: he did not bear the least resemblance to the French master now.

But they had! There was no doubt about that! They, and everyone else, had fallen for Wibley's remarkable stunt. He had played the part of Mossoo, while Mossoo was far away on his journey home: and in the part of Mossoo he had come to the rescue of the Famous Five in their scrape—and pulled them through. The clouds had rolled by, and all was serene: and they owed it all to William Wibley!

"Wib, you old ass—!" murmured Bob Cherry, when they came out of hall. Wibley chuckled.

"Did it work?" he grinned.

"It did!" said Harry Wharton. "We never dreamed—"

"Of course you didn't!" said Wibley, cheerfully. "When I play a part, I play it—with the accent on the 'play'."

"Even Quelch fell for it!" said Nugent.

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

"Of course he did!" said Wibley. "My dear chaps, if I were a foot taller, I could make up as Quelch and make him believe he had a twin!"

"Um!" said Johnny Bull.

"Think I couldn't?" exclaimed Wibley, warmly.

"Oh! Yes!" said Johnny, hastily. "Of—of course you could, old bean! Anyhow, you did Mossoo all right!"

"Did you notice Loder in hall?" grinned Wibley. "Was his nose red?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"First time I've tweaked a pre's nose—!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Keep it dark, though," added Wibley. "If it got out—" He whistled. "But look here, you chaps—can I act?"

"You can!" said Bob.

"The canfulness is terrific."

"Wonderful!" said Nugent.

"Marvellous!" said Harry Wharton.

"Tremendous!" said Johnny Bull.

William Wibley smiled complacently. He had the artistic temperament, and could do with any amount of admiration! And the Famous Five were too grateful for services rendered, not to ladle it out in full measure.

What would have happened, if it had come out, would hardly bear thinking of. But there was no danger of that. It did not come out: and when Greyfriars School broke up for the holidays, Harry Wharton and Co. departed in the cheeriest spirits for a merry Christmas.

THE END

The Editor apologizes for the error in the illustration on page 53. Loder is shown as receiving the paint instead of Mossoo. As the reader knows, Loder was known to be going out and fully intended to go out. This was anticipated and the illustration made, but then Mossoo came along . . .



BESSIE BUNTER'S BIG BANG!



HILDA RICHARDS

I

“CLARA, dear—!”
“Hook it!”

That reply, from Miss Clara Trevlyn of the Fourth Form at Cliff House School, could not have been called elegant. Such remarks were really not in the best traditions of the Cliff House Fourth.

But Clara was a little given to expressing herself slightly slangily. And she had no patience to waste on Bessie Bunter.

Bessie, as often happened, was superfluous.

Clara had arrived at the door of her study, No. 7 in the Fourth. She had a carefully-wrapped and tied parcel in her hand. That parcel attracted the attention of Bessie Bunter. Bessie rolled up, her little round eyes and big round spectacles, that were so like her Brother Billy's at Greyfriars, fastened on the parcel.

She addressed Clara in her most endearing tones. When a Fourth-form girl was taking a parcel to her study, close on tea-time, it was a moment for endearment.

Clara, it seemed, had no use for Bessie's endearments. Her reply was short and sharp.

"But I say—!" persisted Bessie.

"Buzz!" said Clara, still slangy and still impatient.

"If you're going to have tea early—"

"We're not."

"What have you got in that parcel, then?"

"Br-r-r-r-r!"

"I jolly well know it's tuck," said Bessie, with a reproachful blink. "You've been down to Friardale, and brought it back with you. I jolly well know it's something special, or you'd have got it at the school shop. I say, I'll come to tea if you like—!"

"It's nothing for tea! Now mizzle."

"Oh, really, Clara—"

"Travel!"

"Look here, I'll help you build the bonfire after tea," said Bessie. "You want it ready for to-morrow, the Fifth. You haven't got enough stuff for it, and I'll get some books from my study—Barbara and Mabel won't miss them—"

"You little fat fathead!" said Clara. "If you snoop any of Babs' or Mabs' books for the bonfire—"

"Well, I only want to help," said Bessie. "Miss Bellew's given us leave to have a bonfire on the Fifth of November, and we want a good one. A few grammars and dictionaries would help—"

"Run away and play!"

"Shall I come into your study and help you unpack that parcel?"

"No!" shrieked Clara. "Scram!"

And by way of inducing Elizabeth Bunter to "scram", Clara swung up the parcel by the string, and brandished it over the fattest head at Cliff House School. Bessie jumped back in alarm. She jumped rather too hastily, and stumbled. Then there was a heavy bump in the Fourth-form passage, as Bessie sat down.

"Ha, ha, ha!" trilled Miss Clara.

"Cat!" gasped Bessie.

Clara, laughing, went into No. 7 Study, and closed the door after her with a bang. Bessie Bunter clambered to her feet—not a rapid process, for she had almost as much weight to lift as her brother Billy. She gasped for breath as she resumed the perpendicular.

Then she stooped to the keyhole of No. 7.

"Cat!" howled Bessie, through the keyhole. "Think I want anything out of your measly parcel! Cat!"

And having thus expressed her feelings, Elizabeth Bunter rolled away to her own study, breathing indignation—with what little breath she had left!

II

MARJORIE HAZELDENE glanced up, as Clara came into No. 7 and banged the door. She was seated at the study table, with Dolly Jobling. Two heads were bent over a French exercise when Clara arrived.

It was very cosy and pleasant in No. 7 Study. Outside, the winter dusk was falling thickly: but within, all was cheery. A bright fire burned in the study grate, and it was warm and comfortable in spite of the November chill. Clara slammed the parcel down on the table, and Dolly Jobling jumped, and there was a spurt of ink from her pen, which did not improve the French exercise on which the two juniors were engaged.

"Oh!" ejaculated Dolly, "look what you've done, Clara!"

Clara looked: but did not seem impressed.

"That's all right," she said, "Mamselle never makes a fuss. Not like Bellew, with an eagle's eye for a blot."

"All the same—!" began Marjorie.

"Never mind all the same," interrupted Clara, briskly, "it's done now, and it doesn't matter anyway. I say, aren't you through yet? How long is it going to take you to push Dolly through that exercise, Marjorie?"

"Nearly through," said Marjorie. "There'll be time for a trot round the quad before tea, after Dolly's taken this in to Mamselle."

"I've got them!" announced Clara.

Miss Clara was, apparently, alluding to the contents of the parcel she had slammed on the table. There was triumphant note in her voice.

"That little noodle Bessie nobbled me as I came up," went on Clara. "She fancied there was tuck in that parcel! She would!"

"She would!" agreed Dolly, "and I wish there was, instead of what you've brought from Friardale, Clara."

"Rot!" said Clara.

She made a grimace at Marjorie, across the table. Marjorie's face was very grave.

"Do you wish it was tuck, instead of fireworks?" asked Clara, pettishly.

"Never mind about the tuck," said Marjorie, "but I wish you hadn't brought in fireworks, Clara, after what Miss Bellew said."

Sniff, from Clara.

"Who's Bellew?" she snapped.

"Well, she's our form-mistress," said Dolly Jobling, "and she's very strict about fireworks in the studies. She thinks they're dangerous things to have about in junior studies."

"Rubbish!" said Clara, decisively. She made another grimace at Marjorie. "Stop looking as serious as a judge on the bench, old dear—it spoils your good looks—such as they are!"

Marjorie smiled. But her face became grave again.

"It's too bad, Clara," she said. "Miss Bellew told us, quite distinctly, that we could have a bonfire in the School Field to-morrow, and buy our fireworks at the school shop any time on the Fifth. But she was very strict about getting them in beforehand, and keeping them in the studies. She would go off at the deep end if she knew."

"Well, she won't know, so that's all right," said Clara, cheerfully. "I've got a splendid lot at Friardale—much better than we could have got for the money at the school shop, to-morrow. Squibs, crackers, jumping-crackers, Roman candles, and catherine-wheels—something of everything in old Uncle Clegg's shop. Think they won't be safe in the study cupboard here?"

"Yes, of course. But—"

"But what, then?"

"Miss Bellew—!"

"Bother Miss Bellew!"

"Oh, Clara—!"

"Bless Miss Bellew! If I wasn't the most lady-like girl in the Fourth, I'd say blow Miss Bellew!"

Marjorie laughed.

"Well, it's done now," she said. "I wish you hadn't—there's such a thing as respecting the rules, Clara—"

"Bother the rules!"

"Yes, but—"

"Bless the rules!"

"My dear Clara—!"

"Blow the rules!"

Miss Clara, with her nose in the air marched across to the study cupboard, and deposited the parcel therein. Marjorie shook her head, and resumed work on the French exercise with Dolly. Clara's reckless disregard of rules, and of her form-mistress's strict injunctions on the subject of fireworks in the studies, worried her more thoughtful friend: but Clara, like an obstinate horse, had to be given her head: and that was that.

"Now buck up with that beastly French," said Clara, as she stood warming her hands before the crackling fire. "It's all right, Marge—Bellew won't know a thing. How could she! We're not going to let off crackers in the study, just to let her know we've got them here."

"But—!" said Marjorie.

"Blow butts!" interrupted Clara. "Get that putrid French done, and let's get out for a trot before tea. It will be lock-ups soon."

The French exercise was finished at last. Then the three girls left No. 7 Study, and went down.

III

“CATS!” murmured Bessie Bunter.

Bessie was in her study, No. 4. It was near tea time, but Barbara Redfern and Mabel Lynn, who had the pleasure—or otherwise—of sharing No. 4 with Miss Elizabeth Bunter, had not come up. It looked, to Bessie, as if they were going to tea in Hall: in which case there would be no tea in the study for Bessie: who was in the usual state of members of the Bunter tribe,—stony! So when Bessie, through the open doorway, had a view of three girls passing, she frowned a fat frown at them and murmured “Cats!”

Unconscious of Bessie, Marjorie and Clara and Dolly went down the stairs, to deliver that French exercise to Mademoiselle Lupin, and then take a “trot” in the quad before lock-ups, and call at the school shop for something for tea in No. 7. Bessie, quite unaware of that intention on their part, had no doubt that there was something for tea already in No. 7—lots, in fact! Had she not seen Clara carry in that parcel from Friardale, with her own eyes and her own spectacles? And what could it contain but tuck for tea?

“Cats!” repeated Bessie, morosely.

She was indignant.

With a parcel of good things from Uncle Clegg’s in their study, they might at least have asked a girl to tea, Bessie considered. They were “cats”: everyone who displeased Miss Bunter was a “cat”: indeed it might have been inferred from Bessie that Cliff House School was an almost wholly feline establishment.

Bessie rose from Barbara’s armchair, and blinked out of the study doorway. Marjorie and Co. had disappeared: and there was still no sign of Barbara and Mabel coming up. It looked as if Bessie, if she wanted any tea at all, would have to roll down the staircase and join the scramble in the hall.

Or would she?

There was a gleam in the little round eyes behind the big round spectacles. Marjorie and Co. were gone—and they certainly had not taken that parcel with them. It must be in the cupboard in No. 7. That study would be vacant, in their absence: and there was nobody about in the passage.

Bessie stepped out of No. 4.

Quietly, she walked up the passage to No. 7.

At the door of that study, she paused, to cast a stealthy and cautious blink round her. The coast was clear! Nobody was going to see Bessie Bunter going into No. 7—and the parcel was there, at Bessie’s mercy. And in matters of tuck, Bessie was merciless!

She rolled into No. 7, and shut the door after her.

She rolled across to the study cupboard.

“Good!” breathed Bessie, as she blinked in. Her eyes danced behind her spectacles. There was the parcel from Friardale.

There it was—just as she had seen it in Clara’s hand! They had not even

unwrapped it yet! There it was, wrapped in brown paper, tied with string. A fat hand reached into the cupboard.

In a moment, that parcel was transferred from the shelf in the cupboard, to the table before the fire. Bessie grabbed up a pair of scissors, and cut the string.

Her extensive mouth watered at the prospect of what she was going to find in that parcel from Uncle Clegg's. A cake, at least, and probably jam: very likely dough-nuts, possibly meringues: all sorts of good things, Bessie had no doubt. She almost gasped with anticipation as her fat hands pulled open the wrapping-paper.

And then—!

Then, as the poet has expressed it, a change came o'er the spirit of her dream!

She gazed into that parcel.

Her eyes almost popped through her spectacles at it.

"Cats!" hissed Bessie.

It was an overwhelming blow!

Not a single edible article met her eyes or spectacles. Not a cake—not a dough-nut—not a meringue—not a stick of toffee, a bar of chocolate, or even a bullseye! Crackers and squibs, Roman candles and catherine-wheels, were there in plenty! Absolutely nothing to eat!

Bessie Bunter could eat almost anything. But even Bessie Bunter could not eat crackers, or squibs, or Roman candles, or catherine-wheels. Her feelings, as she gazed at that stack of fireworks, were inexpressible.

"Cats!" gasped Bessie.

She glared at that parcel, with a glare that might almost have cracked her spectacles. All her trouble for nothing—and nothing to eat! Not so much as a plum or a crumb! It was altogether too disappointing and exasperating! In a spasm of wrath, Bessie raised a fat hand, and knocked that parcel whizzing off the table. Crash!

IV

FIZZZZZZZZZZZ!
"Oh!" gasped Bessie.

Fizzzzz!

She jumped.

It was, in fact, rather a reckless proceeding, to knock that parcel of fireworks off the table, with an angry smack, so near the fireplace. Bessie did not think before doing so—thinking, really, was not much in Bessie's line. Certainly she had no intention—did not even dream—of landing that parcel in the fire-place. She did it without intending to or dreaming of it!

Fizzzzzzzzzzz!

There was a shower of sparks. That parcel had landed fairly in the middle of a crackling fire. Flames were licking all round it.

"Oh, scissors!" gasped Bessie.

She made a step towards the grate, to drag the parcel out of the glowing fire before it was too late! But it was too late already!

Bang!

Fuses were fizzing! The first cracker went off with a bang. It was followed fast by others.

Bang! bang! bang!

"Oooooogh!" gasped Bessie.

She jumped back in haste.

Bang! bang! bang! bang! Bang! Whizzzzz! Whooooosh! Bang! bang! Crackers were cracking, squibs were squibbing, Roman candles fizzing, catherine-wheels scattering sparks. Bang! bang! bang! BANG!

The study filled with smoke and the smell of gunpowder. A jumping-cracker leaped from the explosion in the fire, and landed at Bessie's feet with a bang. She jumped clear of the carpet. The cracker jumped as Bessie jumped, and banged again. Shrieking, Bessie Bunter fled from the study and the havoc



"Oooooogh!" gasped Bessie.

she had wrought. Bang! bang! bang! bang! followed her as she went. She slammed the door of No. 4 after her, and collapsed into Barbara Redfern's armchair, spluttering for breath, and hardly aware whether she was on her head or her heels. From along the passage came the merry sound of fireworks, echoing all over Cliff House.

Bang! bang! bang!

There were excited exclamations and hurrying footsteps. In a matter of minutes, Miss Bellew, form-mistress of the Fourth, and a crowd of girls, were staring into No. 7—reeking with smoke and smell, with crackers still cracking and squibs still squibbing, and a catherine-wheel fizzing in the middle of the room. The expression on Miss Bellew's speaking countenance resembled that of the fabled Gorgon.

"Fireworks in this study—against my express injunctions!" gasped Miss Bellew. "And they have exploded! Barbara!"

"Yes, Miss Bellew."

"Find Marjorie and Clara and Dorothy, and tell them to come to my study immediately."

"Yes, Miss Bellew."

Bang! bang! bang!

Miss Bellew stayed only to see the last spark extinguished, before she went down to deal with the delinquents in her study.

V

THERE was a bonfire in the School Field at Cliff House the following day, when all the junior girls were pleased to remember the Fifth of November, the gunpowder treason and plot! Under Miss Bellew's supervising eye, there were crackers and squibs and Roman candles and catherine-wheels. But there was one member of the Fourth Form who did not join in the celebration of Mr. Fawkes' anniversary. Clara Trevlyn had only a distant glimpse of dancing flame as she sat in the detention-room, writing out sadly and sorrowfully "Fireworks must not be taken into the studies" five hundred times: with detention for four half-holidays to follow.

How those fireworks had gone off, in No. 7, was a mystery to Clara. But they had—there was no doubt about that! They had gone off, with a terrific banging that had roused out every echo in Cliff House School. As Bessie Bunter did not think it judicious to enlighten her, it had to remain a mystery.

By the time she had written her five-hundredth line, no doubt it was fully impressed on Clara's volatile mind that junior studies were no place for explosives. And so long as her detentions lasted she was not the least little bit pleased to remember the Fifth of November!

THE END



I

It was, as usual, Bundle's own fault.

Dolcot juniors were strictly and sternly forbidden ever to set foot on a Time-Tripper.

Senior men could go. In the Sixth Form they could be trusted to be circumspect. But irresponsible juniors might risk getting stranded in some far-off past age, and perhaps never succeed in getting back to the Twentieth Century again at all.

In the Head's opinion, juniors might be reckless and thoughtless. Bundle, undoubtedly, was both.

Nevertheless, Bundle was determined to go.

If he couldn't get leave, he was going without leave. He had saved up a pound for his fare. And he was going.

Bundle was not fearfully keen on history in the history-class. Often his form master, Mundy, had to call him to order, when his attention wandered. But he was quite keen, and very curious, to see history in the making, as it were. You could do that, on one of those Time Trips.

It might come in useful, too, to a fellow who was a bit of a dunce in history. A fellow might, for instance, have to do a paper on the Battle of Hastings. What an advantage it would be, actually to have seen that battle taking place!

And it cost only a pound for the trip backwards in Time, as far as 1066. That was a considerable sum for a Fourth-form junior at Dolcot, certainly: but it was very reasonable, all things considered.

Bundle of the Fourth had a leaning towards scientific things. And the Time-Tripper was one of the latest developments in scientific research. It had never been heard of as recently as 1965.

Scientific men had discovered how to split the atom: how to eliminate whole cities by merely pressing a button: how to bombard the Moon with guided missiles: even how to invade Mars and carry on war with its inhabitants. But only lately had they discovered the secret of travelling backward in Time, and seeing for themselves how much truth there was—or wasn't!—in the history-books.

The first machine, designed by the celebrated Professor Balmycrumpet, had been quite a wonder, even in an age of wonders. The newspapers had been splashed with head-lines. But since then, it had gone into mass-production, and become rather commonplace. You took a trip back to the Battle of Hastings, or even to the Battle of the Arbela, just as the old folks in the 1950's had taken trips to Southend-on-Sea or Boulogne-sur-Mer.

It was all very well for the head-master of Dolcot to fancy that juniors wouldn't be as safe as seniors on such a trip. Bundle did not agree.

He was jolly well going. It made him quite envious, when he heard Bates of the Sixth, or Frewin of the Fifth, describe how he had dropped in at ancient Rome just in time to see Julius Caesar on his way to the Senate-House on the Ides of March: or at Athens to hear Pericles making one of his epoch-making speeches: or at Carthage to give Hannibal the once-over.

Bundle settled that he was going, and he fixed on Wednesday afternoon, which was a half-holiday at Dolcot. He was going anyhow: but, with the Head's cane in mind, he decided to ask leave, hoping for the best. He wanted to get a close-up view of 1066 and all that: but he did not want to see his head-master afterwards. So he presented himself in Mr. Mundy's study, hoping to find him in one of his good tempers, which happened occasionally.

Unluckily, Mr. Mundy was not in an amiable mood. He was seated at his ether-phone, where he had some difficulty in getting through to a friend on the planet of Neptune. It was a long-distance call: sometimes liable to interruption if a wandering comet, or anything of that kind, got in the way.

He gave Bundle quite a cross glance.

"What is it, Bundle?" he rapped.

"If you please, sir—!" began Bundle, meekly.

"Be brief!" rapped Mr. Mundy.

"If you would please give me leave to take the Time-Tripper as far as 1066 this afternoon, sir—"

The Fourth-form master raised his hand.

"That will do, Bundle!" he said.

"But, sir—"

"You are a careless, thoughtless, irresponsible boy!" said Mr. Mundy, severely. "Last week you were permitted to go on your air-bicycle to Central Africa. Did you, or did you not, fall into the Limpopo?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! But—"

"You came back drenched!" said Mr. Mundy. "Only last Saturday you were allowed to see the Space Ball start on its whirl to Mars. Did you, or did you not, step on it, and narrowly escape being carried off to that planet, which would have kept you away from your lessons for several days?"

"Oh! Yes, sir! But—"

"I shall not give you leave," said Mr. Mundy. "It would be like you, Bundle, to wander away from the Time-Tripper, and get lost in the eleventh century. You are forbidden to go."

"But, sir—!"

"That will do!" said Mr. Mundy. He gave Bundle a very sharp look, "If you should go without leave, Bundle, you will be sent up to your head-master. That is a warning. Now leave my study."

"But, sir—!" mumbled Bundle.

Mr. Mundy gave him no further heed. He was through to Neptune at last, and chatting with his friend on that planet. Bundle left the study.

"Blow!" said Bundle, as he went down the passage.

He hadn't made matters better by asking leave. In fact he had made them worse, for Mundy was evidently suspicious: and if Bundle did not turn up for calling over, he would guess. He wouldn't suppose that Bundle had merely gone off on his air-bike to China or Peru, or any little thing like that: he would guess that he had gone on that Time Trip. That meant going up to the Head: and only too well Bundle knew how the Head could whop!

He hesitated.

But it is well said that he who hesitates is lost. Bundle's hesitation was brief. He had his pound in his pocket, and he had only to walk as far as Bamford to take the Time-Tripper. It was due back at five, which gave him ample time to get in at Dolcot for calling-over—if nothing went wrong—though it was true that things did often go wrong with Bundle of the Fourth. Anyhow his mind was made up, and he went.

II

"TAKE your places for 1066!" said the conductor.

Bundle took his place with a dozen other time-passengers.

It was rather an exciting experience to Bundle: it was his first Time Trip. He was quite surprised to see the conductor yawn, just as if he had been conducting nothing more exciting than a bus.

But it was, in fact, only one of the short cheap trips. Trips back to ancient Rome, or Athens, or Persepolis, lasted longer and cost more: it was three or four pounds to get a close-up of the glory that was Greece or the grandeur that was Rome. It was very small beer to the conductor, who took a party every day as far as 1066, and was quite bored with Normans and Saxons.

"Tickets!" said the conductor, with another yawn. "Keep your seats! One hour in 1066, with a view of the Battle of 'Astings and death of King 'Arold. 'Old your breath when we start—it's a bit of a jerk! 'Ere goes."

He touched a button.

Bundle, with his keen interest in things scientific, would have been glad to know how the machine worked. It seemed easy and simple enough, though no doubt it was really more or less complicated. The spherical car whirled when the conductor touched the button, and it whirled faster and faster, and made him a little giddy at first: though he soon got used to it. After a time, he was able to catch glimpses from the windows: and those glimpses surprised him, as they naturally would any fellow on his first Time Trip. Strange scenes flashed past the windows: quite puzzling, till he realized that it was history that was unrolling, and Time that was slipping by.

The conductor could yawn, if he liked: but Bundle did not feel in the least like yawning, when he caught a glimpse of the Spanish Armada, with Drake drumming them up the Channel as he drummed them long ago.

Later—or rather, earlier, as he was going backwards through Time—he had a momentary view of a royal barge on the Thames, in which a fat unwieldy man sat, who everyone else on the barge seemed to be treating with great respect and fear. The fat important man reminded him of a character in fiction called Billy Bunter: and he realized with quite a thrill that he was staring at Henry the Eighth.

Henry the Eighth disappeared like a dissolving view. Then Bundle found himself staring at a horseman in armour, brandishing a sword, surrounded by fighting men-at-arms. Even as he looked, the rider was unhorsed, his steed slain. He was on his feet in a moment, waving his sword, and shouting: so loudly and fiercely that his voice penetrated the Time-Tripper:

"A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

And Bundle knew that it was Richard the Third at the Battle of Bosworth. But Time raced by, and Richard Crookback vanished.

After that, the speed of the whirling Time-Tripper blurred the scenes, and

Bundle saw nothing more distinctly, till there was a sudden stop. The conductor's yawning voice came to his ears:

"Ere you are, gents! Battle of 'Astings going on yonder! You can get out if you like, but look out for the arrers: and don't get near them Normans—they're a narsty lot. Mind you don't miss the 'bus back—can't wait for nobody when we're working to schedule."

He threw open the door.

Bundle stared out.

It was really exciting. Indeed he could hardly believe that he was back in the eleventh century already. But it seemed that he was. 1066 and all that were all round him. From a little distance came the sound of shouting, of clashing arms and thudding horses, and yells and groans. Masses of fighting-men, armed with swords and spears, were engaged in furious combat. Archers plied their bows and the air was thick with arrows. Bundle jumped out. The other time-passengers kept their seats, preferring the shelter of the Time-Tripper, with so many arrows flying.

But Bundle wanted to catch a glimpse of King Harold, if he could. He ran downhill, nearer to the raging battle. An arrow whizzed by his ear. He did not heed it. He glimpsed a fine-looking man in Saxon armour, with flashing blue eyes, and flaxen hair showing under his steel cap, leading on his men sword in hand, and knew that it was Harold, the last of the Saxon Kings: and then, right under his horrified eyes, the fatal arrow flew, and King Harold went down. Of course Bundle knew that it was nine hundred years ago, but it gave him a pang all the same, and he stood staring—and then he was suddenly caught in a rush of retreating Saxons, and swept nearly off his feet.

He was rushed on headlong in their midst.

By the time he got out of the throng, he hardly knew where he was. He had had a summer holiday at Hastings, and fancied that he knew the country: but it all seemed different in 1066. Fighting was still going on, in spots, at a distance. Bundle climbed a tree and looked round for the Time-Tripper. He realized that time was nearly up: and he remembered Mr. Mundy, and the Head's cane if he should miss the machine back. That would mean hanging on in the eleventh century until—and unless—he could get a lift home in another Time-Tripper: with an awful row at Dolcot to follow. And he mightn't spot another Time-Tripper, which would mean that he would be stranded for good in that long-past century, under the rule of Duke William of Normandy! The thought of it made Bundle feel quite desperate.

From the tree-top, however, he spotted the Time-Tripper on the hillside at a considerable distance. He made out the conductor in the doorway, looking out—no doubt for Bundle. He knew that the man wouldn't wait. As he had said, they worked to schedule on these Time Trips. There was just time, Bundle thought, to do it, if he ran his very hardest.

He slithered down the tree and ran.

It was uphill, and hard going, Bundle panted as he flew. Suddenly there was a crash of hoofs behind him. He gave a hurried glance back: to see a Norman knight, with lance in rest, charging after him.

"Oh, crikey!" gasped Bundle.

The knight shouted to him, in Norman-French. Bundle did not heed. He raced on. His feet hardly touched the ground as he flew. After him galloped the Norman. Bundle hardly knew how he escaped. He just did it! With a last effort, almost at his last breath, he reached the open doorway of the Time-Tripper, which the conductor was about to slam. A final bound landed him inside. The conductor slammed the door, and touched the starting-button.

The Norman reined in his steed. Bundle stared from the window. The Norman knight, with an amazed expression on his face—natural enough as he could never before have seen anything like a Time-Tripper from the Twentieth Century—lifted his lance to thrust it at the slammed door. Bundle shivered. One crash of that heavy lance would have crippled the frail machine, and probably wrecked it in the eleventh century.

But even as the thrust came, the Time-Tripper was on the whirl, spinning through Time: and as the thrusting lance reached the spot where the door had been, Bundle and his time-travelling companions were already well on into the twelfth century: 1066 and all that left far behind.

But, Bundle was rather serious, as the Time-Trimmer spun on through the centuries, back to the century he knew. He realized that he had had a very narrow escape: and perhaps it even dawned on him that the Head was quite right to prohibit these Time Trips for juniors. He did not feel quite at ease till he was safe back in the Twentieth Century, and jumped out of the Time-Tripper at Bamford in the year 1970.

"ADSUM!" chuckled Bundle, when Mr. Mundy called his name in hall at Dolcot.

He noted that Mundy's eye singled him out. But it was all right: he was back on time from 1066, and there he was in hall, answering "adsum" to his name at calling-over: as coolly as if he had merely been on an afternoon's run to Timbuctoo or Tasmania. But it had certainly been a near thing for Bundle!

THE END



I

GOOD OLD SKIP!

“THAT goat Perkinson!” said Tom King.

“That footling fathead!” said Dick Warren. “I thought that Skip was the biggest idiot at Felgate. But Perk goes one better.”

Tom King and Dick Warren, of the Felgate Fourth, were sauntering under the old Felgate oaks, when they beheld Perkinson of the Fifth.

They did not behold all of him. What they beheld was chiefly a pair of very long legs. In that quiet corner, hidden by trees from general view, Percival Perkinson was climbing the school wall. But they knew that it was Perkinson, though his back was to them: chiefly by the legs. They were the longest legs at Felgate.

They stopped, and stared at those legs, and the crumpled jacket further up. They heard Perkinson pant, as he dragged himself up the wall. His head and shoulders were over the top, but the rest of him followed slowly.

“The goat!” repeated Tom.

“The fathead!” repeated Warren.

On a half-holiday at Felgate School, there was no reason why any Felgate

man shouldn't walk out at gates: with the single exception of Perkinson of the Fifth. Perk was "gated".

He was gated, as a penalty for having "cheeked" his form-master, Mr. Kye. Everybody sympathized with Perkinson. When a fellow had his head crammed with Soccer, could he be expected to concentrate on Livy in the form-room?—especially a chap like Perk, who was first-class at football, and about fiftieth-class at Latin?

Perkinson, looking forward to the Dolcot match, simply living and breathing Soccer, just couldn't take the slightest interest in that ancient War, "quod Hannibale cum populo Romano gessere".

Kye, on the other hand, had that idea, so common to schoolmasters, that fellows came to school to learn things. So not infrequently there was friction.

Perkinson, certainly, shouldn't have murmured "Old ass!" when Kye ragged him for mistaking the perfect indicative for the infinitive. He did not mean Kye to hear. But Kye heard. Hence the gating.

Perkinson was a hot-headed fellow. His hot head was not over-supplied with brains. He was often in trouble: and now, evidently, he was looking for some more. King and Warren were quite dismayed to see him at it. They liked old Perk—everybody did. And what a winger he was! Now, regardless of "gates", he was going out—surreptitiously over the school wall in that secluded corner. It was an awful risk. No doubt he intended to return in the same surreptitious manner, and show up at calling-over, just as if he hadn't been out at all. Still it was fearfully risky. Kye might have an eye open for him—might miss him—and Kye was a fierce man. If Kye found out that Perkinson had disobeyed his order, it would be the last drop, as it were, in a full cup. Perk would have to go up to the Head. It would mean a flogging. It might mean the sack! Perk was risking all that, just because he jolly well wouldn't stay in gates at Kye's order. Probably he did not even know that what he was doing would be regarded, by Kye, as rank mutiny and defiance of all authority. He was jolly well going out if he jolly well liked, and that was that!

"The blithering ass!" sighed Dick Warren, watching the long legs on the wall. "If Kye finds this out, Perk mayn't be here to play in the Dolcot match at all! What a chump!"

"What about stopping him?" suggested Tom King.

"Um!" said Warren.

"Catch his legs and pull him back," said Tom.

"Oh, my hat!"

Warren looked very dubious. Gladly he would have stopped Perkinson from rushing on his fate. But Perkinson was a Fifth-Form senior, a great gamesman, a tremendous Blood. For juniors of the Fourth Form to interfere with his proceedings, however idiotic, was quite an unheard-of thing. Was he likely to listen to sweet reasonableness from Fourth-Form fellows? He was much more likely to smack their heads.

"Um!" said Warren, again.

"Chance it!" said Tom. "Dash it all, he might be sacked for cheeking old Kye to this extent. Old Langdale would miss him badly, if he couldn't play at Dolcot. Come on."

"Oh, all right!"

Perkinson was pulling himself up the high wall, slowly but surely. There was still time to catch the long legs. The two juniors ran forward, and captured a leg each.

There was a startled gasp from Perkinson of the Fifth. He was taken quite by surprise. The gasp was followed by a howl, as he came slithering down the wall, to land on the earth in a sitting posture.

He sat there, and spluttered, and stared at the two juniors. The fury that gathered in his face, as he realized that it was a couple of Fourth-Form kids who had pulled him down, was quite terrific.

"Why, you—you—you—!" he gurgled.

"Look here, Perkinson, you can't do it!" expostulated Tom King. "Old Kye will be as mad as a hatter if he finds out—"

"You'd have to go up to the Head!" said Warren.

"Might be the sack!" said Tom.

"For goodness sake—!" said Warren.

They had got so far, when Perkinson bounded to his feet. He did not answer them in words. He made a sudden grasp, catching a junior by the collar in either hand.

Crack!

Two yells were blended into one, as two heads came together with a sharp and painful concussion.

Then Perkinson lifted his foot.

Tom King and Dick Warren did not wait for it. They backed away hurriedly, rubbing painful heads as they backed. Perkinson of the Fifth gave them a glare, and turned to the wall again. Only too obviously, sweet reasonableness was wasted on him.

"Oh, crumbs!" breathed Tom, rubbing his head.

"Oh, crikey!" mumbled Warren.

The long legs whisked up the wall again. Tom and Warren, from a safe distance, watched them whisk, without the slightest idea of lugging Perk back a second time. Indeed at the moment they were rather inclined to hope that, if Perk was sacked for this exploit, he would be jolly well whopped before he went!

The long legs disappeared over the wall. Perk was gone. Tom King and Dick Warren, rubbing their heads, looked at one another.

"You ass, Tom!" said Warren. "Fat lot of use talking sense to the biggest idiot at Felgate! Blow him!"

"Blow him!" agreed Tom.

"Oh, my hat!" breathed Warren. "Here's Kye."

A stout form appeared on the path by the school wall. It was Kye, master of the Fifth, coming along. Perkinson had been gone about a minute! Only sixty seconds earlier, Kye would have had a view of long legs whisking! As it was, he saw nothing but two juniors rubbing their heads, and rolled on regardless.

"Keeping an eye open for Perk!" whispered Dick Warren, when the Fifth-Form master had rolled on.

Tom King nodded.

Kye was suspicious, that was clear. And Perk was out of gates! By the time the ache had faded out of their heads, King and Warren hoped that Perk would succeed in getting back undiscovered in time for roll. But they doubted it.

II

"YOU young ass!" roared Perkinson.
Skip Ruggles did not even hear him.

Skip, at the moment, was in unhappy expectation of sudden death.

The fattest member of the Felgate Fourth was on a bike, in Fell Lane. Holding a handle-bar with one fat hand, with the other he had extracted bullseyes from a sticky pocket. It was just like Skip to do that at a point where a wind in the lane hid the road ahead. So when a car came round the bend at about 50 m.p.h. it took Skip by surprise. He wobbled in the middle of the road, his round eyes popping at the destruction that was hurtling down on him, in an utterly bemused, bewildered, and helpless state.

What might have happened to Skip Ruggles, if Perkinson of the Fifth hadn't been strolling up Fell Lane, might have made a very sad chapter in the history of Felgate School.

Luckily, Perkinson was there. Perkinson was strolling up the lane, with a cheery smile on his face, thinking how happily and successfully he had done old Kye. But, ass as Perk was in most things, he had learned quick decision and quick action on the football field. Even while he roared at the hapless Skip, he was leaping to his aid.

How Perkinson gathered up the fat cyclist and the bicycle too, and whirled them out of the way of the rushing car, seemed quite a miracle. He just did it. Only just!

Skip, too bewildered to know how he got there, found himself sprawling on the grass verge by the lane, gurgling for breath, his bicycle reposing in the grass by his side.

Perkinson, panting from the sudden exertion, stared down at him—or rather, glared. About a split second would have been enough for Perk and Skip and the bike to get mixed up under the car. It roared on towards Hodden without having done any damage. But it had been a near thing for all concerned.

"You fat chump!" howled Perkinson.

"Oooooooooogh!" gasped Skip.

"Did you want to be killed, you young idiot?"

"Grooooooooooogh."

"If you can't ride a bike, why don't you get a scooter?"

"Urrrrrrggh!"

"You footling little fathead, I've a jolly good mind to boot you all over the shop!" hooted Perkinson.

"Oogh! Oh, crumbs!" gasped Skip. He sat up dizzily, and blinked up at the long-legged Fifth-Form man. "I—I—I say, I—I should have been run over!"

Snort, from Perkinson.

"Has that just got into your fat head?" he asked.

"I—I—I say thanks for lugging me off the road!" gurgled Skip. "I—I—I say—oh, crumbs! Ooogh."



Skip . . . found himself sprawling.

"I've a jolly good mind to boot you," snapped Perkinson.

"Oh, I say!" gasped Skip.

"And I jolly well will, too!" added Perkinson: apparently thinking it a good idea. And he did.

"Yaroooh!" roared Skip.

Skip was prepared to feel deeply grateful to Perkinson, for having lugged him out of harm's way especially as it was clear that it had been touch and go, and that Perk himself would have had his share of a very bad accident, if it had happened. But gratitude faded out somewhat, as the Fifth-Form man proceeded to boot him. Skip might feel grateful, but Perk was feeling exasperated, and he signified the same by landing several good ones on the fat figure sprawling in the grass.

Then he walked on, leaving Skip roaring.

When he was gone, Skip crawled to his feet. He rubbed several places where boot-leather had landed. But gratitude revived. After all, what was a booting, compared with what old Perk had done for him?

Skip remounted his bike, and, wisely resisting the lure of bullseyes, put both fat hands to his handle-bars as he pedalled home to Felgate. By the time he got in for tea in Study Four, he had quite forgotten the booting, and boundless gratitude supervened.

III

"DENVER!"

"Sir!"

"Have you seen Perkinson, of my form?"

"Not lately, sir."

Skip Ruggles felt a tremor.

Had Mr. Kye asked him, instead of Denver of the Sixth, whether he had seen Perkinson, what could Skip have replied? Skip had seen him, out of gates: walking down to Fell, as coolly as if he wasn't gated at all. Indeed, if Perk hadn't walked down to Fell that afternoon, it was probable that Skip wouldn't have been at tea in Study Four in the Fourth. But the fact remained that Skip had seen him—out of gates.

However, Kye was not likely to ask Skip. For one reason, he had no reason to suppose that Ruggles knew anything whatever about the proceedings of a Fifth-Form senior. For another, as Kye did not look up, he did not see Ruggles at the open window of Study Four, and was quite unconscious and regardless of Ruggles.

There was tea in No. 4: or rather, there had been tea. Tom King and Dick Warren had finished. Skip hadn't finished: but he had left off.

Skip never had finished a meal, so long as anything edible remained in

Study Four. As it happened, there was a large cake to wind up tea—a very extensive cake that had arrived for Ruggles in a parcel. Generously Skip whacked it out with his friends. No doubt in acknowledgement of his generosity, King and Warren stopped him, after he had consumed about a couple of pounds of plum cake, and told him that the remainder had to stay over till supper. They stated that they did not want to see their fat friend burst all over the study.

In vain Skip protested.

It was his cake. He was still hungry. He was going to finish that cake. They could share the bulky remainder with him, if they liked: but it was going to be finished.

In reply to which, Tom King lifted the cake into the study cupboard, and shut the door on it. Dick Warren picked up a fives bat as Skip made a step towards the cupboard. Whether Skip knew it or not, he had had enough, and a little over, and his chums rightly considered it time to put the stopper on. Skip had to yield the point.

Now he sat at the open study window, looking out gloomily into the quad, while King and Warren cleared the table.

That was how he heard the voices floating up from the path under the study windows. And, remembering his deep debt to old Perkinson, Skip forgot even the cake, for the moment at least, and looked down at Kye's mortar-board and the top of Denver's head.

Kye, only too plainly, was suspicious of that recalcitrant member of his form, Percival Perkinson. He was looking round to ascertain whether Perkinson was within gates, according to order, or not. Not seeing him anywhere, he was asking questions.

Denver of the Sixth answered reluctantly. Denver was a prefect: and as a prefect, of course he had to be down on any fellow who kicked over the traces. Still, he didn't want to land old Perkinson in a row with Kye, if he could help it. To Kye, Perk was a mutinous boy in the Fifth. To Denver, he was the champion winger in the Felgate first-eleven, and such an ass that a fellow wouldn't help liking him. It was a difference in the point of view.

Looking down, Skip could see the discomfort in Denver's face. Then Kye's voice came again, sharp and acid.

"Was Perkinson at games-practice, Denver?"

"I—I think not, sir."

"And you have not seen him?"

"I saw somebody when I passed the library, sir! It might have been Perkinson," said Denver.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Kye, very drily. Percival Perkinson was about the last fellow at Felgate to be found within the walls of a library, or anywhere else where there were books. However, Kye walked off in the direction of the library, asking no more questions.

Skip grinned, a fat grin. Denver hadn't fibbed: it might have been Perk in the library when he passed the window. But it was much more likely that it might not. Books and Perk were wide as the poles asunder.

Langdale, the captain of Felgate, came along the path under the studies, and stopped to speak to Denver.

"Kye's rooting about," he said. "Know where that ass Perk is?"

"Goodness knows!" said Denver. "Kye's gone to look for him in the library."

"Oh, holy smoke! Likely spot," said Langdale. "I say, it will be serious if that fathead has cut. Kye's furious with him already. I've not seen him about."

"Neither have I."

"Chap needn't be on view, if he doesn't choose," said Langdale. "If he shows up for roll, all right. But if he doesn't—!"

"Even Perk will have sense enough to get back in time for roll."

"And hike in over the wall, and drop into Kye's arms, as likely as not!" said Langdale. "Kye's as watchful as a cat this afternoon. He's got it in for Perk, if he catches him. Might be sacked—and we'd lose him in the Dolcot match. We've got no other winger like Perk. The ass!"

The two Sixth-Form men walked on.

Skip, looking across the quad, saw Mr. Kye coming away from the library. Evidently, he had not found Perkinson there! Skip saw him stop and speak to Loring of the Sixth—another prefect! Only too plainly, Kye had got his teeth into this!

Ruggles hoped from the bottom of his fat heart that Perkinson would come through without being nailed by Kye. However, there was nothing that Skip could do in the matter, and he remembered the cake.

He looked round at his study-mates.

"Look here, you chaps," he said. "I'm hungry."

"You must be!" agreed Dick Warren, sympathetically. "You've only had two eggs, a chunk of ham, half a loaf, three or four dough nuts, and a couple of pounds of cake. Famished, I expect! Feeling like a ship-wrecked chap in an open boat at sea, what?"

"Well, it's my cake, ain't it?" hooted Skip. "Can't a fellow scoff his own cake if he jolly well likes?"

Tom King shook his head.

"Not if it's going to make him a hospital case," he answered, "and not if it's going to make him burst all over the study, like a balloon. Leave it over till supper, old fat man."

Skip glared at his faithful friends. They were great chums in Study Four: but at the moment, Skip's glare was fearfully unchummy. The fact that he had packed in foodstuffs to the very brim did not quench Skip's longing for cake.

"Come out for a trot, and get an appetite for supper," suggested Warren.

"I've got an appetite now!" hooted Skip. "I—I say, you fellows go out for a trot! Don't stick in the study in this lovely weather."

At which King and Warren chuckled. They could guess what would happen immediately if they left Skip and the cake in the study.

"Okay," said Warren. "You come too."

"I want a bit of a rest, after a bike ride," said Skip. "I'll stick here in the window-seat while you fellows take a trot. Besides, I'm a bit knocked out by what happened in Fell Lane, you know—old Perkinson lugging me away from that care—"

"Keep that dark," said Tom. "Kye would scalp Perk if he heard. Now come out for a trot."

"Shan't!" hooted Skip. "Look here, leggo my arm, Tom King—leggo my ear, Warren, you smug! I ain't coming."

But Skip came, all the same. His chums were really alarmed about what might happen to Skip, if he followed up two eggs, a chunk of ham, three or four dough-nuts, and a couple of pounds of cake, with three or four more pounds of cake. Skip needed his pals to look after him, and they did. They grasped Skip and walked him out of the study and down the stairs. Skip went reluctantly, but he went. And the cake remained in the study cupboard—lost to sight but to memory dear!

IV

Skip grinned breathlessly.

He almost tiptoed into Study Four.

It was more than an hour later. Tom King and Dick Warren were in the Pound, with a crowd of other juniors. They had entered into an argument with Bullinger, as to the respective merits of Perkinson and Cadby on the right wing in the Felgate First, and momentarily forgotten Skip.

Never was a fellow so glad to be forgotten.

Skip had backed out of the Pound, and cut up to Study Four in the Fourth. The lapse of time had made Skip keener than ever on that cake.

Now he crept into Study Four, grinning. To grab the bulky remnant of the cake from the study cupboard was the work of a moment.

But he dared not linger in the study to devour it. King and Warren might be up after him any minute. Staying only for one gargantuan bite, to go on with, Skip rolled the cake in a newspaper, and hurried out of Study Four with it.

It was dusk, and close on lock-ups. Heedless of that, Skip cut out of the House. If Warren and King looked for him in Study Four, they were not likely to find him now.

Neither were they likely to find him, if they looked out of the House. For the artful Skip hunted cover at once. He did not pause till he was in a secluded corner between the old oaks and the school wall: the very spot, in fact, where Tom King and Dick Warren had lugged at the long legs of Percival Perkinson earlier in the afternoon, with such painful results to themselves.

The dusk was thicker under extending branches. Skip felt quite safe in that

hidden corner. Leaning back against the wall, he opened the newspaper, and proceeded to deal faithfully with the cake.

Munch! munch! munch! Guzzle! guzzle! guzzle! Stanley St. Leger Ruggles munched and guzzled, and was happy.

He finished the cake. He did not, as his chums had feared, burst. Perhaps the lapse of an hour averted that catastrophe.

But he undoubtedly did feel loaded a little beyond the Plimsoll line, and disinclined to move. He leaned back on the old wall and rested after his exertions. There was no hurry to move, till he should hear the bell for roll-call. Leaning heavily on the wall, he breathed a little stertorously, his mind still dwelling happily on the cake.

He started a little, as footsteps came along the path. But he was not alarmed. If his friends had rooted him out in that remote corner, it was too late: the last crumb and the last plum had gone on the downward path.

He blinked through the dusk.

It was not King or Warren. It was a stout figure that rolled along the path: that of Mr. Kye.

Skip whistled softly.

Kye, evidently, was still on the prowl. Having failed to spot Perkinson anywhere within the walls of Felgate, he could have little doubt that that disobedient youth had gone out of gates regardless of authority. True, Perk might be somewhere in the school where Kye hadn't looked—even Kye, in his most suspicious mood, couldn't root through all the studies. If that was so, he would turn up for calling-over—well and good. But if he was out of bounds, he was not going to trickle in surreptitiously, if Kye could help it. And that old wall behind the oaks was just the place for a surreptitious trickle-in.

Kye gave Ruggles a careless glance, and rolled on. Even Kye, sharp and acid as he was, couldn't tell a Fourth-Form fellow not to loaf about: he had nothing to do with the Fourth. He rolled on up the path, and disappeared. Skip had no doubt that he would turn back at the end of the path: for obviously he suspected that Perkinson was out, and might, and probably would, return by way of that secluded wall. It looked as if Kye was going to do sentry-go on that dusky path, till the bell rang for roll.

Skip was reflecting on this, when he gave a sudden jump and gasp, as something banged on his head.

"Oooooogh!" gasped the astonished Skip.

It was surprising to be banged on the head, when a fellow was leaning peaceably against a wall, digesting cake. It was still more surprising to discover, the next moment, that it was a large size in shoes that had banged.

But the next moment Skip understood.

The shoe, naturally, was on a foot. The foot, equally naturally, was attached to a leg—a long leg. Another long leg whisked in the dusk.

"Perk!" breathed Skip.

Perkinson of the Fifth was swinging over the wall. He dropped almost on Skip. Luckily, he just missed him.

Further up the path, footsteps were audible: approaching. Kye had turned back at the end.

Perkinson gave a startled gasp.

"Who—what—?" He stared at Skip angrily. "You again, you fat ass! Getting in a fellow's way! I—"

Skip clutched his arm. He was wildly excited. In a matter of seconds Kye would be on the spot, and, finding Perkinson there, would know everything.

"Quick—!" breathed Skip.

"Let go my arm, you little fat idiot."

"Kye—!" gasped Skip.

"Eh? What about Kye?"

"He's coming—he'll see you in a tick! Get behind that tree—quick!" breathed Skip, in an anguish of anxiety.

Perkinson stared blankly for a moment. Then the approaching footsteps struck his ear, and he understood. It was useless to cut—Kye would have both seen and heard. Promptly, Perkinson backed behind a massive oak. He was barely in time. A stout figure came rolling down the path.

Mr. Kye's eyes were watchful and suspicious. He had heard something. He was looking round him sharply as he came.

Skip could have groaned.

Perkinson was out of view for the moment. But when Kye came close—he knew that the game was up. Old Perkinson had lugged him out of the way of that car, at the risk of going under it himself: and now he was going to be marched off to the Head, very likely to be sacked.

Not if Skip could help it!

Skip did not stop to think. Thinking was not much in his line, anyway. He acted without thinking. He shot along the path at top speed, and before Kye knew what was happening, the fattest junior at Felgate crashed headlong into the stoutest form-master in the school.

It was a terrific crash.

Kye went over backwards, and sat down with a concussion that might almost have shaken the county of Herts. Skip reeled from the shock, and staggered against an oak, dizzy.

Perkinson peered round his tree. He glimpsed a stout form-master sitting for a second, and then rolling over on his back. That was enough for Percival Perkinson. Kye, for the moment, was in no state to observe his surroundings, and Perkinson shot away, the longest legs at Felgate covering the ground at a speed they had never equalled before, even on the football field.

Perkinson of the Fifth vanished into space.

Ruggles of the Fourth would have been glad to do likewise. But there was no such chance for Ruggles of the Fourth. The shock had winded Skip, and he

could only lean on the oak and gurgle for wind. Besides, flight would have been futile, for Kye had, of course, seen him, and had a baleful eye on him now. Skip leaned breathlessly on the oak, while Mr. Kye, gradually recovering, heaved up to his feet.

"Boy!" thundered Mr. Kye.

"Ooogh! Yes, sir!" gasped Skip.

"How dare you rush along the path in so utterly senseless a manner! How dare you crash into me?"

"I—I—I—"

"You utterly stupid boy—"

"I—I—I—"

"You will be punished for this! I shall take you to your form-master, and demand the severest punishment."

That was no news to Skip: he did not expect to barge over a beak without something happening afterwards. Anyhow, Kye knew nothing about Perkinson: and that was a solace. Old Perk was safe in the House by this time, ready to answer to his name in Hall, and Kye couldn't do a thing.

From a distance, a bell clanged.

It was the bell for calling-over! Mr. Kye grasped Skip by a fat shoulder, and walked him away to the House.

V

"Ow! wow! ow! wow! Wow!"

Those sounds of woe greeted Tom King and Dick Warren, as they came into Study Four after calling-over.

They had missed Skip after roll. He had been called to the study of Mr. Charne, his form-master. They had wondered why. Now they knew.

Skip was leaning on the table in Study Four, wriggling. And he wowed and wowed and wowed.

"Whopped?" asked Tom: a rather unnecessary question. It was painfully clear that Stanley St. Leger Ruggles had been whopped.

"Wow! Yes! wow!" moaned Skip.

"Charne?" asked Warren

"Wow! Yes! Six of the best! Wow!"

"What for?" asked both together.

"Wow! Barging over old Kye!" moaned Skip. "Wow!"

"You fat clown, what on earth did you barge over old Kye for?" exclaimed Tom, in astonishment.

"Wow! Perk got in over the wall, and Kye would have spotted him if I hadn't! Wow! ow! wow!"

They gazed at him.

"Well, my hat!" said Tom. "Good old Skip! Perk got clear?"

"Wow! Yes! Wow!"

"And you got six?"

"Wow! Yes! wow!"

"Good old Skip!" said Warren. "After all, he did lug you away from that car, you know."

"That's why!" moaned Skip. "Wow!"

"It will wear off," said Tom, comfortingly, "and look here, old man, you can jolly well finish that cake now, and chance it."

But that, in the circumstances, was not much comfort to Skip!

BUT the next day Skip Ruggles was merry and bright again. Indeed, his fat face beamed like unto the sun at noonday. He was the happy, indeed ecstatic, possessor of the biggest cake that could be had for love or money at the Felgate tuckshop. Perkinson was not ungrateful: and his gratitude took a form that Skip really could appreciate!

THE END

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I

“WHAT about me” asked Billy Bunter.

“Ha, ha, ha!”

Four fellows in No. 1 Study, in the Remove at Greyfriars, laughed.

One fellow frowned.

The four were Frank Nugent, Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. The one was Harry Wharton.

“Ass!” said Harry Wharton, politely.

“Oh, really, Wharton—”

“Roll away, and don’t bother,” exclaimed the captain of the Remove, impatiently.

Billy Bunter did not roll away. He stood where he was, blinking at the captain of his form through his big spectacles.

“I said what about me, and I mean what about me!” said the fat Owl of the Remove. “You’re short of a man, at the last minute. Smithy’s got himself crooked and can’t play. You’ve got to fill his place. Well, I can fill it. I fancy I’m as good at outside right as Smithy.”

“Give us a rest!”

“St. Jude’s will be here soon,” went on Bunter. “You’ve got to make up your mind. Shove me down to play.”

Four fellows chuckled again. To the Co. the bare idea of Billy Bunter figuring in a Soccer match against St. Jude's was funny. But the captain of the Remove, with a problem to solve at almost the last minute, was not amused. He had to fill Smithy's place: but William George Bunter was assuredly the very last fellow he would have thought of. Bunter, it seemed, had kindly thought of it for him!

Harry Wharton wrinkled his brow over a list of names. Smithy was one of his best men, and not easy to replace. He had neither time nor inclination to be amused by Billy Bunter's claim to play for the Remove.

The fat Owl blinked at the top of his bent head.

"Look here, Harry, old chap—!" he urged.

"Pack it up!"

"It's important!" said Bunter. "I can tell you I'm jolly keen to play for the Remove. Mind, it isn't because my Uncle Carter's going to send me a pound note if I play in a School match—"

"Wha-a-t?"

"Nothing of the sort!" said Bunter. "I wasn't thinking of that at all. I'm keen on the game—jolly keen! Look here, old fellow, do the right thing for once, and give a fellow a chance."

"It will have to be Hazel," said Harry Wharton, passing by the remarks of William George Bunter like the idle wind that he regarded not. "Come on—it's time we got down." He rose from the study table. "I'll tell Hazel he'll be wanted."

"I say, you fellows!" squeaked Bunter, as the Famous Five made a move for the door. "You hold on! I tell you—"

"Fathead!" said Bob Cherry.

"I tell you—"

"Ass!" said Frank Nugent.

"Beast! I tell you I jolly well ain't going to be left out for a fellow like Hazel," exclaimed Bunter, indignantly. "Does Hazel play Soccer like I do?"

"Hardly!" said Harry Wharton. "If he did old, fat man, he wouldn't play for the Remove. Forget it, fathead! Go and frowst in an armchair in front of the fire in the Rag—that's more in your line."

"The frowstfulness is your long suit, my esteemed fat Bunter," remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Fancy Bunter in the front line!" chuckled Johnny Bull. "Why, the St. Jude's chaps would think that a barrage balloon had got loose on the footer ground."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Billy Bunter gave the Famous Five a glare that might almost have cracked his big spectacles.

"Look here, Wharton, if you're leaving me out—"

"No 'if' about that!"

"Then I shall jolly well go to the games-master about it," said Bunter. "We'll jolly well see what Lascelles has to say. Lascelles wouldn't stand for keeping a jolly good man out of all the matches, just because you're jealous of his form. Lascelles will jolly well call you to order, if I put it up to him. Do you want the games-master to call you over the coals?"

"Ha, ha, ha!" yelled the Famous Five. This time the captain of the Remove joined in the merriment. They could not quite see Larry Lascelles calling the captain of the Remove over the coals, for declining to play Billy Bunter in a Soccer match.

"Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!" snapped Bunter. "Mind, I mean it! I'm fed up with all this jealousy, and being left out every time. You put me down to play, or I go straight to Lascelles' study, and put it to him as games-master. I fancy you'll be called to order."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"You can cackle—!" howled Bunter.

"Thanks!" chuckled Bob Cherry. "We will!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

And the Famous Five, still cackling, marched out of the study, leaving the Owl of the Remove pink with wrath.

"Beasts!" breathed Bunter.

And he, in turn, rolled out of the study. His plump brow was set, over his big spectacles. Bunter, as he had stated, meant what he said. He was going to the games-master about it.

Bunter, as a rule, was not fearfully keen on Soccer, or any other form of healthy exercise. Indeed, he generally had to be rooted out when games-practice was the order of the day, and his excuses for dodging the same were many and various.

But circumstances alter cases. Uncle Carter who took a kindly interest in his fat nephew at school, was going to present him with a whole pound note, if he played in a match. The amount of tuck that could be obtained at the school shop in exchange for a pound note was quite dazzling. If Billy Bunter did not yearn to urge the flying ball, he certainly did yearn for tuck. Neither was Bunter aware—though any fellow at Greyfriars could have told him—that he was of no use on the Soccer field. It was Bunter's way to fancy that he could do things, until he actually came to do them. In his mind's eye he could see himself covering the ground at terrific speed, with the ball at his feet, and slamming it into goal amid deafening cheers. Often had Billy Bunter seen that, in his mind's eye. He had never seen it in any other!

But he was determined this time. If a fellow didn't get justice, in games, it was up to the games-master to put in a word. Bunter was convinced that he wasn't getting justice. He wanted justice, and still more he wanted Uncle Carter's pound note. So he rolled away to Mr. Lascelles' study, hoping for the best. At the worst, Lascelles could only refuse to intervene.

He tapped at that study door, and opened it. He rolled in.

"If you please, sir—!"

Having got as far as that, the fat junior discerned that the study was vacant. He was addressing empty space.

"Beast!" hissed Bunter.

It was, in Bunter's opinion at least, very inconsiderate and undutiful on the part of Larry Lascelles, not to be on the spot just when Bunter wanted him. It was very annoying indeed.

However, Mr. Lascelles was not there. The fat Owl decided to wait for him. He rolled across to the armchair, which stood near a bright crackling fire. It was a sharp winter's day, and that bright fire was grateful and comforting. As a matter of fact, but for the lure of Uncle Carter's pound note, Bunter would have preferred an armchair and a fire to the Soccer field. He sat down in the armchair to wait, stretching his fat limbs comfortably on soft leather.

Between the warmth of the glowing fire, and the six or seven helpings he had had at dinner, the fat junior was soon nodding. Lascelles did not seem in a hurry to come back to his study: which was easily explained by the fact that he had undertaken to referee in the match with St. Jude's: a circumstance of which Bunter was unaware. Minute followed minute: and Billy Bunter's eyes closed behind his big spectacles. Then, if Lascelles had come back to his study, he would have been greeted by a quite unexpected and unusual sound in that apartment—a deep and resonant snore. Forgetful of Lascelles, forgetful of Soccer, and forgetful even of Uncle Carter's pound note, Billy Bunter, curled up in the deep armchair, slept and snored.

And then—!

II

IT seemed to Billy Bunter too good to be true.

But there it was!

He had hoped that an appeal to the games-master would work the oracle, so to speak. Harry Wharton and Co. might consider him so much useless lumber on the football field: but Lascelles, Bunter hoped, would know better. Bunter had a hopeful nature! But hopeful as he was, he had had doubts—a good many doubts—and most assuredly he had not expected it to be so easy as this! It really seemed like a dream, as he rolled into the changing-room at the games-master's heels, and all the fellows there stared round.

"Wharton!" rapped Mr. Lascelles.

"Yes, sir!" Wharton was changing for Soccer, and he had one boot on and one boot off. He rose to his feet as the games-master addressed him, with the boot in his hand. He looked inquiringly at Mr. Lascelles, wondering why he had a frown on his brow.

"Why are you not playing Bunter?"

"Eh?"

"While I do not desire, Wharton, to interfere unduly, I feel bound to intervene now. Again and again Bunter has been passed over in the junior matches."

"Oh! Yes! You see—"

"I do not see!" interrupted Mr. Lascelles. "I have not spoken on the subject before, Wharton. I must speak now. I advise you to find a place for Bunter."

"Oh!" gasped Harry Wharton.

"Bunter can't play Soccer, sir," said Bob Cherry, staring.

The games-master glanced round severely at Bob.

"Cherry! Is it your opinion that you know more about Association football than I do?" he inquired.

"Oh! No, sir!" stammered Bob. "But—"

"But Bunter's no good at the game, sir!" said Johnny Bull.

"That will do, Bull!"

"He really isn't, sir—!" said Frank Nugent.

"The goodness of the esteemed fat Bunter is not terrific, esteemed sahib," said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Evidently, there is some prejudice on this subject," said Mr. Lascelles. "I am sorry to see it. Wharton! Give me a plain answer. You are captain of your form: and you have left out your best winger—"

"Eh?"

"Answer me plainly—will you play Bunter, on my advice, or will you not?" rapped Mr. Lascelles.

"Oh, my hat!"

"That is not an answer, Wharton."

"Oh! No! I—I—I—," Harry Wharton stammered. "The—the team's full up, sir—I—I can't leave out a man to make room for Bunter—"

"You refuse to act on my advice as games-master?"

"Oh! No! But—"

"Then you will play Bunter, in the place of Vernon-Smith, who is, I understand, standing out of the game."

"I—I—I—"

"I think you will be satisfied with the result, Wharton. In any case, I expect you to act on my advice. In fact, I insist."

Harry Wharton looked at him. All the fellows in the changing-room looked at him. Billy Bunter grinned. This was like a dream come true. He had hoped to hear Lascelles talking to the captain of the Remove like this. Now he heard it! The fat Owl was in high feather. If Lascelles put it like that, could the captain of the Remove refuse? He could not! Billy Bunter was safe for the St. Jude's match, and for Uncle Carter's pound note. It was like a happy dream!

"Well?" rapped Mr. Lascelles, as Harry Wharton did not speak. He seemed to have some difficulty in finding his voice.

"If—if—if you put it like that, sir—!" stammered the captain of the Remove, at last.

"I do put it exactly like that!" said Mr. Lascelles.

"Then—then—I—I—I'll play Bunter, sir."

The die was cast!

The games-master turned to the grinning fat Owl.

"You hear that, Bunter? You will change for football—you are to play for the Remove!"

"Yes, sir!" chuckled Bunter.

And he proceeded to change for Soccer. At last—at long, long last!—W. G. Bunter was going to play for Greyfriars: he was going to kick goals for his school,—perhaps!—and still more important, still more gratifying, Uncle Carter's pound note was as good as in his fat hand! Undoubtedly it was rather like a dream: but there it was: and Billy Bunter, as he rolled out with the footballers, felt like the ancient classic gentleman, who was like to strike the stars with his exalted head!

III

"GOAL!"
"Bravo!"

"Good old Bunter!"

"Well kicked, sir!"

"Goal! Goal!"

"We're dreaming this!" said Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter chuckled.

It was quite a long shot from the wing: but it had come off. It had cost Bunter hardly an effort. Smithy, in his place, could never have brought off that shot. Bunter had! It was quite an unusual Bunter: he was a little surprised himself!

"Good old Bunter!"

"Who'd have thought it?"

"Bravo, Bunter."

Harry Wharton gave the fat Owl a smack on a fat shoulder. Judging by his look, he no longer regretted that he had acted on the games-master's advice, and played Bunter. Bunter had always believed that he was the goods, on the field of play. Now other fellows had to believe it. A goal was a goal!

"Keep that up, Bunter!" said Harry.

"What-ho!" grinned Bunter.

And, amazing to relate, he kept it up! By the time the whistle went for the interval, Greyfriars had put the ball in again twice: and each shot came from the foot of William George Bunter.

Fellows had often likened Bunter, on the Soccer field, to an elephant, a

rhinoceros, or a hippopotamus. Now he was a surprise to them: and perhaps to himself. It was really like magic. He skimmed the ground at a speed no other Remove man could beat. The St. Jude's forwards could not touch him—the halves strove in vain—the backs seemed nowhere. The goal-keeper watched him like a cat, but could not stop his unerring shots. Often and often had Bunter declared that he was a good man at Soccer, the man to win matches. Now it had to be admitted. He did not even tire—he seemed as fresh as paint, in spite of the uncommon weight he had to carry. After a rather gruelling first half, some of the other fellows panted a little, or more than a little: but Billy Bunter seemed quite sound in wind and limb.

To tell the truth, Bunter, as well as the other fellows, was surprised. True he fancied himself at games. But he had never fancied himself such a games-man as this! This Soccer match seemed wax in his hands. As the game progressed, it seemed more and more like a happy dream.

St. Jude's were good men, and they did their best. But there was no man like Bunter in their ranks. They did not get a single shot through. But in the second half, Bunter put the ball in thrice again. The crowd thickened round the field, shouting applause.

At the final whistle, with a glorious victory of six goals to nil, every one of them shot by Bunter, the fat Owl was on top of the world. He did not roll off the field: he was grasped and hoisted and carried off shoulder-high by the rest. For the first time in history, Billy Bunter was a man whom the Greyfriars Remove delighted to honour.

"I say, you fellows," chirruped Bunter, in the changing-room afterwards, "what about me for the St. Jim's match next week?"

"What-ho!" said Harry Wharton, "and the Rookwood match after it, and the Carcroft, too. We shall want you all the time, Bunter."

"Hear, hear!" said Bob Cherry.

"Good old Bunter!"

"Bunter's the goods—"

"Bunter's the man—"

"Bunter—!"

IV

"BUNTER!"
"Bunter!"

"Bunter!"

"Grooooooooooogh!" mumbled Billy Bunter. He opened his eyes behind his big spectacles, and blinked rather dizzily.

Somebody was shaking him by a fat shoulder.

It was Mr. Lascelles, the games-master. He was shaking Bunter vigorously. The fat Owl blinked at him. He sat up in the leather armchair, in front of the

fire, quite dizzily astonished. His last recollection was of the enthusiastic crowd in the changing-room: he did not remember coming back to Lascelles' study. But there he was, and the games-master was shaking him.

"I—I—I say—!" stammered Bunter.

"Are you awake at last?" exclaimed Mr. Lascelles. "What do you mean, Bunter, by entering my study, and going to sleep in my armchair?"

"I—I—I—did I—I fall asleep?" stammered Bunter. "I—I say, it was a jolly good game, wasn't it, sir?"

Mr. Lascelles stared at him.

"Quite a good game," he answered, "but you can know little about it, as you appear to have been asleep here, in my study, Bunter, while it was played."

"Eh?"

Bunter sat bolt upright.

"Oh, crikey!" he ejaculated.

Slowly, it dawned on him!

"I—I—I say," he gasped, "I—I thought—I—I—I mean, I—I—I—haven't I—I—haven't I been playing football?"



A goal was a goal!

"What do you mean? You have been asleep here in my armchair," said Mr. Lascelles, testily. "Are you wandering in your mind, Bunter?"

"Oh, crumbs!"

"The football match is over," said Mr. Lascelles. "You should have been watching your schoolfellows play St. Jude's, Bunter—you are very lazy and very slack."

"Oh, lor'!"

"But why did you come to this study to go to sleep?" demanded Mr. Lascelles.

"I—I—I didn't—"

"What?"

"I—I—I mean—"

"Well, what do you mean?"

"I—I—oh, lor'!" It came clear to Billy Bunter's fat mind, at last. He hadn't played in that Soccer match. Lascelles hadn't taken him to the changing-room and told Wharton to play him. He hadn't kicked those surprising goals against St. Jude's. The wish, in his fat dreaming mind, had been father to the thought. He had fallen asleep in Lascelles' armchair before the fire, and had slept while the Remove played St. Jude's: and dreamed the whole thing.

It was quite a blow!

"Oh, crikey!" mumbled Bunter. "I—I—I—I came here to speak to you, sir, but you weren't here, and—and—and I—I think I—I fell asleep—"

"I think you did!" said Mr. Lascelles, drily, "and I had some difficulty in awakening you, Bunter. Now you are awake, leave my study."

"Oh, lor'!"

Billy Bunter detached himself from that comfortable armchair. He rolled out of the games-master's study. A shout greeted him as he rolled dismally and disconsolately down the passage.

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Where have you been, Bunter? We've beaten them, old fat man—two goals to one. Why didn't you roll up to see us beat St. Jude's, you fat slacker?"

Billy Bunter rolled on without replying. His feelings, just then, were rather too deep for words.

EVEN while that happy dream had lasted, it had seemed, to Bunter, rather too good to be true! And so it was!

THE END



I

“KIFO!” murmured Bobolobo, the Kikuyu.
Lyn Strong breathed hard and deep.
He knew that it was death.

There was no mercy in the Mau-Mau. The black faces that surrounded them were grinning, with a gleaming of white teeth, a glittering of rolling dark eyes. But there was no pity, no relenting, in the grinning faces. The boy hunter of Masumpwe and the Kikuyu gun-bearer were doomed.

They lay on the summit, almost on the verge, of a high bluff overlooking the Popolaki river of Kenya. Sixty feet below, the river rolled deep and fast, splashing in foam on the rocky precipice, which rose steeply as the wall of a house. From that height Lyn could glimpse, far in the distance, across the tree-tops of the forest, the town of Masumpwe—he could even have made out

the roof of his father's house and the shamba he was never to tread again. Within a bird's-eye view of his home, he was to die at the hands of the Mau-Mau.

There were more than a score of them. They had taken the boy hunter and his Kikuyu comrade by surprise. Lyn and Bobo, standing on the summit of the precipice over the river, had been looking across the forest at Masumpwe, when the rush came from the bush.

They had had no time to use a weapon. Bobolobo, magnificent in his war-array of black-and-white monkey-skins, with his three spears and his rhinoceros-hide shield, Lyn Strong with his rifle, had gone down under the rush, grasped by innumerable hands, without a blow or a shot. Now they lay on the high rock, bound hand and foot with knotted kamba, the fibre-cord almost cutting into their flesh—with the Mau-Mau grinning round them.

It was death—not long to be delayed—whether the Mau-Mau gang finished them with thrusting spears, or hacking axes, or flung them from the precipice to drown in the rushing river far below. But they seemed in no hurry, as they grinned and gloated over their helpless prisoners.

“Bwana, it is death!” said Bobolobo, in a low steady voice, “and yet I do not understand, Bwana. For when we crossed the river at sunrise, did I not place three stones on the bank in honour of Ngai who dwells in the clouds on Mount Kenya and is it not known to all the Kikuyu tribes in this land, that Ngai watches over those that honour him?”

Lyn smiled faintly.

Honoured or not by Kikuyu custom, Ngai, the great god dwelling on the soaring summit of Mount Kenya, was of little avail now. There, according to the Kikuyu's simple belief, dwelt Ngai, hidden by clouds, looking down on all that passed in forest and jungle swamp. But if Ngai was looking down, it seemed that his eyes did not see Bobolobo, in spite of the three stones reverently piled at the ford of the Popolaki. For Bobolobo lay bound, at the mercy of the Mau-Mau: and there was no more mercy in the Mau-Mau than in the hungry jaws of Simba, or Tui the leopard leaping on his prey.

One of the grinning blacks stepped towards the prisoners at length. It was Mzumo, the leader of the gang. His spear was in his hand, and the broad blade gleamed in the sun as he circled it before their faces. Lyn Strong resisted an impulse to close his eyes. He would not let the black man believe that he feared to look on death. Bobolobo stared at the grinning black with eyes as steady as those of Tai the eagle.

But Mzumo did not thrust with the spear.

“O Bobolobo,” he said, speaking in the musical Swaheli tongue, “in every mji of the Kikuyu it is known that you are brave in battle, and a great warrior: but now you lie under my spear.”

“O Mzumo, it is true!” answered Bobolobo, “Ngai has closed his eyes to me, and soon I shall be with the ghosts. But Kifo when he comes will not make me tremble.”

"For the white lord there is death!" said Mzumo. "For every white skin in this land there is death without mercy. But there is mercy for our own people who join us against the Mzungu. Give me faithful words to follow me, Bobolobo, in the war against the Mzungu, and you shall live and not die."

"Scoundrel!" muttered Lyn.

Mzumo did not heed him. His eyes were fixed on the face of Bobolobo. The rest of the gang looked on and listened. All eyes were on Bobo. Lyn Strong glanced at him.

He expected to hear only an indignant refusal from the brave Kikuyu. Bobo was offered life and liberty if he joined the Mau-Mau. For the boy with the white skin, there was only pitiless death: but for the Kikuyu there was mercy, if he threw in his lot with the terror-gangs of Kenya. Mzumo and his gang would have been glad to welcome so redoubtable a recruit to their ranks. A warrior like Bobolobo was worth many common men, in the struggle to drive the white settlers from the land. But even in the shadow of death, with Kifo's cold hand stretched out for him, Lyn could not believe that the Kikuyu would listen to such an offer.

But there came no indignant refusal from Bobo. His dark face was thoughtful, as if he pondered over Mzumo's words.

He spoke at last.

"These are good words that you speak, O Mzumo!" he said, slowly. "For life is sweet, even to one who does not fear death: and it is better to hear the birds sing in the branches of the muhugu, than to walk with the ghosts."

"Bobo!" breathed Lyn.

He could hardly believe his ears. The Kikuyu's eyes turned on him gravely.

"O Bwana," he said, "I have served you faithfully, and faithfully I have served the Bwana m'kubwa, your father. But death ends all things. And if Mzumo gives me life, why should I not follow him?"

"It is well said!" said Mzumo.

Lyn's eyes flashed.

"Bobo! You will join these jackals of the jungle—you who have eaten the mahindi in my father's house—you who carried me on your shoulders as a child in my father's shamba? Shame!"

The Kikuyu did not flinch under the bitter words.

"O Bwana," he said, "life is sweet, and my ears do not hear you. My ears hear only the good words spoken by Mzumo."

"You speak well, O Bobolobo," said Mzumo, "and you shall live and not die."

Lynn caught, for a moment, a glitter in Bobolobo's dark eyes. And it came into his mind that perhaps the Kikuyu was speaking cunning words, to delude the Mau-Mau leader.

But if that was so, there was no indication of it in Bobo's dark face. His look was grave, as if he had weighed the matter in the balance and decided. And Lyn said no more.

"You shall live and not die, O Bobolobo," repeated Mzumo, "and when you have proved your faith, you shall walk a free man, spear in hand. But my ears are closed to cunning words that mean nothing. It is in my thoughts that when you walk free of the kamba, you may seek to escape to the white man's dwellings. For what are words but wind?"

"Let the Mau-Mau oath be given!" said Bobolobo.

Mzumo grinned.

"Have I not said that words are but wind?" he repeated. "There are those who have taken the oath, and yet walked with the Mzungu and the askaris. But with blood on your hands, you will not seek the nyumba of the Mzungu, for they would hang you with a rope, and that to a warrior would be seven times worse than death by a warrior's spear. You shall prove your faith, O Bobolobo, by slaying the young Bwana before our eyes, and then you shall walk with us a trusted comrade."

There was a cackle of ferocious merriment from the blacks staring on the scene. Lyn Strong felt his heart miss a beat. His eyes were on Bobolobo, and he could not believe that Bobo would accept that terrible test of his faith to his new master. But Bobo's dark face expressed only indifference.

"You speak wise words, O Mzumo!" he said, "for it is true that words are but wind, and oaths may be broken, but with the blood of a Mzungu on my hands, I am pledged to the Mau-Mau for life or death, and the white masters would hunt me like Tui, the leopard, or Simba, the lion, or Fisi, the hyena. And even as you have said, so it shall be done, when you free my limbs of the kamba."

"Bobo!" muttered Lyn.

The Kikuyu looked at him.

"O little Bwana," he said, "for you there is no mercy, and you must die, and is death more bitter from one hand than from another?"

Lyn turned his face away.

Mzumo, with the cutting edge of his spear, severed the kamba that bound the powerful limbs of the Kikuyu. The fibre cord fell away, and Bobolobo rose to his feet a free man.

II

BOBOLOBO of the Kikuyu stood erect, a giant figure in his monkey-skin war-garb, breathing hard and deep. Lyn, helpless in his bonds, lay and looked up at him. It lingered in his mind that perhaps the Kikuyu was deluding the Mau-Mau: in a last desperate hope of saving himself, and perhaps of saving his white master. Yet what could he hope? He stood free, but unarmed: and round him thronged the rebel blacks, with knife and axe and spear, ready to hew him down at a sign. Ready to welcome him as a comrade, if he gave the

fearful proof of faith that their leader demanded: a proof that would cut him off for ever from the Mzungu, and make his life as forfeit as the lives of the ruffians round him: to be hunted, like them, in the mountains and the jungles and the forests. But if he failed to make his words good, he was a dead man: a single step to attempt to escape, would have been the signal for his death under raining blows and stabs. They were all round him, watching him like cats.

Bobolobo stretched out a sinewy hand.

"Give me my spear, O Mzumo, and you shall see blood!" he said, quietly.

Mzumo grinned, but did not hand him a spear. He was prepared to trust his new recruit, after, but not before, his desperate proof of fidelity. Unarmed, the giant Kikuyu, with all his strength, was powerless in the mob of Mau-Mau: but with a spear in his hand, he did not fear even such numbers. Many of the Mau-Mau would have gone down under his spear-blade, before he was slain—even if so brave and powerful a fighting-man had not put the whole gang to flight. It was not in Mzumo's thoughts to trust him with a weapon until he was sure of him.

"O Bobolobo, you are not speaking to a child," said the Mau-Mau leader. "Am I an infant to be deluded with words? When you have slain the Bwana, under our eyes, you shall walk with us a free man, with spear and shield, and fight with us in the forests against the whites and their askaris and eat with us the mahindi and the borohoa in our camps. But until you have slain the Bwana, O Bobolobo, we know not whether your words are more than idle breath."

Bobolobo dropped his hand.

Mzumo lifted his spear, and pointed with his blade to the edge of the precipice, only a few yards distant. Beyond that edge, was yawning space, sixty feet down to the river that rushed and roared on the rocks below. Bobo followed the pointed direction with his eyes, and then glanced at the Mau-Mau leader.

"Take up the boy!" continued Mzumo. "Take him in your strong hands, O Bobolobo, and fling him from the rock, to drown in the deep waters of the Popolaki with his hands and feet bound with the kamba. Under our eyes shall you do this, and all will witness that you have slain a Mzungu."

Bobolobo stood very still.

If he had dreamed of tricking the cunning Mau-Mau, of a last desperate fight with a weapon in his hand, it was an empty dream. Weaponless, he had to carry out that savage order. And Lyn, watching his face, was sure—or almost sure—that he had hoped to trick the Mau-Mau—and had failed.

In the boy's own heart there was no hope. Whether Bobo was true, or whether he was false, his own fate was sealed—whether Bobo's hands, or another's flung him from the height into the torrent. Even free of his bonds, he could not have swum the Popolaki where it raged and roared round the base of the precipice. And his hands, and his feet, were tied fast. A wild rush through the air, a plunge into deep running waters, and it was the end.

Bobolobo stood silent.

The grin faded from Mzumo's face, and his eyes glinted, and he took a harder grasp on his spear. From the other blacks came a murmur, and a movement of knives and axes.

"O Bobolobo," said Mzumo, in a low fierce voice of menace, "have you talked with a false tongue, or do you not hear with your ears?"

"My ears hear you, O Mzumo!" answered the Kikuyu, stolidly, "and as you say it shall be done."

He stepped towards Lyn Strong. Stooping his tall head, he grasped the boy in his arms: and, sturdy as Lyn was, swung him up from the earth as if he weighed no more than a palm-leaf. With the boy hunter of Masumpwe in his grasp, he stepped towards the edge of the precipice.

The Mau-Mau were grinning again, and pressing nearer to watch. High over the dizzy edge of the precipice, Lyn Strong swung in the powerful arms of the Kikuyu. His head swam at the yawning space, and from his cheeks the colour had drained. It was death—death at the hands of Bobolobo, under the ferocious stare of the Mau-Mau gang.

But Bobolobo, on the brink of the high rock, looked back at the Mau-Mau, and his eyes flashed at Mzumo.

"O dog, son and grandson of five hundred dogs," he said, "it was with a false tongue that I spoke, that my hands might be free to wield a spear, in defence of my master. And if a spear had been placed in my hand, I would have driven your whole pack before me, like jackals, for I, Bobolobo of the Kikuyu, am a great warrior, and have slain in battle even the brave fighting-men of the Masai tribes. But if I cannot save the Bwana, O Mzumo, I shall die with him. But it may be that Ngai, in whose honour I placed three stones on the bank of the river, may look upon me and remember."

And with that, the Kikuyu, with the boy in his arms, leaped from the precipice, and vanished from the staring eyes of the Mau-Mau. With startled howls, the blacks pressed forward, to the very verge of the high rock, to stare down after him. They saw the Kikuyu, the boy still in his grasp, strike the water, and plunge under: and they watched for a dark head to reappear—but they saw only the whirling, foaming water, that had swept away the Kikuyu and his Bwana in its wild rush.

III

LYN STRONG opened his eyes. He came back from unconsciousness, like one coming back from death. He stared wildly round him. He remembered the crash into the river: he had known nothing more. Now he was lying on a swampy bank, under the shade of a muhugu's mighty branches: the river flowing by, a dark anxious face bending over him. Bobo, his monkey-skins drenched and dripping, was at his side. Lyn, staring at him, could not believe that he was still alive.

"Bobo," he breathed, faintly.

He stirred. His limbs were free of their bonds—the kamba lay loose beside him. He passed his hand over his brow, and stared at Bobolobo again.

"Bobo!" he whispered.

"O Bwana, it was not written that we should perish in the deep waters," said Bobolobo.



The Kikuyu . . . leaped from the precipice.

Lyn sat up, dizzily. He stared at the flowing river—flowing between swampy banks: far—very far—from the precipice where Bobolobo had leaped, under the eyes of the Mau-Mau. It was hard to believe that they had come through alive. But the Kikuyu had saved him. He had been a helpless burden, bound as he was, on Bobo's hands, in the deep rushing waters: but somehow—he could hardly imagine how—the Kikuyu had won through, and saved him, and dragged him ashore: far from the murderous Mau-Mau.

"Bobo! You've saved me—brave Bobo! O Bobo, forget what I said when I believed that you would have joined the Mau-Mau to save your life—" muttered Lyn. "I—I believed—"

"If you had not believed, Bwana, Mzumo would not have believed," said Bobolobo. "I spoke with a crooked tongue, Bwana, to delude the dogs and sons of dogs, that I might be free to wield a spear: and with a spear, Bwana, I would have driven the whole pack before me, like antelopes fleeing from Simba, the lion: for I, Bobolobo, am the bravest and most powerful warrior in all the tribes of the Kikuyu. But Mzumo was too cunning: and it was left to me only to die with the Bwana. Yet even when I leaped into the waters, it was in my thoughts that I and the Bwana would live and not die."

"It was death," breathed Lyn, "and how we have escaped death I do not know, only that you have saved me, brave Bobo."

The Kikuyu looked at him gravely.

"Did I not place the three stones on the bank, when we crossed the river at sunrise, O Bwana," he said, "and is it not known to all people of the earth that Ngai watches over those that honour him? And I remembered this when I leaped, Bwana, and it has proved even so."

Lyn nodded and smiled.

THE END



I

SAMMY BUNTER, of the Second form at Greyfriars, stared. He stared at his major, Billy Bunter of the Remove.

Sammy was surprised, and interested.

Sammy of the Second was seated, at the moment, on a branch of one of the old Greyfriars elms. Under that old elm, there was an oaken bench, backing against the trunk. Bunter minor had been sitting on that bench, lazing away the time till the bell should ring for class, when a playful fag had snatched away his cap and tossed it up into the branches. Sammy had to climb for his cap. He had found it, and jammed it on his head: but he did not immediately descend. Sammy was as plump as his brother Billy, and as short of wind: and his clamber in the elm branches had left him breathless. So there was Sammy Bunter, sitting on a branch, slowly recovering his wind before he clambered down the trunk.

And then Billy happened.

Billy Bunter, of the Remove, came along under the elms. He blinked to and fro, through his big spectacles, as he came. His manner was cautious and watchful—so very cautious, and so very watchful, that any eye that had fallen on him, would have detected at once that Bunter was “up” to something.

Like Moses of old, Billy Bunter looked this way and that way. Obviously, he

was uneasy lest he might be observed. But it did not occur to Billy Bunter to cast a blink upward. He remained in happy ignorance of the fact that his minor, Sammy of the Second, was sitting half-hidden by foliage above his head.

Sammy watched, and grinned.

There was a parcel under Billy Bunter's arm. It was wrapped and tied, stamped and addressed. Evidently it had arrived at Greyfriars School by post, and had not yet been opened.

Sammy's grin widened.

It looked, to Sammy, as if Brother Billy had had a parcel from home, and was seeking a quiet spot in which to unpack it and devour the contents. But the next moment he realized that it was not that. Any moment now the bell might ring for class: there was no time for a feast on the bench under the elm. And blinking down from above, Sammy spotted a name in the address on the parcel. That name was not W. G. Bunter. It was R. Cherry.

Sammy's grin widened still further, till it almost reached from one of his fat ears to the other.

Bob Cherry, of the Remove, might be mystified, when he missed a parcel from his study, to guess what had become of it. Sammy Bunter could have told him. Grinning, Sammy continued to watch.

Below him, Billy Bunter stooped at the bench. He was not going to unpack that parcel: there was no time for that now. He pushed it under the oaken bench, where it was completely out of sight. Sammy heard him chuckle, as he rose again after hiding Bob Cherry's parcel.

"He, he, he!"

Having thus expressed his satisfaction, Billy Bunter rolled away again, and disappeared from Sammy's ken.

Then it was Sammy's turn to chuckle.

"He, he, he!"

From the distance, came the clang of the bell. It was ringing for class, and it was time for Sammy Bunter to get a move on.

He clambered down the trunk of the elm, and stood by the oaken bench. But he did not immediately head for the House and the form-room.

He stooped, and dragged out the parcel from under the bench. Billy Bunter only too evidently, had "snooped" that parcel. He had concealed it under the bench in that secluded spot, with the intention of dealing with it after class. It was going to be dealt with after class—though not by Billy Bunter. Sammy, sad to relate, had no more scruples in the matter of tuck, than his brother Billy. All was grist that came to the mill of either Bunter. Perhaps Sammy felt justified in snooping from the snoopers. Or perhaps he was thinking more about the tuck than the justification. Anyhow, Sammy Bunter put that parcel under a fat arm, and rolled away with it.

All over Greyfriars, fellows were heading for the form-rooms, as the bell clanged. But Sammy Bunter had to risk being late for Mr. Twigg in the

Second-form room. That parcel had to be at a safe distance from the bench under the elm, when Billy Bunter looked for it after class.

Sammy rolled off, like Iser in the poem rolling rapidly. He rolled into the old Cloisters, and carefully selected a spot in a dusky corner behind one of the old stone pillars. The bell had ceased to ring: but that parcel was, in Sammy's eyes at least, of more importance than Mr. Twigg. Having selected his spot, he packed the parcel carefully away out of sight. There it was safe—left till called for, as it were.

Having thus disposed of it, Sammy Bunter rolled away to the House. He rolled in haste: but he was six or seven minutes late for class in the Second. For which his form-master, Mr. Twigg, rewarded him with half-an-hour's detention after class. But Bob Cherry's parcel was worth being "kept in" for half-an-hour, and Sammy's fat face was cheery, as he sat through the afternoon's classes, and the half-hour of detention that followed—in happy anticipation of what was to come, when he was free at last to revisit that dusky corner in the old Cloisters.

II

"HALLO, hallo, hallo! Bunter!"

Bob Cherry's cheery roar impinged on Billy Bunter's fat ears.

Bunter certainly heard it. In fact any fellow would have had to be at a good distance, not to hear it!

But if Bunter heard it, he followed the example of the ancient gladiator, and heeded not.

He did not stop.

The Remove were out, dismissed by Mr. Quelch. Billy Bunter, as a rule, moved off last and slowest. On this occasion he was quite brisk. Possibly he was thinking of something he had hidden under an old oaken bench, in the quad. At all events, he rolled on unheeding: Bob Cherry staring after him as he went.

"Bunter!" roared Bob.

Still the fat Owl of the Remove did not turn his head.

"Well, my hat!" Bob glanced at his chums, Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. "What's the matter with that fat fozzler? Is he gone deaf, as well as blind and silly?"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"Looks as if he's off somewhere special, and doesn't want to stop!" he said. "Let him rip!"

"And be blowed!" suggested Johnny Bull.

"The ripfulness and the blowfulness are the proper caper, my esteemed Bob," agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"What do you want Bunter for?" asked Frank Nugent.

Grunt, from Bob.

"I don't want him! Could anybody want Bunter? But I've had that parcel

from home to-day, and there's lots and lots, and as there's lots and lots, I was going to ask the fat ass to come up to the study for a whack in the spread . . ."

"Oh!" Harry Wharton laughed again, "if Bunter knew that, he would come running."

"The runfulness would be terrific!" grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Well, let's go after the fat duffer, and tell him," said Bob. "Mauly and Smithy are coming, but we can squeeze Bunter in, and I know he's stony. He hasn't had that postal-order yet that he's been expecting."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

The chums of the Remove followed Billy Bunter into the quad. The fat Owl was already at a little distance from the House. He was heading towards the old elms by the school wall: but every now and then he turned a fat head and gave a backward blink through his big spectacles. One of those backward blinks revealed to him the Famous Five in pursuit: and Bunter came to a sudden stop.

No doubt he had reasons for keeping his destination a secret from the five: especially from Bob Cherry!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo!" roared Bob, as the juniors came up. "Gone deaf, Bunter? I called you when we came out of the form-room."

"Oh! Did you?" stammered Bunter, "I never heard you, old chap! Besides, I'm in rather a hurry, or I'd have answered—"

"You fat ass!"

"Oh, really, Cherry—"

"Like to come up to my study to tea, old fat man?" asked Bob. "I've had a parcel from home to-day. I haven't unpacked it yet, but I know there's lots and lots, and it's going to be a spread. Come on!"

Bunter did not stir.

If anything, as a rule, could wake Bunter to brisk activity, it was an invitation to a study spread. He might have been expected to head for Bob Cherry's study without delay: indeed, to race Bob there! Amazing to relate, he did not stir.

"Come on, fathead!" said Bob, in surprise. "Don't you catch on? It's a study spread, and lots—!"

"Oh! Thanks, old chap!" stammered Bunter, "I—I'd be jolly glad to come, but—but—but—but—!"

"Is the butfulness terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter?" asked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"Oh, really, Inky—"

"Don't you want to come, fathead?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Oh! Yes! But—but—as it happens, I'm going to tea with Mauly!" stammered Billy Bunter, "otherwise, I—I'd be jolly glad."

"Mauly's coming too, fathead!" said Bob.

"Oh! Is he?" gasped Bunter, "I—I—I mean, I'm going to tea with—with Smithy, so I can't come, old fellow."

"Smithy's coming too!"

"Oh! crikey! I—I—I—I mean—!"

"You howling ass," said Bob Cherry, in measured tones, "what are you rolling out fibs for? No need to make excuses if you don't want to come. I thought you'd jump at it—you were eyeing that parcel like a hungry octopus when I took it to my study just before class. Look here, do you want to come or not?"

"Oh! Yes! No! You see, I—I—I've promised to go to tea with Temple, in the Fourth. So I—I can't come. Don't you fellows waste time. You—you get off to your study, Bob old chap. I—I hope you'll have a jolly good spread."

The Famous Five all stared at Billy Bunter.

It was unknown, quite unprecedented, for William George Bunter, of the Remove, to refuse an invitation to a study spread. He was much, very much more likely to invite himself, than to refuse when asked. But on this occasion Bunter seemed bent on making history. He did not want to accompany the Famous Five to Bob Cherry's study, up in the Remove. The mention of a parcel from home, with "lots and lots" in it, did not tempt him.

"O.K." said Bob, puzzled, but certainly not distressed by the loss of Billy Bunter's fascinating society. The invitation had been given out of sheer good-nature, simply because Bob had a parcel from home, and Bunter was hard up. "Please yourself, old fat frump. Come on, you men."

The Famous Five walked back to the House.

"O day worthy to be marked with a white stone!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

"First time Bunter's ever turned down a spread!" said Nugent. "But what was he telling fibs about it for?"

"Can't help telling fibs," grunted Johnny Bull. "Nature of the beast!"

As the chums of the Remove went into the House, Bob Cherry glanced round again. He was puzzled by Bunter's refusal: and, if the Owl of the Remove had shown a sign of changing his fat mind, Bob was ready to give him a welcoming beckon.

But he had a view only of Bunter's fat back. Bunter was heading for the elms by the wall again, oblivious of the Famous Five.

The juniors went in. Lord Mauleverer and Herbert Vernon-Smith, guests at the spread, joined them: and a party of seven marched up to the Remove passage. In No. 13, Bob's study, they found Mark Linley, who shared that study with Bob, and was also a sharer in the coming spread. Mark gave them an inquiring look as they crowded in.

"Didn't you tell me you left your parcel in the study here, Bob?" he asked.

"I jolly well did," answered Bob, "I expected you'd have started unpacking it by this time, Marky."

"So I would have: but—"

"But what?"

"I can't find it anywhere in the study."

"What? It's in the cupboard."

"It isn't!"

"Rot! I left it there, just before class." Bob Cherry strode across to the study cupboard. "It's there all right, fathead! I tell you I—Great pip!"

Bob Cherry stared into an empty cupboard.

He stared blankly.

Then he uttered a roar.

"Bunter!"

"What about Bunter?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Bunter!" roared Bob. "That parcel's gone! That's why that fat brigand wouldn't come up to the spread—he's had it already!"

"Oh my hat!"

"It's gone?" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"Gone!" roared Bob.

"The fat villain!"

"The bloated brigand!"

The whole party stared into the cupboard. There was no doubt that that parcel was gone. And there could hardly be any doubt how and why it had gone. Billy Bunter's manners and customs were only too well known in the Remove. No fellow's tuck was really safe from the fat Owl.

"The—the—the podgy pirate!" breathed Bob. "But look here, he can't have scooped it yet! It was only just before class that I shoved it in here. He hadn't time to scoff it. Let's get along to his study—"

Johnny Bull shook his head.

"It isn't there," he said.

"How do you know it isn't?" demanded Bob.

"Because Bunter isn't!" said Johnny.

"Oh!" Bob thought a moment, and then nodded. "No—he'd know we should draw his study first shot. He's got it somewhere else. Oh!" he repeated, "what was he cutting off for, just after class? He's parked it out of the House—that's it! Why, the fat villain was heading for it, when we stopped him and asked him to the spread! Come on!"

Bob Cherry rushed from the study. His chums rushed after him. There was still time to save that parcel, if Bunter had it. And they had not the slightest doubt that Bunter had it. They rushed out of the House, and headed for the corner of the quad behind the elms, like fellows on the cinder-path.

III

BILLY BUNTER grinned.

It was a happy grin of mingled satisfaction and anticipation.

Bunter had lost no time.

Bunter was eager to sample the contents of that parcel, hidden under the

oaken bench by the old elm. That unexpected invitation to the spread in Bob's study had delayed him a few minutes. But now he had arrived at the spot: and his eyes glistened behind his spectacles, as he stooped to grope for the parcel under the bench.

He knew that it was still there! It was quite safe there! Nobody would think of looking for a tuck-parcel under a bench in a corner of the quad. Unless an eye had fallen on Bunter when he was hiding it there, that parcel was all right. And Billy Bunter was still happily unaware that two eyes, not to mention a pair of spectacles, had been fixed on him from the branches above, while he was hiding that parcel under the bench.

"He, he, he!" chuckled Bunter.

He groped.

He expected his fat hand to contact the parcel at once. He had shoved it well back under the bench, but it should have contacted his fat hand as he groped. But that fat hand met only empty space.

He groped and groped.

The grin faded from his fat face.

Where was that parcel? It was there—it had to be there! How couldn't it be there, when he had parked it, out of sight, in that spot? It simply had to be there! Yet it did not seem to be there!

He dropped on his fat knees, lowered his fat head, and blinked under the bench, through his big spectacles. It was dusky under the bench: but Bunter could see all that was there. What he saw was a litter of fallen leaves blown there by the wind. Merely that and nothing more!

"Oh!" gasped Bunter.

He blinked, and blinked, as if he could not believe either his little round eyes, or his big round spectacles. But no parcel was there. The fat Owl had to realize that it was gone! Someone, evidently, had removed that parcel since Billy Bunter had hidden it; who, he had not the faintest idea. But it was only too sadly and sorrowfully clear that the parcel was gone: the snooper had been snooped!

"Oh, crikey!" groaned Bunter.

He rose from his vain search. His fat face, generally much broader than it was long, now looked longer than it was broad. Deep dismay and despondency were imprinted thereon. The parcel was gone! Bunter had taken the risk of snooping it from Bob Cherry's study: it was only too probable that Bob would guess who had snooped it, and look for him, on vengeance bent. As likely as not, in fact more likely than not, Bunter was going to be booted for snooping that parcel—and it was gone! A gorgeous feast was worth a booting, if it came to that! But there was to be no feast—not a mouthful, not a morsel: not a plum or a crumb: absolutely nothing for Billy Bunter, except the probability of a booting!

He groaned.

As he stood there, in utter dismay, the sound of voices came to his fat ears. He gave a startled jump, and blinked round.

"I saw him heading this way—!" It was Bob Cherry's voice. That voice came from quite near at hand, but on the other side of the massive old elm under which Bunter stood by the bench. He could not see Bob—and so far Bob could not see him: but it was coming.

"He's somewhere about—!" came Harry Wharton's voice.

"With the parcel—"

"He can't have scoffed it yet—"

"Not the lot, at any rate!"

"By gum, I'll boot him all over the school—I'll burst him—I'll jolly well give him a lesson about snooping tuck in the studies—"

"The bootfulness is the proper caper!"

"The fat villain!"

"The bloated octopus!"

"Look out for him—!"

Billy Bunter trembled in every fat limb, as the voices of the Famous Five came to his fat ear. Apparently they knew, or had guessed, where to look for him, as they were heading for that very spot: only the massive trunk of the venerable elm hid him from their eyes. He was going to get the booting—without having had a crumb or a plum from the parcel!

"Beasts!" breathed Bunter.

He stirred to action. Not often was Billy Bunter quick on the uptake. Not often did he move swiftly. But peril seemed to sharpen his fat faculties. There was no escape—if he ran for it, he would be in sight of the Famous Five immediately: if he stayed where he was, they would pass that tree in a few moments, and see him standing there, and then—! Billy Bunter dropped on fat hands and knees, and squeezed himself under the oaken bench.

It was a close fit.

Any other Remove man of Greyfriars would have had ample space there. But Billy Bunter's circumference was uncommon. He had to squeeze.

Desperately, he squeezed!

In a matter of seconds, there was a tramp of feet on his side of the tree. But Bunter was out of sight. Squeezed, cramped, half-suffocated under the oaken bench among the dead leaves, he was at least hidden from view. He hardly dared to breath. If they discovered him—!

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Not here—I thought we might find him squatting on that bench, scoffing the tuck—"

"Sure he came this way?"

"Quite sure—I looked back when we went into the House, and saw him. But he's not here now."

Bunter was glad to hear that!

"Come on—we've got to run him down, if we're going to have anything for

tea in the study! My first kick when we find him!" said Bob Cherry. "Come on!"

To Billy Bunter's infinite relief, there was a tramp of departing footsteps. He heard Bob's voice as the juniors went:

"We'll comb the whole jolly old show for him! Mind, first kick to me—"

The voice died away.

"Oh, crikey!" breathed Bunter.

Not till footsteps and voices had faded out, did a breathless, grubby, dusty fat Owl venture to crawl out from under the bench. He crawled out at last, and sank down on the bench, gasping for breath.

"Oh, lor'!" moaned Bunter.

He had escaped! So long as he remained where he was, he seemed fairly safe: they were not likely to search the same spot twice. But it was, after all, only postponing the evil hour! Sooner or later he had to turn up in the House, and then—! If he had had the spread, it wouldn't have been quite so bad! But he hadn't! Not as much as a crumb or a plum—and they were looking for



It was a close fit.

him to boot him—first kick to Bob Cherry who had the largest and heaviest foot in the Greyfriars Remove! It was a sad, sorrowful, disconsolate Owl who sat on the bench under the old elm and gurgled for breath.

IV

“WHERE is he?”

“The wherefulness is terrific!”

“Not here!”

“May as well look round.”

The Famous Five were getting exasperated. They had looked for Billy Bunter, up and down and round about. Now they had come into the old Cloisters, to give that secluded spot the once-over. But there was no sign of Billy Bunter there. There had been no sign of him anywhere. As they did not think of looking again in the spot they had looked first of all, they were not likely to see a sign of him—not till calling-over, at all events.

Half-an-hour had passed: and Bunter was still understudying the Invisible Man! Nobody was to be seen in the deserted old Cloisters.

“The bloated brigand!” said Bob Cherry, breathing hard. “He seems to have got into a hole and pulled it in after him! He’s travelling through our spread all this while.”

“And he’s a quick traveller!” remarked Nugent.

“Where the dickens—”

“Might have seen us coming, and dodged out of sight!” said Johnny Bull.

“Look round, at any rate. That fat villain must be somewhere.”

The juniors moved along the cloister, looking about them. Suddenly Bob Cherry stopped, and held up his hand.

“Listen!” he whispered.

“What—?”

“Quiet—listen!”

They stood quiet, and listened. From somewhere, close at hand, came the sound that had caught Bob’s ears. It was a strange sound to be heard in that spot: and yet not exactly unexpected by fellows who were in search of Billy Bunter and a missing tuck-parcel. It was a sound of champing and guzzling!

Guzzle! guzzle! guzzle!

Evidently, out of their sight, a pair of very active jaws were at work. The juniors could hardly doubt whose jaws they were! They exchanged a grin of satisfaction. The tuck-raider had been run down at last! The guzzling sound came from behind one of the old stone pillars. In that dusky corner, someone as yet unseen was guzzling away at a rapid rate.

“Bunter!” breathed Bob.

“The Bunterfulness is terrific!” grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

“Listen to the band!” murmured Frank Nugent.

"Bunter all right!" chuckled Johnny Bull. "Only Bunter makes a row like that over his fodder."

"We've got him."

"Mind he doesn't dodge!"

"What-ho!"

"Come on! Quiet, and take the fat villain by surprise!" whispered Bob.

The juniors grinning, tiptoed round the stone pillar, on either side of it. The sound of happy guzzling did not cease for a moment. Evidently, someone in that secluded dusky corner was having the time of his life with unlimited tuck. Guzzle! guzzle! guzzle!

A moment more, and they were looking at a fat figure, seated with its back to the stone pillar, with a large parcel, packed with good things, open on the flags at its side. Two fat hands were grasping a cake, and the solitary feaster was taking it in in chunks. For a second, they fancied that they had found Billy Bunter. But the next second, they saw that it was a smaller edition of the Owl of the Remove.

It was Bob Cherry's parcel that lay there open. It was a cake from that parcel that the fat feaster was guzzling. But the feaster was not Billy Bunter of the Remove. It was Sammy Bunter of the Second Form!

So busy was Sammy with the cake, that he did not hear tiptoeing feet, or look up at staring faces. Having been kept in half-an-hour after class by his form-master, Sammy had not been many minutes in that corner when the Famous Five happened. That cake was his first sample from the parcel. He was enjoying it: and looking forward happily to more and more good things to follow.

But alas for Sammy!

No more good things were to follow. He was not going even to finish that cake. Had not Harry Wharton and Co. been looking for Billy Bunter, it would have been all right for Sammy: they would never have thought of him, and never have dreamed of the feast that was going on. Looking for Billy, they had found Sammy—with the purloined parcel.

Guzzle! guzzle! guzzle!

"You fat young sweep!" roared Bob Cherry.

"Oooooogh!" gasped Sammy.

He jumped, and stared round, his mouth full of cake. Five separate and distinct glares were fastened on him. It was a surprise for the Famous Five. They had expected that sound of guzzling in a hidden corner to lead them to Bunter major, not to Bunter minor. But it had led them, at all events, to the snooper of Bob Cherry's tuck-parcel.

"Urrrrrggh!" gurgled the startled Sammy. A chunk of cake went down the wrong way, and Sammy choked and gurgled horribly, "Oooogh! Grooogh! Oooogh."

"Not Bunter!" exclaimed Johnny Bull.

"Bunter's minor!" ejaculated Nugent.

"That fat smudge in the Second, snooping tuck in a Remove study—!" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

"Snooping runs in the Bunter family!" grinned Johnny Bull.

"Collar him!"

"Bump him!"

"Boot him!"

"Urrrrrrggh!" gurgled Sammy Bunter, "I say—wurrgh—I—I—groogh—"

"Boot him!" roared Bob Cherry. "Why, the cheeky little sweep—raiding a Remove study, by gum! We were going to boot Bunter all over the shop—and it wasn't Bunter at all—it was his minor! Boot him!"

"Bump him!"

"Give him beans!"

Sammy Bunter ceased to gurgle, and yelled, as five pairs of hands grasped him. The Famous Five would have been wrathful, if Billy Bunter had been the raider. They were wrathier to discover that it was Sammy. A Second-Form fag tuck-snooping in a Remove study was the limit! They were going to impress on Sammy of the Second that it was injudicious to follow in his major's footsteps! They whirled him up, and bumped him down, and the yell that Sammy gave woke every echo in the ancient Cloisters.

Bump!

"Wow!"

Bump!

"Yoo-hoooooop!"

Bump!

"Yow-wowow-ow-ow-ow!"

"Now boot him, all together!" roared Bob Cherry.

"I—I say—oh, jiminy—I say—yaroooh—I—I say—whooooop!" Sammy Bunter, yelling frantically, fled for his life, with the Famous Five in pursuit, dribbling him out of the Cloisters.

Sammy, yelling, vanished into space. Harry Wharton and Co. walked back to collect the parcel. They walked it away to the House in cheerful mood. There was a handsome spread, after all, in Bob Cherry's study.

BILLY BUNTER was surprised, when he rolled in at calling-over, to find that the Famous Five took no particular notice of him.

He was relieved also.

He grinned, when he learned what had happened. Nobody was going to boot Billy Bunter. The booting had been administered, and Sammy Bunter had had it. Billy had had a narrow escape. Sammy hadn't! There had been a booting instead of a spread for Sammy!

THE END