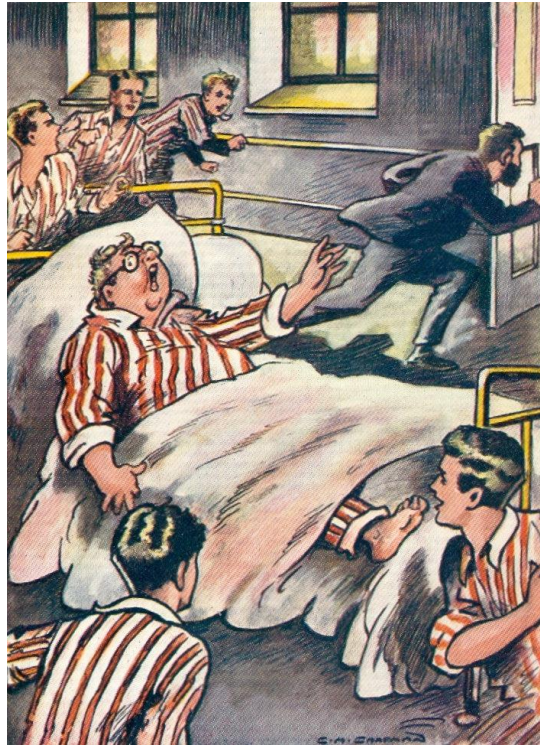




OVER a mile lay between Greyfriars and the theatre at Courtfield, and a mile to William George Bunter is a mile too far where walking is concerned. True, he had wangled a free theatre ticket from Smithy, but the main attraction of the outing lay in the promised 'spread' in the bun-shop afterwards. His ambulation rolled to an exhausted halt, and the matinee at the Theatre Royal gave way to the temptation of a quiet rest. But he soon moved with an unprecedented speed, which carried him, not to Courtfield, but into the comparative safety of the wood, and-unbelievably, for Bunter-up a tree: someone was after him, or so he thought. But what he saw from his hideout convinced him even more that it was advisable to stay there for a long time, bun-shop or no bun-shop.

This was only the first of a whole series of quite remarkable events which, to the Owl of the Remove, were disconcerting and even alarming, though his plea for a bodyguard was received with no more sympathy and no less derision from the other Removites than was any other of the many familiar Bunter fantasies - until the fattest figure in Greyfriars School disappeared. Even an unscrupulous tuck-raider merits help when truly in trouble, so 'Sherlock' Smithy and the Famous Five concentrated their powers to find him, and their efforts led to some startling discoveries.



HE BOLTED FOR THE DOOR

BILLY BUNTER'S BODYGUARD

By
FRANK RICHARDS

Illustrated by
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CHAPTER 1

MORE HASTE, LESS SPEED!

'PUT it on!'

'Better go slow here--'

'Want to be late for roll?'

'No, ass! But—'

'Oh, come on, and don't waste time chin-wagging.'

'Look here, Smithy—'

'I'm going on, anyhow.'

'But—'

'Rats!'

Six Remove juniors of Greyfriars were in haste. Not one of them, certainly, wanted to be late for roll, and to face an inquiring gimlet-eye in Mr. Quelch's study afterwards. Nobody wanted lines or a detention for cutting calling-over.

But some members of the party, at least, did not think it judicious for a bunch of cyclists to charge at full speed along a winding footpath in a thick wood, where there was little or no visibility for more than a few yards ahead.

They had been watching a Ramblers' match at Courtfield.

In their keen interest in the game, they had rather forgotten Greyfriars and calling-over.

However, there was just about time to arrive at the school, and show up in hall, by taking the short cut across Courtfield Common, and going all out on the bikes.

Herbert Vernon-Smith set the pace, and it was a rapid one; but Harry Wharton and Co. had no difficulty in keeping up with him. On the open common it was bumpy, but fairly easy going. But when they reached the tract of woodland in the middle of the wide common, the Famous Five ceased to drive at their pedals. The narrow footpath ahead was rather like a tunnel under leafy overhanging branches. Smithy was prepared to charge along it as fast as he could drive his bicycle. The Bounder of Greyfriars was always reckless: and he had too many spots of bother with his form-master, to want to add another by failing to answer 'adsum' when his name was called in hall. He shot ahead.

'Ease up, Smithy,' called out Bob Cherry. 'Slow down, fathead!' shouted Johnny Bull.

'Smithy!' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

Smithy's reply was monosyllabic, snapped over his shoulder. 'Rats!'

Then he vanished under leafy branches.

'Silly ass!' commented Frank Nugent. 'There'll be a row, if he knocks somebody over—'

'The rowfulness will be terrific,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, 'but a wilful man must go longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks.'

'Let's hope the path's clear,' said Bob. 'It won't take Smithy a minute or two to get through, at that rate. But we jolly well won't chance it.'

'No fear!' said Johnny Bull, emphatically.

And the Famous Five, stringing out in file, rode into the wood one after another, at a much more moderate pace. Lines from Quelch, if it came to that, would be distinctly unwelcome: but knocking over some unwary pedestrian was not a chance for sensible fellows to take. Vernon-Smith had shot well ahead, and was out of sight on the winding path. He drove hard at his pedals, and his machine fairly flew. At such a pace, it was only a matter of minutes to traverse the wood, and emerge on the open common beyond. He was taking the chance of the footpath being clear, for the necessary few minutes. The Bounder of Greyfriars was the fellow to take chances, and sometimes he was liable to take a chance too many. So it proved on the present occasion.

He was half-way through the little wood, and another minute would have seen him clear. But that minute was not granted him. As he came whizzing round a winding turn, he suddenly glimpsed a figure before him. It was that of a young man carrying a suit-case. But Smithy's glimpse of him was only for a fraction of a second. He had no time to brake, and the man with the suit-case had no time to dodge. Almost before they saw one another, the crash came.

The pedestrian went spinning. His hat flew in one direction, his suit-case in another, and he sprawled on his back in the grass.

The bicycle, rocking from the shock, pitched over, flinging Vernon-Smith from the saddle, into the thicket beside the path.

'Oh!' gasped Smithy.

'Oh!' gasped the sprawling man.

Both of them were too dazed and winded by the sudden shock, to do anything but gasp. Smithy was the first to recover himself a little. He struggled out of the thicket, panting for breath, as Bob Cherry, in the lead of the five following riders, appeared round the turn in the footpath. Bob gave a jump at the scene that met his eyes.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' he ejaculated. 'What— Oh, my hat!' He braked and jumped down, and shouted to the other fellows behind. 'Look out— an accident— that ass Smithy has knocked somebody over.'

'That fathead!' came a growl from Johnny Bull.

There was a jamming on of brakes. Harry Wharton Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, arrived on the scene, wheeling their machines. They stared at that scene— a stranger sprawling in the grass, Smithy standing and panting, and the bike curled up between them.

'You ass, Smithy,' breathed Harry Wharton.

'You terrific fathead!' exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'You had to go all out, and chance knocking somebody over!' growled Johnny Bull. 'You ought to be jolly well kicked.'

The Bounder scowled.

'I couldn't see him in time,' he muttered.

'You couldn't expect to, the rate you were going.'

'Oh, shut up!' snapped Smithy. He was badly shaken by his fall, and more irritated, than

sorry for the result of his recklessness.

Harry Wharton ran to the fallen man. He was a stranger to the juniors: but a man who had been knocked down by a Greyfriars fellow on a bike, was of course a man to be helped, if they could help him. Harry Wharton bent over him on one side, Frank Nugent on the other. 'Let us help you, sir,' said Harry.

They helped him to his feet. He stood unsteadily, stooping to rub his knee. That knee had evidently had a painful knock. He was a young man in the early thirties, with a face that, in repose, would have been called handsome. 'But it was not in repose now. It was furious, and the look he gave Herbert Vernon-Smith was almost deadly. He shook off the helping hands, and limped towards the Bounder.

'You young fool! You reckless young rascal! Take that!'

Smack!

It was quite a terrific smack, with all the force of a sinewy arm. It spun Vernon-Smith off his feet, and he crashed in the grass.

He was on his feet again in a moment, with blazing eyes and clenched fists. Bob Cherry and Johnny Bull grasped him just in time, before he could hurl himself at the limping man.

'Hold on, Smithy!' gasped Bob.

'Chuck it, fathead!' snapped Johnny.

'Let me go!' panted Vernon-Smith, struggling in their grasp. 'Think I'm going to stand that? Let go, I tell you.' They did not let go. They dragged him back forcibly. 'You've asked for that, Smithy,' said Bob. 'You've done enough damage! Chuck it! And you jolly well keep your paws to yourself, Mister Whoever-you-are!'

The limping man looked like repeating the blow. But the Bounder, panting, was dragged out of his reach, and Wharton, Nugent, and Hurree Singh promptly placed themselves between the two. Sympathy for the damaged man was quite washed out by that outbreak of a vicious temper. The juniors were prepared to shove him back without ceremony if he carried on. But he did not carry on. With a black scowl that quite marred his good looks, he picked up his hat and his suit-case, and limped away. Five fellows were glad to see him go: but the Bounder glared after him, as he went, with a scowl as black as his own. However, he disappeared on the leafy footpath, and they remembered Greyfriars and roll.

'Come on!' said Bob.

And they remounted and rode on their way: the Bounder pushing ahead at the same reckless speed as before. That was Smithy's way: just to show the other fellows that he couldn't have cared less. Luckily there were no more pedestrians on the path, or history might have repeated itself. Once out of the wood, the whole party raced. But many minutes had been lost: and minutes were precious. Six breathless juniors arrived at the school gates to find them closed and locked. Undoubtedly it had been a case of 'more haste, less speed'.

CHAPTER 2

HARD LINES!

'OH!' ejaculated Billy Bunter.

The fattest face in the Greyfriars Remove registered sudden alarm.

A moment before, Billy Bunter had been enjoying life. He was standing at the study cupboard, in No. 1 Study in the Remove. In that cupboard there was - or rather, there had been - a bag of cherries.

It was now in the pluperfect tense - it had been! The paper bag was still there. But the cherries were no longer in the bag. They were in Bunter.

There were juicy smears round Billy Bunter's extensive mouth. There were smears on his sticky fingers. He had finished the bag to the very last cherry. The fact that that bag of cherries belonged either to Harry Wharton or Frank Nugent, the proprietors of No. 1 Study, was a trifle light as air to William George Bunter. He liked rich, ripe cherries - which, to Bunter, was a sufficient reason for devouring them, regardless of the rights of property. Having devoured his prey, the fat Owl of the Remove was prepared to roll away, smeary and sticky and contented. But—!

But at that moment, the sound of footsteps and voices in the passage outside came to his fat ears. Among the voices were those of Wharton and Nugent. Billy Bunter spun round from the cupboard, and blinked across the study through his big spectacles, at the door, in alarm. If that door opened, he was fairly caught.

Why they had come up to the studies, after class, Bunter didn't know. Normally, after class on a fine sunny afternoon, Harry Wharton and Co. would have been at the cricket nets, or pushing out their boat on the Sark, or engaged in some other strenuous occupation. Bunter hadn't expected them to come up to the studies, or he might have postponed his call in No. 1. But it was the unexpected that had happened.

'Rotten!' He heard Frank Nugent's voice.

'Beastly!' came Harry Wharton.

'The rottenfulness is terrific.'

'Bother the lines.'

'And bother Quelch!'

'All Smithy's fault!' That was a growl from Johnny Bull. 'If he hadn't wasted time knocking that chap over on the common yesterday—'

'Oh, rats!' came a snap from the Bounder. Bunter heard him tramp on up the passage to his study, and slam the door. 'Well, we're for it!' sighed Bob Cherry. 'Not much good grousing. Grousing won't get us anywhere.'

'What cannot be cured, must go longest to a bird in the bush, as the English proverb remarks.'

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh was always ready with a spot of proverbial wisdom - often a little mixed!

'Good old English proverb!' chuckled Bob. 'Come on, Inky-let's get going. We've got a

hundred to do before we can get out.'

Billy Bunter heard more footsteps recede up the passage.

He understood now what had brought the juniors up to the studies. It was lines. He remembered that they had been late for roll the previous evening.

'Oh, crikey!' breathed Bunter.

If it was lines, that meant that Wharton and Nugent were coming into the study. The moment the door opened, they would behold a sticky, smeary Owl, and then - Billy Bunter could almost feel the impact of a boot on his tight trousers.

'Come on, Franky. Let's get it over.' The door-handle turned.

Billy Bunter was not, as a rule, quick on the uptake. His fat intellect generally moved to slow motion, when it moved at all. But on this occasion he acted with unwonted celerity. How often Billy Bunter had been kicked, for tuck-raiding in the junior studies, he couldn't have computed, without going into high figures. He did not want any more. There was a shelf in that cupboard: under it was a space, open from the floor upward, used for packing odds and ends out of the way. As the door-handle turned, Billy Bunter ducked a fat head under the shelf, squeezed in among the odds and ends, and drew the cupboard-door shut after him. He was just in time.

Barely had the closing cupboard-door concealed him from sight, when Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent came into the study.

'Beastly!' He heard Wharton's voice again. 'Where's Virgil? Where's that dashed Virgil? Oh, here it is. Bother that ass Smithy - all his fault, as Johnny said.'

'Can't be helped,' said Nugent. 'Let's get going. There'll be time for a spot of cricket after we're through.'

'Oh, blow.'

It was close quarters, among the odds and ends, and it was warm and stuffy. Billy Bunter was not comfortable in his hide-out. And Bunter liked comfort. But at any rate Wharton and Nugent had no suspicion that he was there: and he had only to wait till they were through their lines, and gone. And as they were evidently impatient to get down to the cricket, they were not likely to slack over those lines. The deathless verse of Publius Vergilius Maro was likely to be transcribed at a very rapid rate.

The two juniors sat down at the table, with the *Æneid* propped open against a pile of school-books. Each had a hundred lines to write from the Sixth Book. It was the unhappy result of cutting roll, the previous day. True, it had been only a matter of minutes. But Henry Samuel Quelch was quite a whale on punctuality. They had not been present to answer 'adsum' when their names were called, and that was that.

Every member of the Famous Five was feeling like kicking Smithy for having landed them with the lines. But for the Bounder's arrogant recklessness, they might have scraped in, in time for roll. Owing to the collision in the wood on the common, they hadn't. However, kicking Smithy would not have helped with the lines, so they concentrated on Virgil.

Cricket had to wait. Not in the cheeriest of spirits, Wharton and Nugent started at 'sic fatur lacrimans classique'. Further up the passage, Smithy in No. 4, Bob Cherry and Hurree Singh

in No. 13, and Johnny Bull in No. 14, made a similar start. And seldom had half-a-dozen fellows in any school been less appreciative of the beauties of a great classic.

In No. 1 Study, two pens scratched away rapidly.

But a hundred Latin lines was not a small order. Long minutes ticked slowly away, and the pens were still scratching: and a hidden fat Owl was finding his close quarters warmer and warmer. A sudden exclamation, from Harry Wharton, came as a relief, to Bunter.

'Thank goodness that's done.'

Wharton had finished first. He had arrived at 'ea freni furenti'. One more line would have landed him at a full stop. But the captain of the Remove was not worrying about full stops. He was thinking of cricket.

'Where are you, Franky?' he asked. Nugent made a grimace.

'''Quas non oraveris urbes,''' he answered. 'Only eight more, and one of them a short one, too. Shan't be long now'.

'Buck up! I'll get out that bag of cherries, and we'll scoff them when the other fellows come along. They won't belong.'

'Oh, crikey!' breathed Billy Bunter.

Bunter had been relieved to hear Wharton's voice announcing that he had finished. But that further remark was far from a relief for Bunter. A few minutes more and they would have been gone, and the path of escape open to the fat Owl - if the captain of the Remove had not remembered that bag of cherries! But he had!

Not even dreaming that his words had caused a fat pilferer of tuck to quake with dismay, Harry Wharton stepped across to the cupboard, and pulled open the door.

He reached in, to the shelf, for the bag of cherries. He did not, for the moment, glance downward, and so did not observe a fat alarmed face, and a pair of little round eyes bulging at him through a pair of big round spectacles. The next moment there was a loud and wrathful exclamation, as Wharton picked up an empty paper bag from a sea of cherry-stones.

'By gum! Who's been here?'

Frank Nugent looked round from scribbling his last lines. 'What's up?' he asked.

'Somebody's scoffed the cherries. Bunter, I expect - why, here he is!' Harry Wharton's glance slanted downward, at the fat figure huddled among the odds and ends. 'Bunter! You fat villain—'

'I—I—I say—!' gasped Bunter, 'I—I—I—'

'Come out of that!' roared Wharton.

'I—I—I say, I never— I mean I wasn't— I didn't— I— Yaroooh! Leggo!' yelled Bunter, as a vigorous hand grasped his collar, and hooked him out of the cupboard, like a fat winkle from a shell.

Billy Bunter sprawled on the study carpet. Harry Wharton stepped to a corner where a cricket stump stood. He caught up the stump, as Billy Bunter scrambled to his feet. 'Now, you fat villain—!'

'I say-whooh-hooop!' roared Bunter.

Swipe!

'Yaroooh!'

Swipe!

Twice the stump contacted tight trousers. Billy Bunter made a frantic bound to elude a third swipe.

He did not look where he was bounding. He had no time for that!

'Look out!' shrieked Frank Nugent.

Crash!

The table rocked as Bunter crashed on it.

Written sheets of Latin slid off to the floor, accompanied by Publius Vergilius Maro and the inkpot. They mixed in a heap on the study carpet.

'Oh!' gasped Harry Wharton. 'You mad chump—'

'My lines!' yelled Nugent.

The third swipe was never administered. Harry Wharton dropped the stump and jumped to the wreckage on the floor, alarmed for his lines. Billy Bunter gave a single blink at the damage he had done. He beheld sheets of Latin swimming in ink. Then he bolted from the study.

Neither Wharton nor Nugent heeded him, for the moment. They were bending over the wreck, sorting out their lines. Not till they had sorted them out, and ascertained that they were too thoroughly drenched in ink to be shown up to Quelch, did they leave the study—to look for Billy Bunter. And their looks indicated that William George Bunter, when they found him, was booked for a quite exciting time.

CHAPTER 3

BUNTER KNOWS

BILLY BUNTER grinned.

He blinked through his big spectacles at two juniors at a little distance, one of whom had a cricket stump under his arm. Both of them were looking a little excited: and both were looking at Bunter. The looks they gave him could almost have been described as ferocious. Nevertheless, Bunter grinned. He was not, for the moment, in dread of that stump. He was leaning on the wall, under the broad window-sill of Mr. Quelch's study. The window above his fat head was wide open.

Whether the Remove master was in his study or not, Bunter did not know. The broad stone sill over-topped his head. But whether or no, it was a safe spot for a fugitive Owl. Two exasperated juniors, who had each a hundred Latin lines to write over again, were eager, in fact yearning, to get to close quarters with Billy Bunter, who had wrought such havoc in their study. With Bunter, on the other hand, distance lent enchantment to the view, as the poet has expressed it. And they had to keep their distance now.

Obviously, it was impossible to handle that stump under Quelch's open window, at the risk of a gimlet-eye looking out. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent had looked for Bunter-and they had found him. But he was as safe from that stump, at the distance of a few yards, as if he had been miles away. A shindy under Quelch's window was not practical politics.

'You fat villain!' breathed Harry Wharton. He did not care to make that remark in a louder tone. It would have floated in at the open window.

Bunter grinned.

For two or three minutes, they eyed him. Then they turned away. The fat Owl was out of reach of reprisals: and they still had their lines to do. With deep feelings, they went back into the House, to re-start at '*sic fatur lacrimans*', and labour on to '*ea freni furenti*', while the luckier members of the Co. were at the cricket nets.

They disappeared from Billy Bunter's sight. The fat Owl settled down comfortably against the wall under the window. Billy Bunter liked sitting down: but if there was nothing upon which to sit, he liked to lean. Sagely, he was going to remain in that safe spot as long as he could, to give tempers time to cool down. There was no need for Bunter to shift until the tea-bell rang. Then, of course, he had to move, as the call of foodstuffs was irresistible. Until then, at the earliest, Bunter was going to lean lazily on that wall, with his sticky hands in his sticky pockets. Certainly, Mr. Quelch would not have approved of a junior loafing under his study window, and had he observed Bunter there, certainly he would have ordered him off very sharply. But the broad sill over Bunter's head hid him, even if Quelch had looked out. And Quelch did not look out. So the fat Owl was quite at his ease.

Tap!

That tap sounded from within. Somebody had come to Quelch's study. Bunter heard a door open. That the Remove master was in the study, he knew the next moment, as he heard Quelch's voice. Nor was it the sharp voice in which Quelch usually addressed his form. It was

almost honeyed in tone.

'Pray come in, head-master. Please take this chair.'

Evidently the caller was Dr. Locke, the head-master of Greyfriars. It was not uncommon for the Head to drop into Quelch's study for a chat, Quelch being an old friend, as well as a valued member of the Staff. Billy Bunter wondered idly what the two old donkeys were going to chin about this time, not in the least interested, whatever it might be. Very likely some rot about the time-table; or more likely, some bosh about the classics!

'Thank you, Mr. Quelch.' He heard the Head's mild voice.

'I hope I am not interrupting you—'

'Not in the least, sir.'

'I have just had a telephone-call from Captain Philpot.'

'Indeed, sir.'

Billy Bunter wondered who Captain Philpot might be. There was a pause. Dr. Locke, evidently, had looked in on Mr. Quelch to speak to him about a Captain Philpot, who had telephoned. But he did not seem in a hurry to begin. Bunter heard him cough, and then cough again, while Quelch waited in silence. But the Head spoke again at last.

'You are aware, Quelch, that when I received Philpot's letter last week, I was in some doubt about acceding to his request to revisit Greyfriars. He left the school under such — hem — under such very unfortunate circumstances.'

'That was a long while ago, sir,' said Mr. Quelch.

'True, very true. But—'

Another pause.

Billy Bunter, under the window-sill, pricked up his fat ears. He was interested now!

It did not occur to Bunter to move along out of range of the voices in the study.

Eavesdropping was quite in his line. From what he had heard, it seemed that some Old Boy of Greyfriars, who had left long ago under very unfortunate circumstances, was to revisit his old school and that Dr. Locke was a little dubious about it. As it did not concern Billy Bunter in the very least, naturally - for Bunter - he wanted to know more.

'He was then a junior boy, in your form, Quelch: you will remember the circumstances—'

'Perfectly, sir.'

'It is somewhat surprising that, considering those circumstances, Philpot desires to revisit the scene of his disgrace.'

'Quite, sir.'

'He is now a man in his thirties,' went on the Head. 'We must hope that his character has amended, in such a space of time. His military rank would seem to indicate as much, Mr. Quelch.'

'No doubt, sir.'

'In his letter he referred in very kind terms to you, as his old form-master. Certainly he seems to remember no resentment from the past. I had some doubts on the subject: but, as you know, decided to let him come, and he will be a guest here for a week or so.'

'He will be welcome, sir, so far as I am concerned,' said Mr. Quelch. 'I have already made

arrangements for his accommodation here, as you desired me to do. It only remains to know precisely when we are to see him.'

'That is what I have to tell you, Mr. Quelch. He has telephoned that he will be at Greyfriars tomorrow afternoon.'

'Very good, sir.'

Billy Bunter heard the Head cough again. He could guess that the old gentleman was not wholly easy in his mind about a visit from an 'Old Boy' who had left the school in 'unfortunate circumstances'. Bunter wondered whether he had been 'sacked'.

'Of course,' went on the Head, slowly, 'none of the boys knows anything of a person who was here so very many years ago. Indeed few members even of the Staff were here at that time. So there can be no remarks on the subject which would cause unpleasantness to Captain Philpot during his stay. I know that I can rely on your discretion, Quelch—'

'I trust so, sir.'

'I shall speak to Mr. Prout, who will doubtless remember him. You might have a word with Gosling on the subject.'

'I will do so, sir.'

'Thank you, Mr. Quelch. To be quite frank, I wish that Captain Philpot had not made this request, and I half regret having acceded to it. But it would be uncharitable to count against any man the faults of his boyhood, serious as they undoubtedly were in Philpot's case, actually causing his expulsion from the school.'

The fat Owl under the window-sill listened eagerly for more. Bunter was keenly interested to hear what it was that that Old Boy had done, in his time at Greyfriars, that he had been 'sacked' for.

But the inquisitive fat Owl was disappointed. There was no more to hear - only the closing of Mr. Quelch's study door. Dr. Locke had said what he had come there to say, and he was gone.

But Billy Bunter had heard enough to put 'paid' to the prospect of that Old Boy's dubious record remaining unknown to any but the few members of the Staff, and old Gosling the porter, who remembered him. They could be as discreet as they liked: but discretion had never been counted among Billy Bunter's qualities. While eating came first, and sleeping second, in Bunter's list of the joys of life, tattling came a good third. It was extremely probable that by the time Captain Philpot blew in at Greyfriars, most of the Remove fellows would know as much about him as Billy Bunter knew.

CHAPTER 4

BOOT FOR BUNTER

'TROT in, Smithy.'

Harry Wharton and Co. were at tea in No. 1 Study when Herbert Vernon-Smith looked in. Three members of the Co. were cheery and ruddy from the nets. Two - Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent - were perhaps a trifle less cheery. A double dose of Latin lines damped them a little.

It might have been some solace to lay a stump round Billy Bunter for the damage he had done. But even that solace had been denied them, by the wily Owl taking refuge under Quelch's window.

The inky lines had been re-written, and duly handed in to the Remove master. But by that time, the tea-bell had rung, and Bob Cherry, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had come in to tea.

However, excited tempers had cooled down, as Billy Bunter hoped that they would: and Wharton and Nugent were no longer bent on getting busy with that cricket stump. In fact, discussing a fixture with Highcliffe that was shortly due, they had almost forgotten the fat Owl's fat existence.

Smithy had a slightly doubtful expression on his face, as he looked in at No. 1. He was fully aware that it was by his fault that the chums of the Remove had been landed with those lines, and that they had been rather sore about it. He would not have been surprised by disgruntled looks, or even by a book buzzed at his head. But the Famous Five were not the fellows to nurse grievances. The lines were done and done with, and that was that. They bade him cheerily 'trot in': and the Bounder grinned and trotted in. 'You fellows fixed up for tomorrow afternoon?' he asked.

'Cricket!' said Bob Cherry.

'You can cut cricket for once.'

'Well, yes. But—'

Bob seemed a little doubtful whether it was within the range of possibility to cut cricket, even for once! The following day, Wednesday, was a half-holiday at Greyfriars: and how could it be better spent than in urging the flying ball?

'Anything special on, Smithy?' asked Harry Wharton. 'Sort of! I've got half a dozen tickets for the matinee at the Royal at Courtfield. I'm making up a party to go - *matinée* at the Royal, and a spread at the bun-shop afterwards. Reddy can't come - he's going up to Hawkscliff to see his pater. I'd like you fellows to come, if you'd care to.'

'Jolly good of you,' said Harry.

'Topping!' said Frank Nugent.

'The topfulness is terrific,' concurred Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Okay!' said Johnny Bull.

Bob Cherry just refrained from saying 'What about cricket?' His friends, evidently, were prepared to accept Smithy's invitation: and it was, after all, a very attractive one. It was

possible, if only just, to cut cricket for once! Bob was the last of the five to speak, but when he did, he said: 'Thanks, old scout! We'll come.'

'It's a go, then,' said the Bounder, and with a nod to the circle round the table, he strolled out of the study. He left the Famous Five feeling rather glad that they had not, after all, kicked Smithy: as they had felt powerfully disposed to do only a short while ago.

There was a faintly sarcastic grin on Smithy's face, as he went up the passage to his own study. Smithy had plenty of money, and he rather liked splashing it about: and it was quite like him to stand theatre tickets, and a lavish spread at the bun-shop to follow. But it would have been more like him to make up a party with fellows like Skinner and Snoop and Stott and Bolsover major, than with the Famous Five, with whom he was on very much less pally terms. But he had his reasons. Not one of the juniors in No. 1 Study guessed, or suspected that it was because his self-willed obstinacy had landed them in trouble with their form-master, that the Bounder had passed over his usual associates in their favour. But that was Smithy's motive, and it rather amused him that the Co. had no idea of it.

He threw open the door of his study, and lounged in.

He expected to find his study-mate, Tom Redwing, there. Redwing, however, was not in the study. But it was not untenanted. A fat figure was reclining in the armchair, and the sunlight from the window glimmered on a pair of big spectacles. Vernon-Smith glanced at Billy Bunter, not cordially. The fat Owl could not have supposed, by his look, that he was persona grata in No. 4.

'I say, Smithy, shut the door!' exclaimed Bunter, anxiously.

'What are you doing here, you fat frump?'

'I—I—I've just dropped in for a chat, old chap—'

'Then drop out again.'

'Oh, really, Smithy - I say, shut that door, will you?'

'I'll shut it when you're on the other side of it.'

The Bounder held the door open. 'Cut!'

'I—I'd rather stay here for a bit, Smithy, if—if you don't mind. I don't want to run into Wharton. He's in one of his rotten tempers, about some ink spilt in his study. Do shut that door.'

Billy Bunter's eyes, and spectacles were fixed uneasily on the open doorway. He was in full view of anyone passing along the passage: and no doubt he dreaded that the captain of the Remove might appear in the offing - with a stump in his hand! Smithy's study was a refuge where he was not likely to be looked for - with the door shut!

But Smithy did not shut the door. He had no use for Bunter, and no idea of turning his study into a hide-out for a hunted Owl.

'Roll along to your own study, fathead!' he said.

'Well, he might look for me there. I want to keep clear of the beast as long as I can. I daresay he will have got over his temper by calling-over. He doesn't keep up grudges like you do, Smithy.'

'You fat, footling freak, get out!' snapped the Bounder.

It was quite true that Smithy had a long memory for a grudge: but he did not seem pleased or gratified by the fatuous Owl's remark.

'I say, Smithy, what do you think I heard, only an hour ago! It will surprise you, I can jolly well tell you,' said Bunter, impressively. 'I haven't told anybody yet - but I'll tell you, old chap.'

'You needn't take the trouble.'

'What about an Old Boy who was sacked coming back here on a visit?' said the fat Owl. 'Nobody knows excepting me. Mind, it's a secret. Quelch would be shirty if he knew the fellows knew.'

The Bounder stared at him.

'Rubbish!' he grunted. 'What silly yam have you picked up now at a keyhole?'

'Twasn't at a keyhole!' hooted Bunter, indignantly. 'I couldn't help hearing what they said, could I, when I was just under Quelch's window, and the window was wide open? I hope you don't think I'd listen, Smithy.'

'I know you wouldn't do anything else, you fat worm. And who's the Old Boy who was sacked and is giving us a look-in?' asked the Bounder, sarcastically. So far from being impressed by Bunter's startling statement, Smithy did not believe a word of it.

'Ever heard of a chap named Philpot?' asked Bunter. 'Philpot? Never heard the name.'

'Well, I hadn't, till this afternoon. But that's the chap.'

He was in the Remove here, donkeys' years ago, and he was sacked, and he's coming here to stay, and he's coming tomorrow afternoon. The Head said so to Quelch.'

'Bosh! A fellow who'd been expelled wouldn't be coming back here.'

'I tell you I heard the Head say so: yapped Bunter. 'He must have been a jolly bad character, Smithy. The Old Man wouldn't sack a man if he could help it. He would always give a chap another chance, if he could. I mean to say, look at you!'

'Me!'

'Yes, you,' said Bunter. 'You've been jolly near it, more than once, but you always got off, somehow. I fancy this chap Philpot was a bit like you, Smithy.'

'Like me?'

'Yes - pretty juicy character,' said Bunter, shaking his fat head, 'only he didn't have your luck, Smithy. Lots of fellows wonder why you haven't been sacked long ago, don't they, old chap?'

'Do they?' gasped Smithy.

'Yes, rather! You've asked for it often enough,' said Bunter. 'I expect that chap Philpot asked for it once too often. He, he, he! Don't you think the Head would sack you like a shot, Smithy, if he found out the kind of chap you are? Looks to me as if Philpot was a chap like you, Smithy, and - Yarooooooh!'

Billy Bunter was prepared to carry on that pleasant chat indefinitely. But he was suddenly interrupted at that point. For some reason - unknown to Bunter - Smithy seemed to fly into a temper! He came across the study with a swift stride, grasped the fat Owl by the collar, and with a swing of his arm, whirled him out of the armchair. The fat Owl yelled as he

whirled.

'Yaroooh! Wow! Leggo! I say, what's the matter? Leggo! Wow!'

The Bounder did not let go. He propelled Billy Bunter towards the doorway. He twirled him through the doorway, and propelled him down the passage. Billy Bunter wriggled and yelled and spluttered: but there was no resisting the iron grasp on his collar. In that grasp, he was marched down the passage to No. 1 Study. Smithy kicked open the door of that apartment. Five fellows at the table stared round in astonishment.

'Here's Bunter, if you want him!' snapped Smithy.

A swing of his arm sent the fat Owl spinning into the study. He rolled on the carpet roaring, and the Bounder tramped away, leaving him to roll and roar. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent jumped up.

'Bunter—!'

'Boot him!'

'Yaroooh! Oh, crikey! I say, you fellow —whoo-hoop!'

Fortunately for Billy Bunter, tempers had cooled in No. 1 Study. Only two kicks landed on him, as he scrambled up and fled. Wharton and Nugent seemed to be satisfied with that - a feeling not at all shared by Billy Bunter. His yell as he hurtled out of the study indicated anything but satisfaction.

CHAPTER 5

ASKING FOR IT

"TALIBUS orabat dictis arasque tenebat—"

Billy Bunter shifted uneasily on his form.

He was in dread of a gimlet-eye.

It was the following morning. The Remove were in form with Quelch. Harry Wharton, at the moment, was on 'con'. And, for the moment, there was quite a pleased expression on Mr. Quelch's somewhat crusty countenance. Wharton's 'con' was always good. But Billy Bunter was well aware that that pleased expression would fade out, if the gimlet-eye turned on him, and the sharp voice rapped to him to 'go on'. Bunter, as not infrequently happened, had had no time for prep the previous evening. He had been too busy sitting in the armchair in his study. That term the Remove were doing the Sixth Book of the *Æneid*. The Sixth Book had no attraction whatever for Bunter. In fact, he would willingly and gladly have consigned the whole of the Twelve Books to the nearest dustbin.

There were some masters who, taking the line of least resistance as it were, gave their chief attention to the brighter pupils. But Quelch was not that sort of beak. Quelch had a way - a maddening way, as it seemed to Bunter - of concentrating on the backward specimens. This came rather hard on fellows who only wanted to laze about, and allow the acquisition of knowledge to pass them by like the idle wind which they regarded not. It came especially hard on William George Bunter, with whom laziness was both a science and an art.

"Cum sic orsa loqui vates—" went on Wharton.

Billy Bunter listened, wondering what it might mean, if indeed it meant anything.

'Construe!' said Mr. Quelch.

'In such words he prayed, and clung to the altar, when thus the sibyl began to speak—!'

Wharton translated.

'Very good! You will go on, Vernon-Smith.'

Billy Bunter gasped with relief. The gimlet-eye had turned on him, or he fancied it had: and he had dreaded to hear 'You will go on, Bunter'. Fortunately, Smithy was the next victim, and the fat Owl had at least a respite. There was always a chance, in a numerous form like the Remove, for a fellow to be passed over: and Bunter hoped for the best.

But alas for Bunter! Smithy was cut quite short: and then the gimlet-eye did indeed fix on the fattest face in the Remove.

'Bunter—'

'Oh, crikey!' ejaculated Bunter, involuntarily.

'What? What did you say, Bunter?'

'Oh! Nothing, sir!' gasped Bunter. 'I—I—I mean, I—I—I—'

'Go on at once!' rapped Mr. Quelch.

Smithy had been cut short at 'Tros Anchisiade'. So it was up to Bunter to go on at 'facilis descensus Averno'. He blinked at it dismally. He was prepared to read out the Latin, if it came to that. But he was woefully unprepared to render it into English. No doubt Virgil had

a meaning. Even Bunter acknowledged that much. But the meaning, unfortunately, was a mystery to Bunter.

"Facilis descensus Averno", mumbled Bunter, "Noctes atque dies patet atri janua Ditis—"
'You may construe, Bunter.'

Willingly would Bunter have construed, had it been within the bounds of possibility. But it wasn't! Instead of translating, he blinked and mumbled.

'I am waiting, Bunter!' said Mr. Quelch, ominously. 'Oh! Yes, sir! "Facilis descensus Averno"—!' moaned Bunter.

'Construe!' No longer did Quelch's countenance wear that pleased expression! It wore a frown. He snapped. Bunter had to make at least a guess at it - though he knew, by sad experience, that translating Latin under Quelch's gimlet-eye was not really a guessing game! "Facilis descensus Averno" - Averno descended easily—!' stammered Bunter: apparently with the impression that 'Averno' was the name of some character in the *Æneid*.

'Ha, ha, ha!' came from several members of the Remove. Quelch did not speak for a moment. He gazed at Bunter. His gaze resembled that of the fabled Gorgon. Bunter seemed to have taken his breath away with that remarkable translation. Some fellows in the class laughed - all of them grinned. Quelch did not look like either laughing or grinning. Billy Bunter's howlers did not entertain the Remove master so much as they entertained the Remove.

'Wha—t - what did you say, Bunter?' Quelch found his voice.

'Averno descended easily—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Silence! Bunter, how dare you?'

'Oh, crikey! I—I—I mean, isn't that right, sir?' groaned Bunter.

'You have not prepared this lesson, Bunter. You are the idlest boy in my form. You appear unable to translate so simple a phrase as "facilis descensus Averno". Unless you do so, Bunter, you will write out the whole lesson after class.'

'Oh,lor!'

'I will give you two minutes!' said Mr. Quelch. 'Then I shall expect a correct construe from you, Bunter. Cherry, you may go on, from "noctes atque dies."'

Bob Cherry took up the tale.

Billy Bunter sat dismayed. Quelch, really, was going very easily with him. He was allowed a couple of minutes in which to cudgel his fat brains for a translation of 'facilis descensus Averno'. But if that didn't mean that somebody named Averno had descended somewhere - and evidently it didn't - the fat Owl was at a hopeless loss. He cast beseeching blinks round him at other fellows. But nobody ventured to whisper. Quelch's ears were as keen as his eyes.

But help came from an unexpected quarter.

A slip of paper was passed along under the desks. Bunter felt a nudge, and that slip was passed into his fat hand.

He blinked at it, and read 'Easy the descent to Avernus.' It was a hasty pencil scribble in the Bounder's hand. Smithy, probably, did not care two straws, or one, whether the hapless Owl incurred the wrath of his form-master. But he liked doing things that other fellows did not venture to do. Anyhow he had come to Bunter's rescue.

One blink at the slip of paper was enough for even Bunter. It was a tremendous relief. He was ready now for Quelch, when the two minutes were up.

'Bunter!'

'Yes, sir!' said Bunter, quite cheerfully.

'You will now give me the translation of "facilis descensus Averno!"' rumbled Mr. Quelch.

'Oh, yes, sir! I've got it now, sir.' It was like Bunter to take a final blink at the slip in his fat hand. 'Easy the descent to Avernus, sir.'

The gimlet-eyes almost bored into him. 'What is that in your hand, Bunter?'

'Oh! Nothing, sir,' gasped Bunter.

'Show it to me at once.'

'But - but it isn't - I mean I haven't - I—I—I - oh, crikey!'

'Immediately!' thundered Mr. Quelch.

There was no help for it. The Bounder set his lips, as the slip of paper was snapped from the fat fingers. He could only hope that Quelch would not recognize his 'fist' in the pencil scrawl. It was a faint hope. Little escaped those gimlet-eyes.

'Vernon-Smith!'

'Yes, sir!' breathed the Bounder.

'Did you write this translation and pass it along to Bunter?'

'Yes, sir!' muttered Smithy.

"Bunter! You will write out the whole lesson after class. Vernon-Smith, you will go into Extra School this afternoon. You will go on, Nugent.'

Frank Nugent went on. Herbert Vernon-Smith sat scowling while the lesson continued. He had asked for it: but like so many persons who ask for what they do not want, he was not pleased to get that for which he had asked. It was an extremely disgruntled Bounder who came out into the sunny quad when the Remove were dismissed.

CHAPTER 6

BUNTER TOO

'SMITHY, old chap—'

'Oh, scat!' snapped the Bounder.

Smithy was not in a good temper. 'Extra School' that afternoon washed out the Theatre Royal at Courtfield for him. He had joined the Famous Five in the quad when Billy Bunter rolled up. The chums of the Remove were sympathetic. It was hard luck for Smithy.

'You fellows will go, just the same,' Vernon-Smith was saying, when the fat Owl added himself to the group, 'I shall have to cut it. But I'll come along after Extra, and we'll meet at the bun-shop for the spread.'

'I say, Smithy—'

'Oh, roll away, you fat chump. What did you let Quelch see that paper for, you footling, fozzling fathead?' growled the Bounder.

'Bunter all over!' remarked Bob Cherry.

'Well, I'm awfully sorry Quelch spotted you, Smithy, old chap,' said Bunter. 'I've got the rotten lesson to write out after all—'

'Serve you right.'

'But it was jolly decent of you to help me out as you did,' went on Bunter, 'I—I want to thank you for it, Smithy.'

'Eh?'

'I hope I'm grateful, when you did me a good turn,' said Bunter; 'I really am awfully grateful, Smithy. It was — was splendid of you.'

The Bounder stared at the fat Owl. Harry Wharton and Co. stared at him. This was quite a surprise all round.

Gratitude for services rendered was really not strongly developed in William George Bunter. And, in the present case, Smithy's assistance had not proved a present help in time of need. Bunter had the lesson to write out, for having failed to hand out that translation on his own. Nobody who knew Billy Bunter would have expected him to waste a moment's thought on the result to Smithy. Yet now, it seemed, he had sought him out, especially to express his thanks, and overflowing with effusive gratitude.

'It was just like you, Smithy,' went on Bunter; 'nobody else in the form would have had the nerve to pull Quelch's leg like that, and right under his nose too. I've always admired your nerve, Smithy.'

'You fat ass!' was the Bounder's ungrateful reply.

'Oh, really, Smithy—'

'Pack it up, and clear.'

'But I do want you to know how grateful I am, Smithy,' persisted Bunter. 'Mind, I don't think you did it just to show off your nerve to the other fellows - nothing of the kind.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' came from the Famous Five. Billy Bunter gave them a disdainful blink.

'You fellows can cackle,' he said. 'If you were a bit more like old Smithy, you'd be better

chaps than you jolly well ain't. It was topping of Smithy to chance it with Quelch, just to get a fellow out of a jam. Plucky, and all that. But you always had tons of pluck, Smithy.'

'You fat ditherer, what are you getting at?'

'Eh! I'm only telling you how grateful I am, old chap.'

I hope you don't think I'm just buttering you up because I want anything.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, do stop cackling,' snapped Bunter. 'A fellow can't open his mouth without you fellows cackling. I'm so sorry, Smithy, that you won't be able to go to the matinée this afternoon, as you'll be stuck in Extra School. It's jolly hard cheese, old fellow. You won't be able to go, you know.'

'I know that without you telling me.'

'Looks as if your ticket will be wasted,' said Bunter.

'That needn't worry you.'

'Well, look here, old chap, as you can't go, and it's rather a shame for the ticket to be wasted, I'll go instead, if you like.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' yelled the Famous Five. And even the Bounder's disgruntled face broke into a grin. Billy Bunter had come out into the open, as it were, at last! His effusive gratitude was explained now. The fat Owl was, as usual, on the make!

Smithy, certainly, couldn't use his theatre ticket that afternoon, as he was booked for Extra. No doubt he would have given it to some other Remove fellow. Billy Bunter wanted to be that fellow! The buttering-up process was designed to achieve that end! Flattery cost the fat Owl nothing. He had his own inimitable way of laying it on!

'You fat, footling, fozling, frumptious freak—!' said the Bounder.

'Oh, really, Smithy—'

Vernon-Smith glanced at five laughing faces.

'You fellows think you could stand that fat fozzler tagging on?' he asked. 'If you can, I'll give him the ticket.' Five heads nodded. The prospect of Billy Bunter's company did not, perhaps, exhilarate the Famous Five. But they were amenable.

'Okay,' said Bob Cherry.

'The okayfulness is terrific,' concurred the nabob of Bhanipur.

'Here you are, Bunter.'

Billy Bunter's fat and sticky fingers closed on the theatre ticket. Five others had already been handed over to the Co. The Bounder turned away. But Billy Bunter was not quite through with him yet.

'I say, Smithy—!' he squeaked.

'Well, what?' Smithy glanced back impatiently. 'No need for any more soft sawder. You've got the ticket.'

'Beast! I—I—I mean, I—I say, old chap, it's a jolly long walk to Courtfield. I'd stand a taxi if my postal-order had come, but—but it hasn't. I say, suppose you lend me five bob for the taxi, and I'll settle when my postal-order comes. It's jolly hot weather, you know, and—and I couldn't walk all that way to Courtfield.'

'Think you couldn't?' asked Vernon-Smith.

'I'm sure I couldn't, old fellow.'

'That's all right, then. Give that ticket to some chap who could,' suggested Smithy. And having made that suggestion, he walked away.

'Beast!' breathed Bunter. He blinked at the ticket. 'Only a four-bob ticket, you fellows. Might have thought it was a ten-bobber, by the way he swanks. I say, you fellows, which of you is going to stand a taxi this afternoon?'

'Echo answers which!' said Bob.

'Esteemed echo answers that the whichfulness is terrific,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I hope you fellows ain't going to be mean, like Smithy,' remonstrated Bunter. 'He's jolly mean, with all his swank Showing off in form, and handing out a four-bob ticket as if it was worth pounds, and too jolly mean to lend a fellow a taxi-fare! Look here, you can stand a taxi among the lot of you. I jolly well won't come, if you don't.'

'That settles it!' said Bob Cherry. 'If anybody lends Bunter a taxi-fare, I'll jolly well scrag him.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Beast!'

The Famous Five walked away, laughing: leaving Billy Bunter with his theatre ticket, but minus a taxi-fare: and evidently booked to remain in that minus state. It was a dissatisfied Owl that rolled in to dinner. More than a mile lay between Greyfriars School and the Theatre Royal at Courtfield: and in that mile there were eight furlongs, of which one was more than Billy Bunter really liked. But, with the selfishness Bunter encountered only too often, nobody was going to stand him a taxi: and only his fat little legs remained as a means of locomotion.

Nevertheless, when, after dinner, the Famous Five prepared for the walk to Courtfield, the fat Owl turned up to join them, and he rolled out of gates with the Co. A theatre free gratis and for nothing was, after all, worth an effort: and there was a spread at the bun-shop to follow, which to Bunter was a far greater attraction, than any drama at the Theatre Royal. In fact, in Bunter's estimation, it outweighed all the dramatic works ever performed, from Sophocles to Shakespeare.

'Race you to Courtfield, Bunter!' suggested Bob Cherry, as they started.

'Beast!' was Billy Bunter's reply to that suggestion. Harry Wharton and Co. walked cheerily up the Courtfield road. Billy Bunter rolled after them rather less cheerily. The luckless Bunder joined the other delinquents who were booked for 'Extra' that afternoon. For the next hour and a half he suffered under Monsieur Charpentier and French irregular verbs. After which, he was extremely glad to get out, and start for Courtfield in his turn.

CHAPTER 7

WHIP BEHIND

'STEP out, Bunter.'

'Shan't!'

'For goodness sake, get a move on.'

'Yah!'

Bunter was peeved!

It was a warm afternoon-very warm. Bright sunshine streamed down on the long white road across Courtfield Common. There were spots of perspiration on Billy Bunter's fat face.

Five members of the party were enjoying the walk. The sixth was not. Billy Bunter's fat little legs had covered a quarter of a mile. Then fatigue, or at any rate laziness, had supervened. Bunter had lagged from the start. More vigorous fellows had considerably slowed down to accommodate the pace. But now the Owl of the Remove had come to a halt.

At that point, there was one of those wayside seats, provided by a thoughtful Rural District Council for the behoof of tired pedestrians. Bunter was, undoubtedly, a tired pedestrian. He stopped, and plumped down on that wayside bench for a rest.

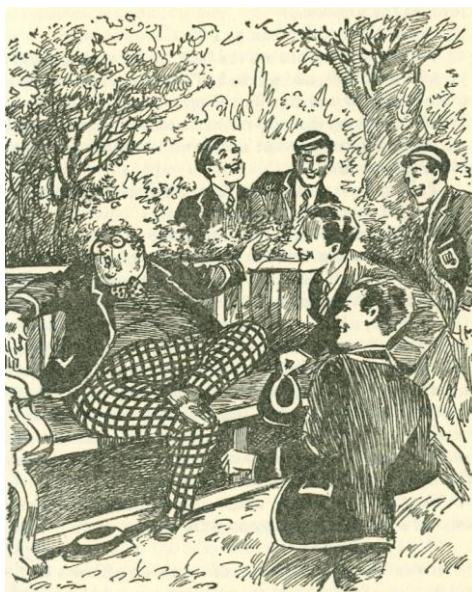
Five juniors halted also, reluctantly. But it was futile for them to urge Billy Bunter to step out, or to get a move on. His replies left no doubt about that. He wasn't going to step out, and he wasn't going to get a move on - not till he felt like making renewed efforts.

He blinked reproachfully at the impatient juniors.

'If you fellows hadn't been too jolly mean to stand a taxi—' he said. 'I'd have stood one, if my postal-order had come! You're all as jolly mean as Smithy—'

'Are you coming on?' snorted Johnny Bull.

'I'm not going to be walked off my legs!' retorted Bunter. 'If you'd stood that taxi—'



'COME ON, BUNTER,' SAID NUGENT

'We don't want to be late for the matinee,' said Harry. 'I'm jolly well not going to be late!' said Johnny Bull, emphatically.

'Bunter can stick on that bench as long as he likes - I'm going on.'

'Oh, buck up, Bunter,' said Bob Cherry. 'We're turning off for the short cut a little farther on, and it isn't much of a walk—'

'The walkfulness is not terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter!' urged Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Come on, Bunter,' said Nugent.

Grunt, from Bunter. That was all the reply he condescended to make. Bunter sat tight.

'Well, Bunter's got his ticket,' said Harry. 'If he likes to roll in late for the show, that's his own affair. We're going on, Bunter.'

'I am, at any rate!' said Johnny Bull. And Johnny marched on.

'Coming, Bunter?' asked Bob.

'Yah!'

That monosyllable indicated a reply in the negative.

Billy Bunter was a fixture on that bench, till he felt disposed to move. So the Co., leaving him to his own devices, followed Johnny.

Billy Bunter cast an indignant blink after them, through his big spectacles. Bunter wanted a rest, and he was going to have one. Apparently it was his idea that it was up to the other fellows to stand round while he had it, regardless of less important matters. The Famous Five, however, did not seem to see the matter in that light. They walked on: and in a few minutes disappeared from Bunter's view: turning off the road to take the short cut over the common through the woodland.

'Beasts!' mumbled Bunter.

The fat Owl leaned on the back of the seat, dabbed a perspiring fat face, and grunted. The others had long been out of sight, by the time he thought of getting a move on. He blinked along the road in the direction of the school, in the hope of spotting some vehicle which might give him a lift into Courtfield.

Two or three cars buzzed by: but the drivers, if they noticed Bunter at all, did not heed him. The fat Owl grunted discontentedly.

A lift into Courtfield would have been grateful and comforting. It might have landed him at the Theatre Royal before Harry Wharton and Co. arrived there even by taking the short cut, which would have been eminently satisfactory. Above all, it would have solved his problem of covering a mile without exertion, than which nothing could have been more urgent.

'Solvitur ambulando' was not a solution that appealed to Bunter. But when another car whizzed by heedless of a fat thumb, he made up his mind that that problem had to be solved by walking, unless he was to miss the matinee and the subsequent spread.

Then another sound, much more harmonious than the buzz of a car, impinged upon his fat ears.

Clop! clop! clop!

It was the pleasant sound of the tattoo of hoofs on the road.

A pony-trap was coming along from the direction of Friardale.

Bunter blinked at it. His fat face registered relief. He knew that plump pony by sight. The pony-trap belonged to old Joyce, the wood-cutter of Friardale, who used it sometimes for the conveyance of logs to customers, and sometimes let it out on hire. It was a familiar sight in the lanes round about Greyfriars. If old Joyce was driving it, the good-natured old wood-cutter was just the man to give a fellow a lift. Bunter had only to stop him and ask.

But as he stepped out into the road, and blinked at the approaching trap, he discerned that it was not old Joyce who was driving. It was old Joyce's plump brown pony, and old Joyce's rather shabby old trap: but the driver bore no resemblance whatever to old Joyce.

'Oh, crikey!' ejaculated Bunter, 'it's a nigger.'

Coloured persons, in that rural region of Kent, were uncommon. But there was no mistake about it. The sunlight glimmered on a face that was black as the ace of spades. Evidently, the trap was hired out that afternoon, and the hirer was a black man.

Bunter blinked at the black face, as the trap came along at an easy, leisurely trot. After the first moment of surprise, the driver's complexion did not worry him. Bunter was not bothering about a 'colour bar': not, at all events, when he wanted a lift. So long as he got that lift, and saved his fat little legs from further exertion, he couldn't have cared less whether the driver was white or black, red or yellow. But while old Joyce himself would certainly have accommodated him, it was not at all certain that a stranger who had hired the trap for the afternoon would do so.

However, it cost nothing to try it on. Coloured men, Bunter had heard, were generally of a genial disposition, and he hoped for the best. So the fat Owl thumbed the vehicle as it came nearer.

The driver stared at him.

That was all the heed he gave Bunter, except that he swerved a little to drive clear of the fat schoolboy standing in the road.

'I say!' squeaked Bunter.

The black man drove on, unheeding.

'Beast!' breathed Bunter.

Obviously, the black man knew that he wanted a lift.

Equally obviously, he was not going to give him one. The glare that Bunter cast at him, as he passed on in the trap, might almost have cracked his spectacles. But the driver did not even see it - he did not waste a second glance on the fat Owl. His eyes were on the road ahead, and he kept them there. So far as he was concerned, Billy Bunter might not have existed at all.

Then, as the pony trotted on, Bunter had an inspiration.

He made a jump after the trap, caught hold, and hung on behind. The vehicle was going at so leisurely a pace, that it was quite an easy performance even for the fat Owl.

The driver did not look round. He drove on, quite unaware that he was now carrying a passenger.

Bunter could only hope that he would continue in that state of blissful ignorance. For a moment his feet dragged in the dust: then he got his elbows over the low backboard, and all

was well - if the driver did not look round. Hanging on behind, he blinked anxiously at the back of the driver's head.

It was a somewhat lawless, and not very comfortable, means of locomotion. But it was better than walking - ever so much better, at least from the point of view of a lazy fat Owl. Bunter hoped fervently that the driver wouldn't look round before he drove into Courtfield. He was rather in dread of a 'whip behind'.

But that proved a delusive hope.

The driver, after a few minutes, did look round. Possibly Billy Bunter's extensive weight made itself felt. Anyhow, the black man looked round. He stared blankly, for a moment, at the fat face and glimmering spectacles looking at him over the back of the trap. Billy Bunter had no time to drop off and escape what happened next. The driver, half-turning, cut at him with his whip.

'Ooooooooooh!' yelled Bunter, as he caught that vicious cut.

Bump!

The fat Owl dropped off, and bumped in the road, stirring up a cloud of dust. A second cut just missed him as he dropped.

'Ow! Oh, crikey! Wow! Beast! Wow!' spluttered Bunter. He tottered to his feet and glared after the trap.

'Beast!' roared Bunter. 'Yah! Nigger!'

The trap drove on.

'Nigger!' yelled Bunter.

If that objectionable epithet had caused the black man to stop, and step down whip in hand, Billy Bunter would probably have bolted across the common at about 50 m.p.h. But the coloured man, though he undoubtedly heard, did not seem to mind: he did not even take the trouble to turn his head again. He drove on regardless of Bunter.

'Yah! Nigger!' The fat Owl gave him a final yell.

Then the trap disappeared up the road, leaving behind a dusty, breathless, infuriated Owl.

'Oh, lor!'

groaned Bunter. There was no help for it. 'Solvitur ambulando' was the answer after all. Billy Bunter turned off the road, by the footpath that led through the tract of woodland where, a couple of days ago, Smithy on his bike had knocked over the man with the suit-case. It was a short cut to the town - but no cut could be short enough for Billy Bunter. The sun was hot, the path was rugged: and Billy Bunter was fat and tired and lazy. His pace slowed to that of a fatigued snail.

It was a relief to reach the wood, and get out of the blazing sun, under the shady branches that met over the winding path. The fat Owl plugged on through the wood, and reached its further end.

There he stopped.

Beyond the wood lay the open common again, with the sun blazing down on it. Billy Bunter blinked out of the shade into the blaze of the sun, and gave it up. Anyhow he was late for the theatre: the show was probably half-over already. And the matinee, after all, was not

the chief item in the programme that afternoon - compared with the spread at the bun-shop that was to follow, it was as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine. So long as he was in time for the spread, it was all right, and he wanted a rest - a good long rest in the shade, before he negotiated the remainder of that beastly walk.

So instead of emerging into the sun-blaze, Billy Bunter turned under the trees, seeking a comfortable shady spot where a fellow could repose his weary, lazy limbs. And having found such a spot, he sat down to rest, with a deep, deep grunt of relief and satisfaction, his plump back against the trunk of a tree. Harry Wharton and Co. in their seats at the Theatre Royal, expected Billy Bunter to roll in late - probably very late. But Billy Bunter did not roll in late. He did not roll in at all!

CHAPTER 8

BANK RAID

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH glanced, for a moment, carelessly, at a black face, as he passed a trap on the Courtfield road, just entering the town. He knew old Joyce's pony and trap: and it surprised him, for a moment, to see a black man driving it. But that was only for a moment: the next, he shot ahead on his bicycle, giving him no thought. The trap, moving at a very leisurely pace, was left behind. Old Joyce's plump pony was capable of speed, if put to it: but the coloured man who had hired the trap was taking his time. Of Billy Bunter's encounter with the coloured man, the Bounder of course knew nothing. That had occurred while he was still in Extra. If he thought of Billy Bunter at all, he supposed that the fat Owl was at the theatre with Harry Wharton and Co.

He pedalled up the High Street, and stopped at the bun-shop. That establishment, next to the Bank at the corner of the market-place, was where he was to meet the theatre party after the matinee. Outside it was an old shady tree, surrounded by little tables. Having parked his bicycle, the Bounder sat down at one of the tables, with an ice-cream. He was early at the rendezvous: the matinee at the Theatre Royal was not yet over. Smithy savoured his ice-cream, idly watching the traffic in the High Street and the adjacent market-place, while he waited for the other fellows to turn up.

It was not a busy day in Courtfield. On market-days there was a busy crowd in the little country-town: but it was not market-day, and Courtfield had a quiet and rather slumberous aspect. Five or six persons were seated at the other tables, with tea and cakes or ice-creams. Pedestrians passed now and then at a leisurely saunter, one or two occasionally going up the steps of the bank. It was a warm, drowsy afternoon, and the whole place had a drowsy look.

Clop! clop! clop! clop!

It was old Joyce's trap coming up the High Street, at the same leisurely pace as when the Bounder had passed it on the road.

Vernon-Smith had already forgotten the black man he had passed in the trap. Now he was reminded of him again. He glanced at him, quite without interest. Several heads were turned at the other tables. Black faces were rarely seen in Courtfield, and so were liable to attract a few stares.

If the black man noticed that he was stared at, he gave it no heed. He drew in the pony, passing the bun-shop, and stopped at the bank. Apparently it was to call at the bank that he had driven into Courtfield.

He stepped down, stepped to the pony's head, and turned the trap round, facing back to the way he had come. That, no doubt, was in readiness to return, after he was through with his business at the bank. Little did the Bounder, or anyone else on the spot, guess what that business was!

The black man climbed briskly up the steps of the bank, and disappeared through the swing doors.

Vernon-Smith proceeded to finish his ice-cream. But he never finished it.

BANG!

Smithy jumped. Everyone else in the vicinity jumped.

It was the sudden report of a firearm that broke the quiet of the drowsy afternoon. It came from within the bank building.

'What's that?'

'That's a shot—'

'In the bank—'

'What's up?'

'Bank raid!'

It was a sudden babble of startled voices. The Bounder, on his feet now, stared at the bank entrance. The swing doors flew open, and a figure leaped out—that of the black man.

He came down the bank steps with a single leap, tore across the pavement, and leaped into the trap. The happening was so sudden, so unexpected and startling, that he was in the trap, grasping the reins, and lashing at the pony with the whip, before anyone could think of raising a hand.

The pony, startled and terrified by the sudden vicious lashing, broke into a wild gallop, with a frantic clatter of hoofs. The vehicle shot away at almost lightning speed.

Of all who witnessed that sudden, startling scene, only one had the presence of mind to act in time. That one was the Bounder of Greyfriars. Smithy was always quick on the uptake.

It was a matter only of seconds. But those few seconds were enough for Smithy. As the galloping pony came shooting past, he made a bound at its head, caught the reins, and hung on. The pony's head was dragged down, and its frantic rush, for the moment, checked.

But it was only for a moment.

The bank-raider, standing up in the trap, lashed at the schoolboy, with a rain of fierce and savage lashes. Five or six savage cuts landed on Vernon-Smith's head and shoulders, before he let go and fell back in the road. He had made a gallant attempt to stop the flight of the bank-raider: but he had failed. He sprawled dizzily in the roadway, and the pony, under a shower of merciless lashes, tore on.

There was a roar of excited voices along the High Street.

A minute ago, it had looked half-asleep. It was wide-awake now! People rushed from shops and houses. From the police-station in the market-place three or four men in uniform came running. From the bank a hatless man rushed, waving his arms and shouting from the steps: 'Stop him! Stop thief!'

But there was no chance of stopping him. The Bounder had had a bare chance, but he had failed. The trap rocked wildly as the galloping pony tore on, the driver still standing up and lashing savagely. Almost in a twinkling it was out of the High Street, and tearing along the country road, across the wide expanse of Courtfield Common. It vanished from sight: and it was minutes later before a constable on a motor-bike was thundering in pursuit - and still more minutes before Inspector Grimes, in a car, whirled off in a cloud of dust.

Vernon-Smith tottered back to his seat under the tree, and sat down, panting for breath,

dazed and dizzy, and with more aches and pains in his luckless head and shoulders than he had ever dreamed of experiencing before. It was likely to be a considerable time before he forgot those savage lashes from the bank-raider's whip. Several people gathered round him, with sympathetic words. But the Bounder of Greyfriars was hard as nails: and he had no use for sympathy. He sat there, rubbing the almost innumerable places where the whip had cut, and staring down the street with a black brow, in the hope of seeing the pursuers return with the bank-raider in custody. It would have consoled him to see the ruffian marched into the police-station.

But he did not have that consolation. Inspector Grimes and several constables were in hot pursuit: but the bank-raider had had too good a start, and had made the most of it. Half a mile out of Courtfield, they found old Joyce's pony and trap: the pony nibbling the roadside grass. But of the coloured man who had driven it they found no sign.

CHAPTER 9

BIRD'S-EYE VIEW FOR BUNTER

'OH, crikey!' gasped Billy Bunter.

His little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles.

To say that Bunter was scared would be an understatement. He was not merely scared. He was alarmed almost out of his fat wits.

Billy Bunter had had his rest in the shade. It had been a prolonged rest. He was feeling better. He was prepared, at last, to roll on his way, and cover the remaining distance to Courtfield. The lazy fat Owl had missed the matinee at the Theatre Royal: but he was not going to miss the spread at the bun-shop. One of Smithy's lavish spreads was much too attractive for Bunter to think of missing it. So, at length, Billy Bunter heaved himself up, and, rolled on. Once more he blinked out of the shady wood into the sunlight on the common. It was still hot: and Bunter was still lazy: but this time he was going on.

That, at least, was his intention.

But that intention was not carried out. Instead of emerging from the shady trees into the sunlight, Billy Bunter stopped dead in his tracks, staring. From the direction of the Courtfield road, a running figure was in sight. It was coming, at a racing pace, towards the patch of woodland through which the footpath ran. And it was a man with a black face.

Billy Bunter knew him at a single blink. It was not likely that he could see the fat Owl, in the dusky shade of the trees. But Bunter saw him, plainly and clearly, in the bright sunlight, as he came. It was the black man who had driven old Joyce's trap, and had given Bunter the 'whip behind' and after whom the exasperated Owl had yelled 'Nigger'.

Who the man was, why and where he had left the pony-trap, for what imaginable reason he could be racing across the common in the blazing sun, Billy Bunter had no idea. But he knew that he was the black man who had cut him with his whip, and at whom he had yelled 'Nigger!' The fat Owl stood petrified, blinking at him in terror.

The man was running like a hare. It could not be more than a matter of seconds before he reached the trees - and Bunter on the footpath. Billy Bunter stood petrified for a moment or two - but only for a moment or two. Then he scrambled into the trees beside the path.

Bunter had yelled 'Nigger' after that black man, without the faintest idea that he would ever see him again. Now that he saw him, his one idea was to keep clear of him. The man who had cut him so viciously with his whip, and at whom he had yelled 'Nigger', was not a man Billy Bunter wanted to meet in so lonely a spot. It was only too probable that assault and battery might be the outcome.

The fat Owl squirmed into the trees and thickets, and did not stop till he was a dozen yards from the footpath. There it was safe to wait till the black man had passed and gone.

Obviously he was in haste, and it did not occur to Bunter that he might stop on the footpath. He bent his fat ears to listen, and caught the patter of hurried footsteps. The running man had reached the wood, and was now on the footpath where Bunter had been a couple of minutes earlier.

Bunter expected the pattering footsteps to pass on, and die away in the distance. To his horror, they suddenly ceased.

The man had stopped running.

The next sound that reached Bunter's ears, was a rustling in the thickets. The man was not running on through the wood, as the fat Owl had expected him to do. He had turned off into the trees, as Bunter had done.

'Oh, crikey!' breathed Bunter. 'He's after me.'

That the black man had glimpsed him, and was 'after him', seemed certain to the terrified Owl. Undoubtedly he was pushing through the thickets in Bunter's direction. What could he be after but Bunter?

Bunter had stopped, under the branches of an old gnarled beech. Now, as the rustling drew nearer, he backed round the massive old trunk. His impulse was to take to his heels: but it was obvious that he had no chance in a foot-race. He blinked up at the mass of foliage over his head. Tree-climbing was not in the least in Billy Bunter's line. Only sheer desperation could have extracted such an effort from him. But, as the poet has told us, desperate diseases require desperate remedies! In his terror of the pursuing black man, the fat Owl made the necessary effort. Flight was impracticable: hiding was the only other resource: and the thick foliage offered ample cover. Billy Bunter clambered up the rugged old trunk, crawled into the branches, and disappeared from view. Clamped on a thick branch, screened by the foliage, he panted for breath.

He listened anxiously as he panted.

That the black man was 'after him' he had no doubt.

But even if he guessed that the fat schoolboy had climbed a tree, he couldn't know which tree, and Bunter was safely out of sight. Nevertheless, the fat Owl palpitated as he listened, and blinked down through an interstice in the foliage. His plump heart almost leaped into his mouth, as he glimpsed a hat below. He suppressed his panting breath.

The man had stopped-under Bunter's tree!

Had the black face turned upward, he could not have seen Bunter. But it did not turn upward. Bunter heard him panting. He was out of breath after his burst of speed from the road to the little wood. For a long minute he stood there panting, but he did not look up. It dawned on Bunter that he had no suspicion of a fat schoolboy crouching in the branches over his head.

But why had he stopped there? Peering down through the leaves, Billy Bunter saw him remove his hat, and dab at perspiration on his forehead. The removal of the hat revealed, as might have been expected, a head of thick woolly hair.

But what followed was not to be expected. It was so very unexpected, that it made Billy Bunter wonder whether he was dreaming.

For the man, having taken off his hat, proceeded next to take off the mop of woolly hair! Evidently that woolly mop was not attached to his head. It was a wig!

In utter amazement, Billy Bunter blinked down at a head of fair hair, assuredly not that of a native of Africa.

Then the man moved, and disappeared from Bunter's sight. But he had not gone on his way. Bunter heard sounds under the tree, showing that he was still there - sounds of rustling and groping.

What it could all mean, what the man was up to, was a mystery to Bunter. But he realized that, whatever that terrifying man was up to, it had no connection with him. The black was not, after all, 'after him': he did not know that Bunter was in the wood at all. He had not glimpsed him on the footpath: he had not pursued him into the wood: the fat junior's terrors had been quite unfounded. It was some concern of his own that had brought him there - though what that concern could be, was simply mystifying - as mystifying as that head of smoothly-parted fair hair that had been revealed by the removal of the woolly wig! Curiosity mingled with Billy Bunter's fears now. So long as he kept quiet, he was safe: and he was very careful indeed to make no sound. But he ventured, very cautiously, to move some of the leaves out of the way, to give him a better view of what was going on below. His eyes bulged at what he saw.

The black man was standing over an open suit-case, bending over it. That suit-case seemed to have appeared on the spot by magic. Certainly the black man had not been carrying it when he came into the wood.

But there it was: open, and the black hand groping in it. It could only have been taken out of some hiding-place close at hand: either in a thicket, or perhaps in some hollow in the ancient trunk of the beech.

The amazed Owl guessed now why the black man had sought that particular spot. It was because the suit-case was hidden there, and he wanted something that it contained.

That 'something', to Bunter's further amazement, was an oilskin bag. The black hands opened the bag, and drew out several articles: a sponge, and a bottle of some fluid, and a towel.

Then, straightening up, he threw off his jacket, and rolled up his shirt-sleeves. It was all that Bunter could do, to suppress a squeak of astonishment. For the rolling-up of the shirt-sleeves revealed a phenomenon even more startling than the fair hair under the woolly wig. The man's hands were black - his wrists were black. But above the wrists the arms were white! They looked like the arms of a white man wearing long black gloves.

Dizzy with astonishment, the hidden Owl could only blink at what he saw, almost wondering whether his eyes and spectacles were deceiving him.

The man's next action was to remove his collar and tie, and tuck in the neck of his shirt. Billy Bunter was so astounded already, that it hardly added to his astonishment to see a white neck below the black face.

But the truth was dawning on his fat brain.

That coloured man was not coloured at all! He was a white man disguised as a black man! What could be the meaning of such an extraordinary masquerade, the fat Owl could not begin to guess. But there was no doubt about it. All that had been visible of the man was black - black as the ace of spades. No one could have guessed that he was not of African race. But the rolling-up of his sleeves and the removal of his collar told another story.

It hardly surprised Bunter, now, to see him pour fluid from the bottle on the sponge, and begin to rub his face and hands with it. Nor did it surprise him to see patches of white show through the black. That black complexion was not even skin-deep. It was transferred rapidly from the face and hands to the sponge.

Dumb, the hidden Owl watched.

The man's movements were rapid. He had been in hot haste when Bunter had seen him racing across the common from the Courtfield road to the wood: and he was in haste now. He had been quite leisurely when the fat Owl had seen him in old Joyce's trap. Something must have happened since, to cause his hurried flight, to the solitary spot where the means of removing his disguise had been concealed in readiness. Bunter wondered what it might have been - and whether the disguised man was some kind of law-breaker. Certainly his whole aspect was that of a man in dread of pursuit.

He dropped a blackened sponge back into the suit-case, and picked out another. The fluid in the bottle, whatever it was, seemed effective in cleaning off the dye from the skin. Quite swiftly, as he rubbed and rubbed with hurried hands, the black disappeared and was replaced by white. Another sponge, then a third was dropped back blackened into the suit-case. But the rubbing went on, until almost every vestige of black had vanished.

He groped in the suit-case again, and this time disinterred a looking-glass. He held it up, scanning his face in it. A trace or two of black lingered, and he carefully rubbed away the last vestige, watching the effect in the glass. Then, with a comb in his hand, he gave a dab or two to his hair.

Bulging eyes above watched the transformation. The 'black man' had vanished. In his place was a youngish man with a fair complexion and fair hair. It was no wonder that he had passed unheeded Bunter's yell of 'Nigger' after the trap, which might very probably have exasperated a coloured man. He bore not the most distant resemblance to a negro now. But he was not quite finished yet.

He crammed the discarded jacket and hat into the suitcase, taking therefrom a jacket of a different cut and a lighter shade, and a hat, both of which he immediately donned. A different collar, and a tie of a different colour were added.

Then, it seemed, he was through.

Very carefully, he packed various articles into the suitcase, scanning the ground about him, to make sure that he had overlooked nothing. Bunter heard a click, as he locked the case. Then he heard a low laugh. It indicated that the man who had so strangely changed his colour was in a very satisfied mood. But the man did not linger another moment. He picked up the suit-case, and disappeared from Bunter's view in the direction of the footpath.

The rustling in the thickets died away. He was gone. 'Oh, crikey!' breathed Bunter.

The fat Owl did not stir. The man was gone, but he did not think of descending from his tree. Billy Bunter was not remarkable for intelligence or perception: but even Bunter understood that what he had witnessed could have only one meaning - that the man he had watched

was a breaker of the law. And what such a man might do, if he discovered that he had been watched, was an awful thought. The man was gone: but whether he was gone for good, the fat Owl could not feel sure. He hugged his branch and remained where he was. Even the dismaying thought of being late for the spread at the bun-shop did not move him. Not for the whole contents of the bun-shop would Billy Bunter have stirred from his hide-out, so long as there was the remotest possibility that that terrifying black-and-white man was still in the vicinity.

CHAPTER 10

THE OLD BOY

Buzzzzzz!

Seldom had the sound of the telephone-bell been so unwelcome to the ears of Dr. Locke, head-master of Greyfriars School, and of Mr. Quelch, master of the Remove.

Dr. Locke was seated in an armchair by his open study window. Mr. Quelch was seated in another armchair, on the other side of the window. They were deep in a very interesting conversation, when the buzz from the telephone interrupted.

The subject under discussion was of keen interest to the two masters, though it was one that would probably have made a good many Greyfriars fellows yawn their youthful heads off. Had Billy Bunter been under that open window, as he had been under his form-master's the previous day, even the inquisitive Owl would not have lent a fat ear to listen. For that subject was Quintus Horatius Flaccus: and in particular, Ode XXVIII in the First Book: which has puzzled generations of scholars, and may puzzle many more.

Both the masters were enjoying an exchange of opinions on that rather abstruse subject - to such an extent, indeed, that they had forgotten that a visitor was expected at Greyfriars that afternoon. However, that visitor had not yet materialized: and the discussion of Ode XXVIII might have gone happily on until he did, but for the buzz from the telephone.

Buzzzzzz!

That insistent buzz was not to be denied. Horace had to be dropped like a hot potato. Dr. Locke reached out to the telephone, and picked up the receiver.

'Greyfriars School - Dr. Locke speaking. What—'

'Inspector Grimes speaking from Courtfield,' came a plump voice. 'Good afternoon, Dr. Locke. I trust I am not interrupting you—'

'Not at all, not at all,' murmured Dr. Locke, with perhaps more politeness than strict veracity. 'But what—'

'There has been a somewhat startling occurrence here in Courtfield, sir - a raid on the local bank—'

'Indeed!' said the Head: polite but puzzled. Mr. Quelch, within range of the voice on the telephone, raised his eyebrows slightly, as he heard. Inspector Grimes was an old acquaintance of both the masters: but why he had rung up the head-master of Greyfriars on account of a bank raid at Courtfield, was a puzzle: almost as much a puzzle as Ode XXVIII in the first book of Horace. Police matters of that nature certainly did not come within the purview of anyone at Greyfriars School.

'A very daring raid, by a coloured man,' went on the plump voice. 'A large sum in banknotes was taken, and a shot was fired—'

'Bless my soul!'

'No doubt it was discharged only to scare, as no one was hit. The bank-thief drove up in a pony-trap, which has been identified as belonging to a wood-cutter at Friardale. It was abandoned on the road over the common: but the man who drove it vanished completely. It

is, I understand, a half-holiday at the school, Dr. Locke.'

'That is so. But what—'

'Many of the boys will have been out of gates, on a fine afternoon like this, and a half-holiday—'

'No doubt! But what—?'

'That is why I have rung, sir. Some of the boys may have chanced to see the man, during their rambles. If any of them saw him, they can hardly have failed to notice him. Coloured men are very rare in this neighbourhood.'

'Oh! Quite! A coloured man—?'

'Many people witnessed the raid, among them a Greyfriars boy. All are agreed that the bank-raider was a negro. The man seems to have escaped by running across the common, after abandoning the trap, in what direction is not known - though of course search is going on in every direction. He must have been seen in his flight, and it occurred to me, sir, that with a crowd of schoolboys abroad on a half-holiday, some of them may have noticed a coloured man about—'

'Oh! Quite! I understand, Mr. Grimes.'

'If the man has been seen, any information would be useful, sir. May I suggest that inquiries be made among the boys when they come in from their rambles? And if any boy has seen a coloured man during the afternoon, perhaps you would be kind enough, sir, to give me a ring.'

'Bless my soul! Most certainly, Mr. Grimes. I shall be most happy to render any assistance in my power. I will certainly have inquiries made as to whether any Greyfriars boy may have seen a coloured man in the vicinity.'

'Thank you, Dr. Locke. One moment more - I have mentioned that a Greyfriars boy was among the witnesses of the raid. I think I should tell you, sir, that this boy of your school made a very plucky attempt to stop the bank-raider in his flight, though unluckily without success.'

'Indeed! Indeed! I trust that the boy sustained no injury, Mr. Grimes,' exclaimed Dr. Locke. 'Some cuts from a whip, sir, which forced him to let go the pony's head. He was otherwise unhurt. A very plucky lad, sir, and very quick off the mark. His name is Vernon-Smith.'

'A boy of my form!' murmured Mr. Quelch.

'That is all, sir!' said the Courtfield inspector. 'I shall hope to receive a call from you - if the coloured man has been seen by any boy in the school, it may furnish a clue to the direction taken in his flight.'

'Certainly, certainly. Inquiry shall be made at once, Mr. Grimes.'

'Thank you, Dr. Locke. Good-bye, sir.' Dr. Locke put up the receiver.

'A very startling occurrence, in a quiet country-town like Courtfield, Mr. Quelch,' he said. 'A coloured man, too - that is extraordinary.'

'Very, sir! He can hardly have escaped unseen,' said Mr. Quelch. 'Probably he will soon be taken into custody.'

'We must hope so. It is quite possible, indeed probable, that some of the boys may have

seen something of him. Perhaps you will be kind enough to make some inquiry among the boys, Mr. Quelch.'

'Certainly, sir. I will do so without delay.'

Mr. Quelch crossed to the door. It was probable that Ode XXVIII was somewhat more interesting to the two masters, than a bank raid at Courtfield. But Ode XXVIII had to be left over for another hour of leisure. Dr. Locke was left to ponder, if so disposed, over that perplexing Ode, and the uncertainties attaching to the ancient Archytas - though as it happened, he was to be interrupted again. Mr. Quelch left the study, to carry out Inspector Grimes's request, and begin his inquiries without delay.

But he stopped suddenly, in the corridor.

Two figures were coming up the corridor. One was that of Trotter, the House page. The other was a rather tall young man, with a fair complexion and rather handsome features. In the keen interest of the discussion in the Head's study, both the masters had somewhat forgotten the expected visitor. Mr. Quelch was reminded of him now. Evidently, he had arrived, and Trotter was showing him in to the Head.

The gimlet-eyes fixed on him very keenly.

Quelch had a clear recollection of James Philpot, once of his form. He had been a boy then - he was a man now - but Quelch knew him at once. His keen glance, scrutinizing a handsome face, did not fail to note that, good-looking as it was, it had some very hard lines. His impression was that, if the lapse of years had changed that Old Boy, it had been a hardening process.

'Mr. Quelch!'

Evidently the recognition was mutual.

The young man stopped, with a pleasant smile for the Remove master. 'You have not quite forgotten me, I hope. I remember my old form-master very well.'

'Certainly I have not forgotten you,' said Mr. Quelch.

He did not add that he was glad to see the Old Boy again at Greyfriars. Probably Quelch had his own opinion of an Old Boy who revisited the school where he had left behind him an extremely bad record.

Captain Philpot himself could hardly have forgotten that record: and he could hardly have supposed that his former form-master had done so. But his manner was quite easy and assured. Nobody could have surmised from it, that he had left Greyfriars under a cloud: 'sacked' from his school.

'I trust that you will have a pleasant stay here,' added Mr. Quelch. His manner was scarcely cordial: there was a spot of dryness in his tone. Captain Philpot did not seem to observe it. 'Oh, no doubt about that, Mr. Quelch. I shall enjoy going over the old scenes again,' he said. 'You will find Dr. Locke in his study. You must excuse me now - I am somewhat in haste.'

Leaving Trotter to announce the visitor to the Head, Mr. Quelch walked on. He shook his head slightly as he went. That shake indicated that Quelch derived no pleasure whatever from meeting that rather unusual Old Boy.

However, he had other matters to think of now, and the Old Boy, like Ode XXVIII, was

dismissed from mind. For the next hour, Quelch was busy making the inquiries desired by Inspector Grimes. But he failed to elicit any information about a coloured man. Many fellows were still out of gates: and could only be questioned later, so it was still possible that something might be learned, to pass on to the inspector at Courtfield. So Mr. Quelch had to give it up for the present - little guessing that there was one member of his form, still absent, who would not only be able to give news of that coloured man, but news of the most surprising, unexpected, and startling kind.

CHAPTER 11

SURPRISE FOR SMITHY

'VERNON-SMITH. '

'Yes, Wingate.'

'Quelch's study.'

The Bounder scowled.

Six juniors came to a halt, as Wingate of the Sixth called to Smithy in the quad.

Harry Wharton and Co. had come in, in very cheery spirits.

They had had a good show at the Theatre Royal, after which they had joined Smithy at the bun-shop for the 'spread', and learned of the exciting happening while they had been at the theatre. Why Billy Bunter had not turned up for the spread was rather a puzzle: but it was a puzzle which nobody was particularly interested in solving: and in fact they forgot the fat Owl's existence in discussing the much more interesting topic of the bank raid. They walked back to the school in a very cheery bunch, Smithy wheeling his bike, and looking as merry and bright as his companions, in spite of some painful twinges that lingered from the lashes of the bank-raider's whip.

But his expression changed when the Sixth-Form prefect stopped him in the quad, with the announcement that he was wanted in his form-master's study.

'What the dickens is the row now?' he snapped. 'I did my Extra before I went out, Wingate. What does Quelch want me for?'

'Better ask him,' answered Wingate. 'He asked me to send you to him as soon as you came in. Cut off.'

The great man walked on: leaving the Bounder scowling, and the Co. looking a little concerned. Herbert Vernon-Smith was oftener in Quelch's bad books than out of them: and a summons to his form-master's study generally implied trouble to come.

'Oh, blow!' growled Smithy: and, leaving the Famous Five in the quad, he tramped into the House, with a knitted brow.

He stopped at the door of Mr. Quelch's study. There was a murmur of voices within. Quelch was not alone. Some other beak, the Bounder supposed, was there. If it was a 'jaw', he was going to be 'jawed' before Prout, or Wiggins, or Hacker! However, he had to go through with it, and he tapped on the door.

'Come in!'

Vernon-Smith opened the door, and walked, or rather slouched, into the study. His manner was as impertinent as he could venture to make it: as it too often was. He had no doubt that a 'row' was coming, and he was sullenly prepared for it. So it was quite a surprise that came next.

'Oh! It is you, Vernon-Smith. Come in, my boy,' exclaimed Mr. Quelch, in so genial a tone, and with so genial a glance, that Smithy blinked in surprise. Evidently, it was not going to be a 'row'.

'You sent for me, sir,' stammered Smithy, The sullenness faded out of his face. Apparently

he was in Quelch's good books for once!

The other man in the study was standing by the window, looking out into the quad. Smithy could see only his back, for the moment: but he saw that it was not a member of the Staff, as he had supposed. Smithy did not heed him: his attention was given to Quelch.

The gimlet-eyes were scanning him, but for once with a very kindly glance. Quelch, seemingly, was pleased with him: a new experience for the Bounder of Greyfriars.

'Yes, Vernon-Smith. I have heard of your very courageous action in Courtfield this afternoon,' said Mr. Quelch. 'Inspector Grimes mentioned it on the telephone to your head-master.'

'Oh!' murmured Smithy. He understood now. It was not for a 'row' that he was called into Quelch's study - it was anything but that! It was for the very rare experience of hearing words of commendation from his form-master!

'I wished to see you immediately you came in,' went on Mr. Quelch. 'Inspector Grimes assured us that you were unhurt, but I could not help feeling a little uneasy, after such an occurrence. I am glad to see that you seem to have suffered no ill-effects.'

'Oh! Nothing much, sir,' said Vernon-Smith. 'Only a few cuts from the man's whip. I'm only sorry that I couldn't hold on and stop him.'

'You showed very great presence of mind, and very considerable courage,' said Mr. Quelch, graciously; 'I am very glad indeed that you sustained no harm. Captain Philpot: he added, glancing at the young man standing at the window, 'This is the boy I was speaking to you about - Vernon-Smith, who made a very gallant attempt to stop the flight of the bank-raider at Courtfield this afternoon.'

Vernon-Smith gave the man a careless glance. The name of Philpot reminded him of Billy Bunter's tattle about the Old Boy, which he had forgotten. He was not in the least interested in that Old Boy, or in the fat Owl's tattle about him.

But the next moment, as the young man turned from the window, he was very much interested. His glance was no longer careless. It became a fixed stare, at a handsome face he had seen before. It was only a couple of days since he had seen it: on the occasion of the collision on the common. Captain Philpot, the Old Boy of Greyfriars, was the young man whom he had knocked over on his bike, and who had smacked his head so savagely.

Smithy stared at him blankly.

Not for a moment had he expected ever to see the man again. He had not forgotten that savage smack that had sent him reeling. Smithy had a long memory for grudges. He would have been very glad, had opportunity occurred, to give the man something back for that blow. But he was a stranger whom he had seen for only a few minutes and never expected to see again. Now he saw him - in Quelch's study at Greyfriars! It was quite a startling surprise for Smithy. He stared at Captain Philpot, as if that young man had been the ghost of an Old Boy.

'Him!' breathed Smithy. His eyes glinted.

He had last seen that handsome face almost distorted by rage. But it wore a pleasant smile now.

'So this is the young hero you were telling me about, Mr. Quelch,' drawled Captain Philpot. The recognition did not seem to be mutual. Smithy knew the young man at first glance. But there was no sign of recognition in the captain's face. Possibly he did not remember one among the crowd of schoolboys he had encountered on the common a couple of days ago - though it was the one who had knocked him over, and whose head he had smacked so viciously. He was looking at Smithy with a smiling face, without a sign that he had ever seen him before.

'Congratulations, my young friend,' went on the captain, in pleasant tones. 'You appear to have acted very promptly and very pluckily. It must have been a very exciting experience for you to get mixed up in a bank raid.'

'Oh! Yes!' stammered Smithy. He was too taken aback by that unexpected meeting, to do anything but stare and stammer.

'And you actually saw the bank-robber at close quarters,' said Captain Philpot. 'It is said that he was a coloured man. You would have noticed that.'

'Yes, he was a darky,' answered Vernon-Smith. 'I saw him plainly enough - he was a black man. Lots of people saw him.'

'A very easy clue for the police,' said Captain Philpot. 'No doubt they will trace him before long. Your own part in the affair does you very much credit, Master Vernon-Smith.'

'Very much indeed,' said Mr. Quelch. 'And it is a great relief to know that you escaped injury in such an encounter, Vernon-Smith. You may go, my boy.'

The Bounder left the study, leaving his form-master and the Old Boy to the conversation he had interrupted. There was a dark look on his face, as he went out into the quad, where the Famous Five were waiting to hear the outcome of his visit to Quelch's study.

'Licked?' asked Bob Cherry.

'Lines?' asked Johnny Bull.

'Or what?' inquired Harry Wharton. The Bounder laughed.

'You'd never guess!' he answered. 'Not a row after all. Quelch had heard about the bank raid - it seems that old Grimey's been on the phone. I've been getting compliments from Quelch - bit of a change, isn't it?' Then his brow darkened again. 'You've heard of Captain Philpot?'

'That Old Boy Bunter was babbling about? What about him?'

'He's arrived,' said Smithy; 'he was in Quelch's study.'

You fellows will know him when you see him. You've seen him already.'

'Eh! Where and when?' asked Nugent.

'On Monday. He was the man who got in the way of my bike on the common.'

'The man you knocked over!' exclaimed Bob.

'The man who smacked my head!' said Smithy, with a glint in his eyes.

'Oh, my hat! Did he know you again?'

'He didn't seem to. But if he's forgotten me, I haven't forgotten him!' said Vernon-Smith, with set lips.

'Well, if he's that chap, it's just as well he doesn't know you again,' said Johnny Bull. 'You don't want Quelch to hear that you knocked a man over by reckless riding.'

'Oh, give us a rest about that,' snapped the Bounder. 'That was an accident - but it wasn't an accident that he pitched into me and knocked me spinning. He was pleasant enough in Quelch's study: but he's a rotten brute all the same, and I'd like to give him one back for that smack at my head.'

'Well, you can't smack his!' said Bob, with a grin. 'Can't smack an Old Boy's head when he visits his old school.'

'The old school he was sacked from, according to Bunter,' sneered Smithy.

'Oh, rot.'

The Famous Five, like most fellows in the Remove, had heard Billy Bunter's tattle about that Old Boy. They had given it little heed. Neither had Smithy - till now! Now he seemed disposed to heed it - now that it turned out that that Old Boy was the man who had smacked his head!

'Like his cheek to come back here, if that's how it was,' he said. 'Might give him a tip that a man who was sacked, isn't wanted here.'

'Better forget all about it, Smithy,' said Harry. 'I would, old fellow.'

'It wasn't your head he smacked!' sneered Smithy. 'Now he's here, he's going to get a Roland for his Oliver: and I think I know how.'

'Wash it out, old chap,' urged Bob. 'I know he was a brute to pitch into you as he did: but after all, you'd knocked him over with your bike. Call it a day.'

'I'll call it a day, when I've squared the account!' answered the Bounder: and with that he left the Famous Five: evidently having no use for their pacific counsels.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' murmured Bob Cherry, a little later, 'there's the johnny, you fellows.' Five pairs of eyes turned on a rather tall young man who came sauntering out of the House. Captain Philpot's chat with his old form-master was over - and apparently he was taking a stroll about his old school. All the juniors knew him, at a glance, as the man who had gone down under Smithy's bike on Monday, and had been so savagely enraged by the accident.

'I wonder if he'll know us again!' murmured Nugent. 'It seems that he didn't know Smithy.' It did not seem that the Old Boy recognized them. His glance fell on them for a moment, but he passed on, without a sign of recognition. They watched him, for a few moments, as he sauntered on, with an air of careless ease. Then they went into the House, rather relieved, and judiciously decided to keep out of that Old Boy's way during his stay at his old school.

CHAPTER 12

WHAT BUNTER SAW

'I SAY, you fellows.'

Five fellows, in No. 1 Study in the Remove, looked round, as that fat squeak was heard in the doorway.

There was a jug of lemonade on the table, and the chums of the Remove were variously supplied with two tumblers, two tea-cups, and a tin mug. Cool lemonade was grateful and comforting on a hot afternoon: and Frank Nugent having brewed the same, the Famous Five had gathered to dispose of it, when Billy Bunter happened.

Sad to relate, they had forgotten Billy Bunter's fat existence, and did not remember it, till now reminded of it, as he rolled into the study.

Bunter looked tired. As a matter of fact, he was tired!

How long he had remained perched up in that tree on Courtfield Common, waiting till he was quite, quite sure that that terrifying black-and-white man was gone, he hardly knew. When, at last, he had ventured to descend, in a state of fear and trembling, it was much too late to think of joining the tea-party at the bun-shop. In fact, the fat Owl had left himself no more than time to get back to the school for lock-ups. It was a dismal Owl that rolled back to Greyfriars. He blinked dismally at five cheery faces in No. 1 Study. But his fat countenance brightened a little at the jug of lemonade.

'I say, you fellows, I'm jolly thirsty!' squeaked Bunter. 'Mind if I have some of that lemonade?'

'Help yourself, old fat man,' said Harry Wharton. He pushed his tumbler across the table to Bunter.

Billy Bunter did not heed the tumbler. His fat fingers closed on the handle of the jug, which he lifted to the most capacious mouth in the Greyfriars Remove. Five fellows watched him, as if fascinated, and he tilted the jug over that extensive reception-area.

Gurgle! gurgle! gurgle!

Up went the jug - down went the lemonade.

'Go it!' gasped Bob Cherry.

Bunter did not need that injunction. He was going it!

'Don't mind us!' added Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

Bunter did not need that injunction either!

There was a long, happy gurgle. Then Bunter, a little breathless, set down an empty jug.

'That's better!' he gasped.

'Not bolting the jug too?' asked Johnny: still sarcastic.

'Oh, really, Bull—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I say, you fellows, I was jolly dry. Sticking up in that tree for hours and hours and hours—'

'Eh?'

'What?'

Harry Wharton and Co. had wondered a little why Bunter had not turned up for the spread at the bun-shop. It was so very unusual for the fat Owl to miss a feed. What had become of him, they did not know: and perhaps were not particularly interested to know. But if they had put in any amount of hard thinking on the subject, they would never have guessed that he had spent his time 'sticking up a tree'.

'Sticking up a tree!' repeated Bob. 'What the jolly old dickens have you been sticking up a tree for?'

'I had to keep out of that beast's way, you know. I couldn't be sure he was gone. Oh, crikey! Suppose he'd spotted me!'

'He-who?'

'That awful black man—!'

Five fellows jumped, as if moved by the same spring.

A 'black man' was very much in their thoughts, since the bank raid that afternoon. Mr. Quelch had been questioning Greyfriars fellows who had been out of gates, as to whether they had seen anything of a 'black man'. It looked as if Bunter had!

'A coloured man!' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

'You've seen him!' exclaimed Nugent.

'Haven't I jolly well?' gasped Bunter. 'I can tell you I was jolly scared when he came running across the common, because I called "Nigger" after him when he gave me the whip behind, and of course I thought he was a black man, as he was black, you know—'

'You thought he was a black man because he was black?' ejaculated Bob Cherry. 'Yes - wouldn't you?'

'You howling ass—!'

'Oh, really, Cherry—'

'What else could you think he was but black, you fat ass, if he was black?' howled Bob. 'I mean, he wasn't black—'

He wasn't?'

'No! I thought he was black because he was black, but he wasn't black,' explained Bunter.

'Of course I thought he was black, when he was as black as soot, but he wasn't black at all.' They gazed at him.

'If Bunter's seen a coloured man, it must be that bank-robber,' said Harry. 'But what on earth does he mean? Anybody know?'

'The knowfulness is not terrific.'

'Wandering in his mind, I suppose,' said Johnny Bull. 'That is, if he's got one to wander in.'

'Oh, really, Bull—'

'You fat chump, have you seen a black man or not?' roared Bob.

'Don't I keep on telling you I saw him, and I jolly well kept out of his way. That's why I got up the tree,' explained Bunter. 'Of course, I hadn't the faintest idea that he wasn't a black man at all.'

'Oh, help!' gasped Bob. 'Bunter's seen a black man who wasn't black! Can anybody make head or tail of that?'

'I give it up!' said Johnny Bull.

'I suppose he must mean something,' said Nugent, gazing at the fat Owl. 'Do you mean anything, Bunter?'

'Oh, really, Nugent! I mean he was black at first, but he wasn't black afterwards.'

'He was black at first, but wasn't black afterwards!' said Bob, like a fellow in a dream. 'This is getting curiouser and curiouser, as Alice said in Wonderland. Did he change colour like a chameleon, Bunter?'

'Yes!'

'WHAT?' yelled the Famous Five, altogether.

'Just like that!' said Bunter. 'I can tell you it made me jump. I'll bet it would have made you fellows jump, too, if you'd seen it.'

'I'll bet it would!' gasped Bob.

'The jumpfulness would have been terrific,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Is that fat lunatic off his chump?' asked Johnny Bull. 'Or is he trying to pull our leg, or what?'

'If he's seen a coloured man about, Quelch ought to know at once,' said Frank Nugent; 'but has he?'

'Look here, Bunter,' said Harry Wharton. 'A coloured man raided the bank at Courtfield this afternoon, and old Grimes and the bobbies are after him. If you've seen anything of him—'

'Oh, crikey! That was it, was it?' gasped Bunter. 'I jolly well thought that he had been up to something - it looked like it. I mean, making out that he was a nigger, when he jolly well wasn't—'

'But he was!' roared Bob.

'I tell you he wasn't! Of course, he looked like one, with that black face, till he washed it off—.'

'Washed off what?' shrieked Bob.

'Eh! The black, of course - the black paint—'

'The black paint!' repeated all the Famous Five, together.

'Yes! I can tell you I nearly fell out of that tree when I saw him! He wasn't black at all when he'd cleaned it off.'

'Great pip!'

'Oh, holy smoke!'

Harry Wharton and Co. fairly blinked at the fat Owl. Billy Bunter's meaning was disentangled at last! He had seen a black man, who wasn't really black - he had seen him clean off his coloured complexion!

If that was so, there could be little doubt about the man he had seen - it could only have been the bank-raider, who had adopted a cunning and utterly unsuspected disguise to carry out the raid.

Not for a moment had such a trick been suspected.

Smithy, who had seen the 'black' man at close quarters, had never dreamed of it. Inspector Grimes and his men were in search of a coloured man, never dreaming that he was not coloured at all! They were not likely to run down that coloured man, if what Billy Bunter

stated was correct.

'Suffering cats!' gasped Bob Cherry, 'this beats Banagher!'

'The beatfulness of esteemed Banagher is terrific,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'If that fat ass has got it right—!' said Johnny Bull. 'Look here, Bunter,' exclaimed Harry Wharton, 'let's have this clear. You say you saw a black man, when you were hiding in a tree, wash off the black, and walk away a white man—!'

'Yes, I jolly well did.'

'If you did, it was that bank-raider, and Inspector Grimes has got to know about it. If you didn't go to sleep in the tree and dream it—'

'Oh, really, Wharton—'

'If you're really sure'

'Of course I'm sure! Think I don't know what I saw with my own eyes!' yapped Bunter.

'Then come down to Quelch at once. He will get the police-station on the telephone,' said Harry.

'All right! I'll go and tell Quelch if you like. But—'

'But what?'

'I haven't had my tea! I'm jolly hungry! I say, you fellows, have you got anything to eat in the study? It's too late for hall, and I can tell you I'm famished. I'll go and tell Quelch afterwards—'

'You fat, foozling, footling fathead, you'll come down to Quelch this minute,' hooted the captain of the Remove, 'never mind your tea!'

'But I say, I do mind—'

'Come on!'

'But I say - Beast!'

A meal, to a hungry Owl who had missed one, seemed rather more urgent than going to Quelch. But Billy Bunter had no choice in the matter. Harry Wharton grasped a fat shoulder, and marched him out of the study. Billy Bunter went squeaking protest: but he went.

STARTLING NEWS

TAP!

Mr. Quelch did not, for the moment, heed that tap at his study door.

He was standing at his window, wide open to admit the summer breeze, looking out into the sunset in the quad.

There were a good many persons to be seen in the quadrangle: but Quelch's eyes were fixed on one in particular. Captain Philpot was sauntering there, and it was that Old Boy of Greyfriars in whom Quelch was interested.

There was a thoughtful shade on his brow.

Owing to the 'unfortunate circumstances' to which Billy Bunter had heard the Head allude, James Philpot had had to leave Greyfriars while still a junior in Quelch's form, the Remove. Quelch could not help feeling, and thinking, that the man would have done better to keep clear of the school which he had, as a boy, left in disgrace. However, as he was there, Quelch was prepared to be polite, and as cordial as possible. He had had quite a long chat with the captain, in his study: but he was relieved when the Old Boy left him. Philpot's easy assurance of manner jarred on him a little - in the unusual circumstances.

Now, looking at him from the window, he saw him join Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, who was walking majestically in the quad. Even at the distance, Quelch could read in Prout's portly face that he did not want the company of the Old Boy whose dubious record he knew and remembered. If Philpot observed it, evidently he could not have cared less. He walked on with Prout, and they disappeared together from Quelch's view under the elms.

Tap!

The Remove master heard the second tap at his door, and he turned from the window, dismissing the Old Boy from mind, and rapped: 'Come in!'

Harry Wharton opened the door, and entered the study, Billy Bunter rolling in with him.

'Well?'

'Bunter has something to tell you, sir,' said Harry. 'I think it's important.'

'Indeed! What is it, Bunter?'

'It's about that black man, sir—'

'Oh!' Quelch was alert at once. His inquiries on that subject had led to nothing, so far. 'You have been out of gates this afternoon, Bunter?'

'Yes, sir! I was going to Courtfield, but—'

'Have you seen a coloured man?'

'Yes, sir, only he wasn't coloured—'

'What?'

'I mean he was black, only he wasn't black—'

'Bunter means that the man was disguised as a coloured man, sir, and he saw him wash off the disguise!' said Harry, hastily.

'Bless my soul!'

Mr. Quelch stared blankly for a moment or two. Billy Bunter's startling tale had astonished the Famous Five. Now Quelch was astonished in his turn. But he was very quick to realize that, if the tale was true, it was of the first importance. Inspector Grimes had hoped that some Greyfriars boy might furnish a clue to the direction of the coloured man's flight. But he had never dreamed of a clue like this!

'Bless my soul!' repeated Mr. Quelch 'is it possible! Bunter tell me at once what you have seen! Be brief!'

It was not easy for Billy Bunter to be brief. He was wont to ramble. But his form-master cut his ramblings very short, rapping out sharp questions one after another. In a few minutes Mr. Quelch extracted the whole story from the fat Owl, and satisfied himself that Billy Bunter really had witnessed the transformation of the pretended coloured man.

'Bless my soul!' said Mr. Quelch, again, 'this is very important - most important. I must speak to Inspector Grimes at once. You were quite right, Wharton, to bring Bunter to me. Bunter, I have no doubt that Mr. Grimes will wish to see you, immediately he hears of this. You will be ready to come to my study when I send for you.'

'Oh! Yes, sir.'

The two juniors left the study.

Mr. Quelch made almost a jump at the telephone.

With hurried fingers he dialled Courtfield police Station. What he had to tell Inspector Grimes caused that official gentleman to reply that he would come over to the school at once. Undoubtedly he was very keen to question the schoolboy who had so strange a tale to tell.

Having put up the receiver, Mr. Quelch returned to his open window, with an eye on the gates in the distance for the arrival of the inspector from Courtfield. There his glance fell again upon the Old Boy.

Captain Philpot had left Mr. Prout - or perhaps Mr. Prout had left him. But if the Old Boy had been rebuffed, his easy look gave no sign of it, as he came sauntering along the path under the study windows.

He stopped at Quelch's window, leaning an elbow on the stone sill under which Billy Bunter's fat head had been ducked the day before.

'I seem to have arrived in the midst of an unusual spot of excitement in my old school,' he remarked, with a smile. 'Everyone seems to be talking about the bank raid this afternoon.'

'No doubt,' said Mr. Quelch, 'Inspector Grimes desired inquiries to be made among the boys, as to whether anything had been seen of a coloured man: and that has naturally spread the news over the whole school. Happily, one boy is able to furnish very valuable information.'

'Indeed!' The young man gave Mr. Quelch a very curious look. 'Do you mean that some boy here actually saw the negro in his flight?'

'It transpires that the man was not a negro at all—'

'What?'

'From what this boy, Bunter, tells me, the man was in a very cunning disguise,' explained Mr.

Quelch. 'Bunter actually watched him removing the disguise, concealed in a tree on Courtfield Common.'

'He watched him?'

'Yes. It seems that he was frightened of the man and hid himself in a tree, and so saw him without being' seen himself. The man was not black at all.'

'Is it possible?'

'I have satisfied myself that what Bunter has stated is correct, and have, of course, notified Inspector Grimes. I am expecting him here any moment now.'

'The inspector'? He is coming here?'

'Without loss of time. Naturally he wishes to question the boy himself. It is very gratifying that a Greyfriars boy will be able to give such unexpected and useful information' said Mr. Quelch. 'At the moment, the authorities are in search of a coloured man: and the knowledge that his colour was nothing but a cunning disguise, cannot fail to be useful.'

'This boy – Bunter - is he in the school now?'

'Certainly. You may have seen him - a plump boy in spectacles—'

'No! I have not seen him.' The captain shifted his elbow from the window-sill. He gave a sharp glance round him, perhaps to ascertain whether a plump boy in spectacles might be in the offing. 'This is very interesting - very interesting indeed, Mr. Quelch. No doubt this boy, Bunter, would be able to identify the man, if he saw him again.'

'I have no doubt of that. He will certainly be able to give a description of him,' said Mr. Quelch. 'He is not a very intelligent boy, but all that he can tell will be of use to the police.' There was a buzz of a car in the distance, and Mr. Quelch's glance returned to the gates. A car was turning in at the old gateway.

'That will be Inspector Grimes!' said the Remove master. 'He has lost no time. You will excuse me now, Captain Philpot - I must send for Bunter.'

He turned from the window.

Captain Philpot walked on. But he did not resume his walk round his old school. He turned in at the door of the House, glanced about him there, and hurried up the stairs. And Mr. Quelch, dismissing the Old Boy from mind once more, rang for Trotter, and despatched him to send Billy Bunter to the study, for his interview with Inspector Grimes.

CHAPTER 14

A ROLAND FOR AN OLIVER

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH crossed the dormitory landing almost on tiptoe. In the daytime, no one was allowed up in the dormitories, unless by leave from a master. That mattered nothing to the Bounder, who was a law unto himself whenever he could venture to be. But he did not want to be heard or seen. What he had in mind was reckless enough: but Smithy was cautious even in his recklessness.

From that wide landing, several passages opened. On one of them were rooms occupied by several members of the Staff. It was into that passage that the Bounder went, silently and swiftly.

Any Remove fellow who had seen him, would probably have surmised that he was bent on some audacious 'jape' in a master's room. There had been an occasion when Mr. Quelch had found his bed drenched in ink: and the culprit had never been discovered: though a good many Remove fellows could guess who he was. But it was not a jape on his form-master of which Smithy was thinking now.

He passed the door of Quelch's room, and stopped at the next. He had already ascertained that that was the room assigned to Captain Philpot for his stay. It was that Old Boy's room on which the Bounder had designs.

He glanced up and down the passage, opened the door, entered quickly, and shut it after him. He almost ran across the room to the window, and looked out and down. That window gave a view of the quad: and among the many figures to be seen, was that of a rather tall and athletic young man, sauntering at his ease.

'Okay!' muttered Smithy, as he stepped back from the window. He had seen Captain Philpot stroll out of the House after his chat with Quelch in his old form-master's study. Now he saw that the captain was still out. The coast was clear, for what the Bounder designed to do.

There was a sneering grin on his face, as he stood and looked round. It was a large, airy room which Mrs. Kebble had prepared for the reception of the visitor. It looked very clean and comfortable, in the glow of the sunset at the window. It was not going to look so clean and comfortable when the Bounder was through.

Smithy had told the Famous Five that he would 'call it a day' when he had 'squared the account'. Now he was bent on 'squaring the account' as he had expressed it. Smithy did not forget a grudge easily - when he forgot one at all. That savage smack at his head lingered very clearly in his memory. The man who had delivered it was going to get something back for it, now that the Bounder had so unexpectedly contacted him again.

He could not, as Bob Cherry had remarked, smack the captain's head in turn - much as he probably would have liked to do so. But there were other ways and means.

'Shipping' a study was a form of reprisal not unknown at Greyfriars. It had happened that an unpopular prefect like Loder of the Sixth had had his study 'shipped'. It was not a study this time - it was the Old Boy's room that was going to be shipped! And it was going to be well and truly shipped, if the vengeful Bounder was not interrupted. When the captain came up

to his room, he was going to find it in such a state, as would leave him in no doubt that there was somebody at Greyfriars who did not want an Old Boy who had been sacked back at the school!

That there would be a terrific 'row' about it, Smithy knew. Nothing short of a Head's flogging would result, if the perpetrator was discovered. With his usual headstrong recklessness, Smithy was prepared to take that risk.

He began with a writing-table, tipping it over. Ink from an inkwell streamed over the carpet amid fluttering note-paper. Three or four chairs were piled on the over-set table, and then a stack of sheets and blankets dragged from the bed. Two or three pictures from the walls, a clock, and various articles from the dressing-table, were added.

The Bounder grinned rather breathlessly at the heap of wreckage. But he was not finished yet. He stepped to the bedstead. It was a rather large old-fashioned bedstead, and a good weight. But Smithy was equal to it. He heaved it up and tipped it over on the heap of wreckage he had already made.

Then, as he looked round, he stared at a suit-case, close by the wall where the bedstead had been standing. He remembered that the man had been carrying a suit-case on Monday, when the collision had occurred on the common. This looked like the same one. It did not surprise him to find a suit-case in the captain's room: but it did surprise him to see where it had been placed. Why it had been slid under the bed out of sight was rather a puzzle.

But Smithy did not bother his head about that. He pounced on the suit-case. Whatever it contained was going to be added to the wreck.

But it did not open to his hand. It was locked. The Bounder gave an angry grunt. Had it been a flimsy affair with a common lock, he might have banged it on the floor and smashed it open. But it was a strong leather case, with a strong patent lock. No amount of banging could have produced any effect on it. Whatever it contained, whether clothes, or shirts, or other property, was safe from his destructive hands.

He stood holding it by the handle, and scowling at it.

He thought for a moment of pitching it out of the window. Then the scowl on his face was replaced by a grin, as another thought came into his mind.

He stepped across to the fire-place.

There was, of course, no fire in the room, on a summer's day: nor likely to be. He stooped under the chimney, and stared up into the darkness of the interior. He chuckled. That was a brighter idea than dropping it out of the window. Its owner, when he missed it, was hardly likely to look up a chimney for it.

So far as he could see, there was just about room in the chimney to accommodate that suit-case. He had only to push it so far, for it to jam and stick where the interior narrowed.

Grinning, he lifted the suit-case, and pushed it up the chimney by the end. It was a light weight, and easy to handle. Probably its owner had unpacked any heavy articles it might have contained, though he had carefully re-locked the case after doing so. Anyhow, its weight gave the Bounder no trouble. He pushed it up as far as his arm could reach, and felt it jam where the interior narrowed. He gave it as hard a shove as he could, to secure it

there: and then picked up the poker from the fender, and jabbed at it with all the force of his arm, to jam it still more securely.

'That's that!' grinned Smithy.

He laid down the poker, and looked from the window again. Anyone but the reckless and malicious Bounder might have supposed that he had done enough damage already: but Smithy was going on with the good work, if the coast was still clear.

But this time, as he looked down from the window, he did not see Captain Philpot in the quad. His heart beat a little faster. Whether the Old Boy had walked somewhere out of sight, or whether he might have come into the House, Smithy could not know. But he knew that he dared not risk being caught where he was, if by chance the captain came up to his room.

He cut across to the door.

The passage was clear, as he peered out before emerging.

He stepped out, closed the door after him, and walked quickly to the landing. He descended the dormitory staircase two at a time, to the study landing below. There he was on safe ground if he was seen. But he did not linger there. He walked quickly up the Remove passage to his study: and he was there when, a little later, the door opened and Tom Redwing came in.

'Hullo, Smithy!'

'Hullo, Reddy.'

Redwing had spent the half-holiday at Hawkscliff, with his sailor-man father, home from sea. Smithy had plenty to tell him about the happenings of that eventful afternoon. But he did not mention his exploit in the Old Boy's room. Not for a moment did he regret having given that Old Boy so emphatic a Roland for his Oliver: but it was certain that there would be a most tremendous row about it, with a flogging in the offing - and Smithy's cue was to follow the example of that sage animal, Brer Fox, and 'lie low and say nuffin'.

CHAPTER 15

BUNTER ALL OVER

'I SAY, you fellows—'

'Here comes Trotter.'

'Blow Trotter! Got any more cake?'

'You've had the lot.'

'Anything else in the cupboard?'

'Nix!'

'Oh, crikey! I wonder if Toddy's got anything in No. 7. I'd better go and see. I'm jolly hungry.'

Billy Bunter heaved himself up from his chair in No. 1 Study. Bunter was hungry: there was no doubt about that. He had missed the spread at the bun-shop: and he had missed his tea. He had rolled in too late even for the scramble in hall. He had been marched off to Quelch much against his will, after no more refreshment than a jug of lemonade. A cake, which Harry Wharton had hospitably produced from the study cupboard in No. 1, had perhaps taken the keen edge off his appetite. But the fat Owl had room for more - much more. So, having finished the cake to the last plum and the last crumb, and still feeling like a lion seeking what he might devour, Bunter was ready to roll off to his own study, in the hope of further supplies there.

But alas for Bunter! The chubby face of Trotter appeared in the doorway. Bunter was due for his interview with the inspector from Courtfield.

'Master Bunter! Mr. Quelch's study at once, sir!' said Trotter.

'Oh,lor!'

There was no help for it. A meal for a hungry Owl was, obviously, of infinitely more importance than a police-inspector, or a bank raid, or a black-and-white bank-raider or anything else within the wide limits of the universe.

But Bunter could not hope that Quelch would see it in that light. Quelch had sent for him to go at once: and he had to go. So he went. He could only hope that 'old Grimes' would cut it short, when he rolled into his form-master's study.

'Here is the boy, Mr. Grimes,' said the Remove master. Inspector Grimes fixed his eyes on Bunter, as he came in. The Courtfield inspector was plump and ruddy, solid and stolid. But his eyes were very keen under his plump brows. He scanned the fattest face in the Greyfriars Remove, adorned with a few adhering cake-crumbs.

Mr. Grimes had been startled, and very keenly interested, by what Mr. Quelch had told him on the telephone. He had not lost a moment in whizzing over to Greyfriars in his car. But it was probable that he had some doubts about so strange a tale.

'Now, Bunter,' said Mr. Quelch, 'you will repeat to Mr. Grimes what you have already told me. Take care to keep to the exact facts.'

'Yes, sir!' mumbled Bunter.

'Please tell me exactly what occurred this afternoon, Master Bunter,' said the inspector, encouragingly.

Once more the tale was told. Inspector Grimes listened almost in silence, only putting in a question now and then to keep the fat Owl to the point. But if he had had doubts, they were soon dispelled. It was clear to him, as it had been to the Remove master, that the fat schoolboy really had witnessed what he stated that he had witnessed.

'This is most important, Mr. Quelch,' he said, when he had heard all that the fat Owl could tell him. 'There cannot be the slightest doubt that the man this boy saw discard his disguise in the wood, was the coloured man who raided the bank. It only remains for Master Bunter to give me as accurate a description as he can of the man without his disguise.'

'No doubt you remember the man's appearance, Bunter,' said Mr. Quelch.

'Oh, yes, sir! I'd know him again anywhere,' said Bunter. 'If I saw him about, I'd know him at once, sir.' The inspector smiled.

'You are not likely to see him about, my boy,' he said. 'I imagine that he is very many miles away by this time. But you can describe him to me.'

'Oh, quite easily, sir,' answered Bunter. 'Was he tall or short?'

'I didn't notice—'

The inspector breathed a little hard. This fat schoolboy was the only person who had seen the bank-raider without his disguise. What the man was like, without it, was anybody's guess. An accurate description, from the one person who had seen him undisguised, was the one thing needful. But if Billy Bunter had not even noticed whether he was tall or short, the description he could give did not seem likely to be very accurate!

'Did you notice whether he was stout or slim?' asked Mr. Grimes. 'Think for a moment before you answer. Was he fat or thin?'

Billy Bunter thought for a moment!

'Well, he wasn't so fat as you, sir,' he answered, after that mental effort.

'Eh?'

'Nothing like it,' said Bunter. Mr. Grimes breathed harder!

'And he wasn't bony like Mr. Quelch, sir,' added Bunter. A gimlet-eye glinted.

'You have said that you saw him remove a woolly wig from his head,' said Mr. Grimes. 'You must have seen him bareheaded. Did you notice the colour of his hair? Was it light or dark?'

Billy Bunter was able to answer that. Even Bunter had not forgotten that head of fair hair that had so startled him when the pretended black man had bared his head.

'Light!' he answered, at once.

'You are sure of that?'

'Oh, yes! It jolly well made me jump, seeing a man take off his hair after taking off his hat,' said Bunter. 'It would anybody.'

'Then the man had fair hair?' said Mr. Grimes. 'What was its colour?'

'I didn't notice that.'

'What sort of features? You had a clear view of his face?' said Mr. Grimes, patiently. 'You must remember what his features were like?'

'Oh, yes! I saw his face as plain as anything. I remember his face all right.'

'What was it like?'

Billy Bunter made another mental effort.

'Well, it was - was like a face,' he announced, at last. 'Just a face, like anybody's face.'

'Young or old?'

'Well, it didn't look very young. It didn't look very old, either.'

'Any prominent features? Did you notice, for instance, whether the nose was large or small?'

'I didn't look at his nose specially.'

'The colour of his eyes?'

'I didn't notice his eyes.'

'His mouth?'

'I didn't notice his mouth.'

'Did you notice anything whatever, Master Bunter, that would distinguish his face from a hundred others?' snapped Mr. Grimes.

'Try to remember, Bunter,' murmured Mr. Quelch. 'Oh, yes, sir! I remember him all right! I'd know him the minute I set eyes on him again,' said Bunter. 'He's just like I've described, sir.'

Mr. Grimes closed his notebook with a snap.

'I don't think this boy will be able to give us much further assistance, Mr. Quelch,' he said.

'I fear that he is not a very intelligent boy, Mr. Grimes.'

'Oh, really, sir—'

'That will do, Bunter. You may leave my study.'

Billy Bunter was glad to do that, at any rate! Inspector Grimes knitted his brows, as the door closed on the fat Owl. 'A very stupid boy!' he remarked.

'Very, I fear!' agreed Mr. Quelch.

'Nevertheless, the information he has been able to give is of the greatest importance,' said Mr. Grimes. 'We know now that the bank-raider was a white man disguised as a negro. No witness of the raid had any suspicion of such an amazing piece of trickery. I have interviewed Mr. Joyce, the wood-cutter at Friardale, who hired out the trap this afternoon to a coloured man, as he believed, and I have questioned more than a dozen other persons - and not one had the remotest idea that the bank-raider was anything but what he appeared to be. Neither, I confess, had I, until I received your telephone call. The search for the rogue will now be on very different lines: and we owe that to Master Bunter, stupid as he is.'

So it was in a more or less satisfied frame of mind that the Courtfield inspector went back to his car. Whether he was satisfied or not, Billy Bunter couldn't have cared less. Billy Bunter's fat thoughts were running on much more important matters. Happily, he had found a cake - a large luscious cake - in Lord Mauleverer's study: equally happily, Mauly was out of gates. The capture of that cake was a happier happening, from William George Bunter's point of view, than the capture of all the bank-raiders that had ever raided banks.

BY WHOSE HAND?

'SOMETHING'S Up!' murmured Harry Wharton.

'Looks like it,' agreed Bob Cherry.

'The upfulness seems to be terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I say, you fellows—'

'Silence there!' called out Wingate.

That 'something' was 'up' was apparent to all Greyfriars, assembled in hall for calling-over.

Mr. Quelch, who was calling the roll, had an expression on his speaking countenance that might have made Rhadamanthus himself look quite mild by comparison. All the other masters were present: and every one of them looked not merely serious, but solemn. That solemnity was shared by the Sixth-Form prefects, who evidently knew what the 'something' was. That it was 'something' very unusual, and very serious, everyone could guess.

Hacker, the master of the Shell, had been heard to say 'Scandalous'. Prout, the portly master of the Fifth, was heard to boom 'Unparalleled!' Fellows who caught those remarks wondered what the dickens it could be that was scandalous and unparalleled. Clearly, some sort of a 'row' was on, a 'row' of unusual gravity.

One fellow present, perhaps, guessed what it was.

There was a lurking grin on Herbert Vernon-Smith's face. But the Bounder was quite at his ease. He had expected a tremendous row to result from the 'shipping' of the room occupied by a visitor at the school. Now it was coming, that was all. He was quite cool, and a little amused.

In an atmosphere of expectancy and suppressed excitement, fellows answered 'adsum' as name after name was called. All knew that something was to follow, before they were dismissed, after the usual routine. Mr. Quelch's face was at its grimest when he finished the roll. But it was rather a relief to the Removites that the gimlet-eye did not specially seek out his own form. Whatever it was that had happened that was scandalous and unparalleled, did not apparently concern the Remove in particular. The gimlet-eye ranged over the whole assembled school, impartially.

'It's coming now!' murmured Bob Cherry.

'I say, you fellows, what is Quelch looking like a boiled owl about?'

'Silence!'

There was almost a dead silence, as the Remove master began to speak. His voice was very deep. Everyone hung on his words.

'Before we dismiss, there is a matter—a very serious matter - with which the head-master desires me to deal. Some boy has been guilty of an action which can only be described as flagrantly insolent, lawless, and shocking - an act of hooliganism, of ruffianism, without parallel.'

'Oh, my hat,' murmured Bob.

'Oh, crikey!' squeaked Billy Bunter.

'What the jolly old dooce—!' murmured Lord Mauleverer.

'Silence!'

'Many of you,' went on Mr. Quelch, 'are aware that an Old Boy of Greyfriars is now paying a visit to the school. Many of you, no doubt, may have seen Captain Philpot this afternoon.'

'I say, you fellows, I haven't seen him. Has he come—?'

'Silence!'

'While Captain Philpot was taking a walk round his old school, some person, at present unknown, had the audacity, the temerity, the unprecedented effrontery, to go to his room in this House, and perpetrate what, I think, would be called a "rag" there!' said Mr. Quelch.

'Oh!' It was a general gasp.

'What this person's motive may have been, in committing such an outrage, is beyond my comprehension. It appears to have been an act of sheer reckless hooliganism for which no motive can be assigned. When I was called up to Captain Philpot's room, and saw the state it was in, I could scarcely believe my eyes. The room had been absolutely wrecked. But that is not all!' Mr. Quelch's voice deepened. 'Property belonging to Captain Philpot has been removed from the room - a suit-case is missing.'

The Bounder smiled.

'Whoever was guilty of this outrageous act, had taken the suit-case away with him when he left,' went on Mr. Quelch. 'It must be restored to its owner without delay. Captain Philpot tells me that it contains private papers of importance to him. Much as he is shocked and disturbed by what has occurred, it is about the missing suit-case that he is chiefly anxious. It must be found immediately.'

Five fellows, in the Remove, could not help glancing round at the Bounder. Mr. Quelch could assign no motive for the 'rag' in Captain Philpot's room: but Harry Wharton and Co. were not equally at a loss. They knew that there was one fellow at Greyfriars, at least, who had a motive for giving that Old Boy a Roland for an Oliver!

But they read nothing in Smithy's face. The Bounder was not giving himself away by the slightest sign.

Mr. Quelch paused: his keen eyes roving over surprised, startled, keenly interested faces.

Then he went on: 'I need hardly add, that the author of this outrage will be dealt with by his head-master, when discovered, with the greatest severity. In the meantime, Dr. Locke desires everyone to make every possible effort to discover what has become of the missing suit-case. Whoever removed it from Captain Philpot's room must have concealed it somewhere in this building, though no trace has been found of it so far. I request every boy present to give what help he can.'

That was all.

The crowded hall cleared, in a buzz of excitement.

What had happened was, as Prout had said, unparalleled. Most fellows agreed with Quelch that it was outrageous, and with Hacker that it was scandalous. What was quite certain was, that the ragger, when found out, was booked for the time of his life: and the general verdict was, that he deserved what he was going to get.

But who was it?

The Famous Five could not help having a very strong suspicion. Captain Philpot was a stranger to almost all Greyfriars: nobody could be supposed to have any grudge against an Old Boy who had left the school so many years ago - with the single exception of the fellow whose head he had smacked so savagely a couple of days ago. But whatever they might suspect, the chums of the Remove certainly had no idea of breathing a word on the subject, outside their own select circle. They exchanged opinions in low voices after leaving hall.

'Rotten trick!' said Bob Cherry. 'But who was it, you chaps?'

'Smithy!' muttered Nugent.

'Who else?' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Looks like it,' said Harry Wharton. 'Nobody but Smithy had his back up with the man. And it's like that reckless ass.'

'Just like him!' said Johnny.

'But not a word!' added the captain of the Remove. 'The beaks and pre's will be after him, and if they spot him, he's booked. Might be bunked for it. Mum's the word.'

'Mumfulness is the word,' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Speech is silvery, but silence is the bird in the bush that locks the stable door, as the English proverb remarks.'

'Not a jolly old syllable!' said Bob.

It was an exciting topic in the studies, that evening.

Many fellows were curious to see Captain Philpot, who had suddenly become an object of general interest. But the Old Boy was not to be seen. Search was going on, up and down, and round about the House, for the missing suit-case, and the Old Boy might have been expected to take part in it, if he was so anxious, as Quelch had said, about his lost property. But apparently he was keeping to his room, for no inquisitive eye fell on him. And in the morning there was another surprising spot of news, when it became known that the Old Boy had cut his visit short, and left Greyfriars over-night. As his suit-case had not been found, evidently he must have gone and left it behind him. And the malicious Bounder, grinning over the success of his 'Roland for an Oliver', wondered whether it would ever turn up, in its hiding-place up the chimney.

CHAPTER 17

BUNTER IN LUCK?

Buzzzzzz!

The telephone-bell, in Mr. Quelch's study, had quite opposite effects on two persons in that study.

One was Mr. Quelch. The other was William George Bunter.

Quelch, to judge by the expression that came over his speaking countenance, did not want to hear it. It was, on the other hand, welcome to Billy Bunter's fat ears, unmusical as it was. Bunter was up for judgment. Laziness, his besetting sin had landed him in trouble once more. On Wednesday, when the Bounder had acquired Extra School for giving the fat Owl a spot of present help in time of need, Billy Bunter had been commanded to write out the lesson. That lesson was a section of the *Æneid* from Line 110 to Line 132, in the Sixth Book. So it was up to Bunter to hand in, to his form-master, twenty-two lines, from 'illum ego per flammas' to 'labens circumvenit atro'.

Which Billy Bunter, naturally, hadn't done. And now it was Friday.

He had had far too hectic a time on Wednesday afternoon to bother his fat head about Latin lines. On Thursday, certainly, he could have written them, if the spirit had moved him so to do. But the spirit hadn't. So they had been doubled: and instead of twenty-two lines, there were forty-four - instead of winding up at 'labens circumvenit atro', the hapless Owl had to carry on to Line 154. The doubled impot was now due, but laziness having supervened, Bunter had had to present himself in Quelch's study without it. The thunder was about to roll, when the telephone-bell rang. It came as a relief to a fat junior cudgelling his brains for some excuse to offer for those unwritten lines.

Quelch did not share his feelings at all. Quelch had had a good deal of that telephone during a couple of days. Twice, on Thursday, he had been rung up by Captain Philpot, with an inquiry about the lost suit-case. Twice again during Friday that inquiry had been repeated. Mr. Quelch was more than tired of the subject - of the Old Boy, of the telephone, and of the suit-case. Now he had little doubt that it was James Philpot again: and he had nothing to tell him, excepting that search was still being made, with no success so far. Really it seemed to him that the Old Boy's anxiety about that suit-case was being overdone. He frowned, and grabbed off the receiver.

'Shall I go, sir?' asked Billy Bunter, hopefully. The fat Owl would have been glad to escape from the study, without going further into the matter of those unwritten lines.

But there was no escape for Bunter. He received a Gorgon-like glare over the telephone.

'You will remain, Bunter,' snapped Mr. Quelch. Bunter reluctantly remained. His only consolation was to lend a fat ear, to catch what was said on the telephone! Billy Bunter was never uninterested in what did not concern him.

'Mr. Quelch speaking! If that is Captain Philpot again—'

The Remove master could not quite keep a note of impatience out of his voice.

'I am sorry to be troubling you again, Mr. Quelch!' It was the Old Boy's rather drawling voice,

'but—'

'Oh! Not at all!' said Mr. Quelch, with an effort, 'I am only sorry that I have no news for you.'

'The suit-case has not been found?'

'As I have already told you, sir, it is being searched for. I have every hope that the foolish boy who played so inexcusable a prank in your room here will be discovered, and compelled to reveal what he has done with it. It is only a matter of time, Captain Philpot. Obviously it must still be in this building, and is in no danger of being actually lost.'

'No doubt, sir, no doubt. I will give you another ring tomorrow, Mr. Quelch. If the suit-case has not been found by then, I must consider returning to the school and searching for it personally.'

'You will be very welcome to do so, Captain Philpot.'

Indeed that is what I should have expected you to do, if you had not decided to leave so abruptly on Wednesday night.'

'I did not care to remain, Mr. Quelch, under a roof where I had been treated with such contumely.'

'I can quite understand that, Captain Philpot. You had every reason to be offended. Nevertheless, you can scarcely lay the blame for what occurred at the headmaster's door. Dr. Locke was deeply distressed, and he will certainly administer the most condign punishment when the culprit is discovered.'

'I am less concerned with that, Mr. Quelch, than with the loss of my suit-case. At the moment, I have other business on hand: but if I do not hear from you tomorrow that the suit-case is found, I shall return to the school and take the matter in hand myself.'

'Very well, Captain Philpot. I trust that I may have news for you tomorrow.'

'I trust so, sir.'

Mr. Quelch breathed rather hard, as he put up the receiver. The whole affair was troublesome and annoying. He did not like that Old Boy, and he had not approved of the man revisiting Greyfriars. The utterly unexpected outcome of that visit was a shock to him. Now it really seemed that he was never to hear the end of it. He did not want to see that Old Boy again, and certainly did not look forward with any pleasure to his return. But unless a discovery was made by the morrow, Captain Philpot would be back at Greyfriars, in quest of that lost suit-case. It was all very disturbing and upsetting to Mr. Quelch: and when he turned from the telephone, he did not look in a mood to deal gently with a lazy fat Owl who had not done his lines.

'Now, Bunter—' It was a sharp snap. 'Where are your lines?'

'I—I—I—!' stammered Bunter.

'Have you written them?'

The expression on Quelch's face did not encourage the fat Owl to reply in the negative. Quelch's hand was already straying towards a cane!

'Oh! Yes, sir!' gasped Bunter.

'Then why have you not brought them to me?'

'I—I—I had—an accident with them, sir. A—a fellow was—was larking in the study, sir,

and—and upset the inkpot over them, sir. I—I was just going to bring them, sir, when it—it happened.'

'Bunter!'

'Yes, sir! They—they were all smothered with ink, sir, so I—I—I thought I couldn't show them up, sir.'

No doubt it was a reminiscence of the disaster in No. 1 Study on Tuesday, that had put that bright idea into Billy Bunter's fat mind. He hoped that it would be good enough for Quelch, and at least gain him a respite.

Quelch did not seem to look as if it was good enough.

His brows, already contracted, contracted still further. 'If you are telling me the truth, Bunter—'

'Oh, really, sir—'

'You must learn to be more careful with an imposition, Bunter, and you will write the lines over again. But if you are not telling me the truth, I shall cane you. You are the most untruthful boy in my form, Bunter. Go at once and fetch your lines, in whatever condition they may be.'

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter.

'At once!' rapped Mr. Quelch.

'But— but they're all smothered with ink, sir, and I—I—I threw them away, sir!' stuttered Bunter.

'Where did you throw them, Bunter?' inquired Mr. Quelch, grimly.

'I—I—I forget, sir,' groaned Bunter. Mr. Quelch picked up his cane.

Buzzzzzz!

For the second time, the buzzing telephone came to the relief of the Owl of the Remove. Mr. Quelch glanced round at the instrument, uttering a sound resembling a snort. He laid down the cane, and snatched up the receiver. His patience was at its limit. He had had enough - more than enough - of that persistent Old Boy and his inquiries after that wretched suit-case. He fairly barked into the transmitter.

'Upon my word! This is too much - it is really too much! I must ask you, sir, not to persist in wasting my time -'

'Mr. Quelch!'

'Oh!' gasped Mr. Quelch.

'I—I—I beg your pardon, sir!'

It was not the Old Boy's voice this time. Quelch, somewhat hastily, had taken it for granted that it was Captain Philpot again. But it was not Captain Philpot. It was the surprised voice of Dr. Locke, the head-master of Greyfriars, that came through. Quelch almost dropped the receiver.

'Mr. Quelch! What - what - what did you say?'

'I—I—I—!' stammered Mr. Quelch. It was the majestic Head himself who had been put through from his study to Quelch's. Quite taken aback, Quelch could only stammer, in his confusion. 'I—I—I beg your pardon, sir- I suppose — I—I—I mean I thought—I—I had no

idea - Pray excuse me, sir—Bless my soul!

'Really, Mr. Quelch—'

'I—I—I had no idea, sir, that it was you whom I was addressing. I—I—I—Bless my soul!'

Billy Bunter grinned. Luckily, Quelch's back was to him, and he did not see that fat grin.

Quelch was very far from sharing Bunter's amusement.

'Very well, very well,' came the Head's voice, 'I desired to tell you, Mr. Quelch, that I have just received a telephone-call from Mr. Bunter—'

'Mr. Bunter?'

'The father of a boy in your form. He is at Friardale, and desires his son to meet him at the station there. No doubt you will give Bunter leave to do as his parent requests.'

'Certainly, sir, certainly.'

'Thank you, Mr. Quelch. That is all.'

Mr. Quelch put up the receiver once more, and turned to Billy Bunter. His glance dwelt, for a moment, on the cane. But to the fat Owl's relief, he did not pick it up again.

'Bunter ! Your father is at Friardale Station, and desires you to meet him there. You have leave from class. You may go.'

Gladly, Billy Bunter went.

It was quite a cheerful Owl that rolled away from his form-master's study. True, that doubled impot still remained to be done. But Billy Bunter was not the fellow to meet troubles half-way. In the meantime, he was getting out of class: and there was a possibility, at least, of a parental tip! While the rest of the Remove gathered in the form-room for English Literature with Quelch, Billy Bunter, happily exempt from Quelch and English Literature, rolled cheerfully out of gates - little dreaming what was in store for him!

CHAPTER 18

AMAZING!

'MASTER BUNTER?'

'Eh! Yes! I'm Bunter.'

Half-way from the school to the village, Billy Bunter paused in his leisurely roll, to blink through his big spectacles at the man who addressed him.

Friardale Lane was somewhat narrow at that point, deeply shaded by branches on either side. Bunter, as he rolled, noticed that a hand-cart was drawn up on the grass verge by the lane, the handles resting in the grass. Near it a man was leaning on a tree, smoking a cigarette, and looking along the lane in the direction of Greyfriars.

He was a roughly-dressed man, with a bushy beard, and a black patch over one eye. He looked like a travelling pedlar, who had stopped there for a rest in the shade on a warm afternoon. Billy Bunter would have rolled past him unheeding: but as he came up, the man stepped from the tree, touching his ragged hat, and inquired whether he was Master Bunter.

'Master Bunter of Greyfriars School?' he added, as if to make quite sure of the fat schoolboy's identity.

'Yes,' answered Bunter, 'what do you want?'

The man with the patched eye made no answer to that question. He cast a swift glance up and down the lane.

It was solitary, except for himself and Bunter.

What happened next was amazing.

With sudden swiftness, he grasped the fat junior, and with a swing of sinewy arms, spun him off the road, on to the grass verge, where the hand-cart stood.

'Ooooooh!' gasped the astonished Owl.

Another swing of those sinewy arms, and Billy Bunter was landed bodily in the hand-cart. He bumped in it and yelled.

'Yaroooh! Leggo! Oh, crikey! Ow!'

'Silence!'

Billy Bunter, in such startling and alarming circumstances, was not likely to be silent, if he could help it. He roared.

A hand was clapped over his mouth.

'Silence, I tell you.' The bushy beard and patched eye loomed over Bunter like some horrid vision. He gurgled into silence under the grip of a hard hand.

His little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles, at the threatening face bending over him. 'Quiet, you young fool! You're not going to be hurt, if you give no trouble. But keep quiet!'

Bunter could only blink at him in terror. What this amazing happening could possibly mean, he could not begin to guess. The patched man was a stranger to him: he had never, so far as he knew, set eyes on him before. Who was he, and what did he want? What was he going to

do?

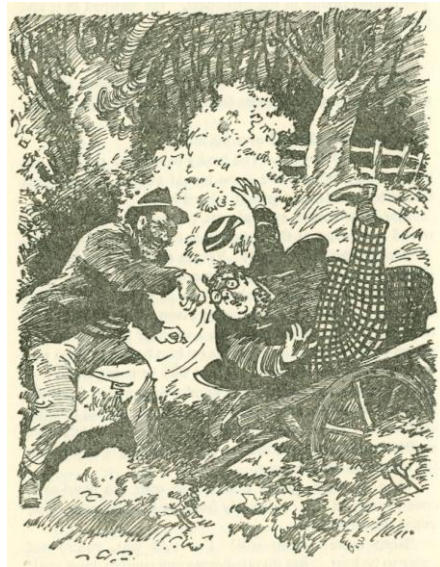
That was soon clear. The hand was removed from the fat junior's mouth, and replaced by a chunk of rag, roughly stuffed in. There were cords attached to it, which were swiftly knotted behind the fat head, making it impossible for Bunter to eject the gag.

Then the man spread a tarpaulin over the hand-cart, covering the fat Owl completely from view. His voice came under the tarpaulin.

'Keep quiet! Keep still! I've told you, you're not going to be hurt. But if you give me any trouble, look out!'

Bunter felt the hand-cart tilt up. Then it was in motion.

The man had taken up the handles, and was wheeling it away.



BUNTER WAS LANDED BODILY IN THE HAND-CART

Bunter, shut in under the tarpaulin, almost wondered whether he was dreaming this. What was happening was almost too amazing to be real.

Hardly more than a minute ago, he had been rolling cheerfully along the lane, glad to get out of English Literature with Quelch, and in happy anticipation of a parental tip from Mr. Bunter at the station. Now he was being taken away, with a gag tied in his mouth: whither, and why, he could not begin to guess. His fat brain was in a whirl.

The hand-cart trundled on.

Several times Bunter heard the sound of wheels on the road, or the buzz of a car, as other vehicles passed. But under the tarpaulin he was quite invisible to all eyes. To anyone that passed, the patched man was simply a pedlar wheeling his hand-cart, with no indication that a kidnapped schoolboy was bundled up therein.

He could not call for help. He dared not stir. The gag had been knotted in so securely, that it would not have been easy to get rid of it, if he had ventured to make the attempt. But he did not venture. He sprawled under the tarpaulin dizzy with amazement and apprehension.

Where was the man taking him - and why? Who was he, and what could it all mean? Bunter could not begin to guess at the answers.

Only one thing was clear in his fat mind - he had to get away, if he could! But how could he? The hand-cart trundled on and on for miles, as it seemed to Bunter.

But suddenly it stopped.

Billy Bunter heard a thudding sound, as of heavy gates closing. It was followed by an angry exclamation from the man wheeling the hand-cart: and then by a shrill train whistle, and the rumble of a train in the distance.

Then Billy Bunter was able to guess where he was. The hand-cart had had to stop at a level crossing.

Bunter knew the level crossing at Pegg, a couple of miles from Greyfriars. He had crossed it often enough, when he visited Sister Bessie at Cliff House School. He knew now that the pedlar - if he was a pedlar - had wheeled him past Friardale, and along the cliff road: evidently intending to wheel him on further to some unknown destination. The closing of the gates at the level crossing, for a passing train, had stopped him.

The hand-cart would be at a halt at least two or three minutes, before the gates re-opened for traffic. Bunter's plump heart gave a jump. Was there a chance to scramble out and run for it, while the hand-cart was at a halt?

A whispering voice came under the tarpaulin. 'Keep still, or you'll get hurt.'

Bunter abandoned the idea of scrambling out!

He heard an impatient muttering from the man holding the handles of the cart. The train was approaching, with an increasing rumble. But other sounds now reached Bunter's ears - wheels on the road, and the clop-clop-clop of hooves. Another vehicle, probably a farm cart, had had to stop at the closed gates. It was followed by the buzz of a car coming to a halt.

Billy Bunter's hopes revived.

His fat ears were on the alert. He could hear the horse-drawn vehicle on one side, the car on the other. So at least two persons were now on the spot, as well as himself and his mysterious kidnapper. Probably other vehicles were coming up the road. It was not uncommon for half a dozen to collect there, when the gates were shut, waiting for them to reopen. If he flung off the screening tarpaulin and jumped out, would the man dare to carry on, under so many eyes? Even if he did, there was help at hand.

His plump heart palpitated.

It was a chance of escape: and likely to be his only chance. Once the hand-cart was in motion again, it would be gone. Once past the level crossing the cart would wheel on to its destination, wherever and whatever that was. The hapless Owl tried to screw his courage up to the sticking-point, to make the venture.

There was a roar from the train, now passing the level crossing. The fat Owl heard it thundering by.

It was now or never!

A minute more, and the train would be past, the gates would roll open to traffic, and the hand-cart would trundle on. In sheer desperation, the fat junior made up his mind. He

scrambled up, and pitched off the tarpaulin, and his fat head came out suddenly into the bright sunlight.

He had a glimpse of an enraged, alarmed face, and of a hurried hand that clutched at him. But that clutching hand did not reach him as he rolled over the back of the hand-cart into the road.

Bump!

The fat Owl landed in the road. He landed with a bump. From several directions came startled voices, exclaiming. A man at the wheel of a car, another man holding the reins of a farm cart, stared at him blankly. Bunter would have yelled to them for help, had it been possible for him to utter a yell. But the gag tied in his mouth kept him silent. He bounded to his feet, with an activity and celerity he had never displayed before in all his fat career, and ran. And the speed he put on would have astonished any Greyfriars fellow who had seen him. The dread of pursuing footsteps behind urged him to frantic efforts.

But there were no pursuing footsteps.

Had Bunter only known it, the patch-eyed man was running also, though in a different direction. Whoever he was, whatever his intentions had been, he could not venture to carry on with a kidnapping, on the open road, and under staring eyes. So far from making any attempt to recapture the terrified Owl, he darted to the roadside, abandoning the hand-cart, and disappeared through a hedge. A motorist, a farmer, and a couple of halted cyclists, were left staring and exchanging excited exclamations. Unconscious of what was going on behind him, Billy Bunter ran, and ran, and ran, till the first cottages of Friardale were in sight. Then, with hardly a run left in his little fat legs, he slowed down, and grabbed at the gag in his mouth, and blinked back at an empty road. Having, with some difficulty, got rid of the gag, he pumped in breath, and found his voice. His first remark was:

'Oh, crikey!'

Then, still hardly knowing whether he was on his head or his heels, he tottered on into Friardale, and arrived breathless at the railway station there.

DOUBTING THOMASES

'HALLO, hallo, hallo!'

'There's Bunter.'

'What's the matter with him?'

Harry Wharton and Co. had come out at the school gates. English Literature with Quelch was over, and they were going for a ramble before tea. But they stopped, in the leafy lane, at the sight of the fattest member of their form.

A pony-trap was coming up the lane. It was the vehicle that had figured in the bank raid on Wednesday, when it had been hired by that deceptive coloured man. Now it was driven by old Joyce, the wood-cutter, himself. But old Joyce was not alone in it. Beside him sat a fat figure, with a pair of big spectacles gleaming back the rays of the sun.

Billy Bunter had walked down to Friardale that afternoon. He was returning on wheels. That was not surprising: Bunter was the fellow to beg, borrow, or steal a lift, if he could, to save his plump legs from exertion. But his aspect at the moment, was unusual.

He was blinking to right and left, at the hedges and trees along the lane, with incessant and uneasy blinks. His fat head did not keep still for a moment. He blinked to the right, then he blinked to the left, then he blinked back along the lane: then he blinked to right and left again. If Friardale Lane had been a jungle path, with wild animals lurking for prey, the fat Owl could not have been more watchful. The Famous Five could only stare. What was the matter with Bunter was quite a mystery.

Finally, his wary blink alighted on the five juniors in the road. He waved a fat hand to them.

'I say, you fellows! Hold on! Stop for me,' shouted Bunter.

'What the dickens!' said Bob Cherry. 'Is there a mad dog about, or what?'

The trap clattered to a halt. Billy Bunter clambered down. Old Joyce touched his hat to the juniors, and drove on. The fat Owl was left with the Famous Five, who were staring at him in surprised inquiry.

'Anything the matter, fathead?' asked Frank Nugent. 'Is the matterfulness terrific, my esteemed idiotic Bunter?' inquired Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter. 'Keep round me, you fellows.'

'What on earth for?' asked Harry Wharton, 'is somebody after you? Or have you seen a cow and fancied it was a bull?'

'Or has a rabbit scared you?' asked Johnny Bull.

'I've been kidnapped.'

'Eh!'

'What?'

'Which?'

'Kidnapped! I say, he may be about - he may be after me again - I say, you look out for a one-eyed pedlar - oh, crikey! Oh, lor!'

They gazed at him! That something was amiss with Bunter, was clear. A bull loose in the

lane, or a bad tempered dog, might have accounted for it, or an encounter with some warlike village urchin. But that he had been kidnapped by a one-eyed pedlar was altogether too astonishing. That statement rather took their breath away.

'Kidnapped!' repeated Bob Cherry, blankly. 'You fat chump, did you go to sleep under a tree and dream it?'

'Oh, really, Cherry—'

'Trying to pull our leg, I suppose!' said Johnny Bull. 'Tell us an easier one, Bunter. That's too steep.'

'The steepfulness is too preposterous,' grinned Hurree Jamset Singh.

'I was kidnapped, I tell you—!' howled Bunter.

'Bow-wow!'

'He collared me in the lane, and bunged me into his cart - an awful ruffian with one eye—'

'Pile it on.'

'If I hadn't got away, goodness knows where he was taking me. You might never have seen me again!'

'That would have made us weep briny tears!' said Bob.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I say, you fellows, there's nothing to cackle at, in a chap being kidnapped by a one-eyed pedlar—'

'Not if it happened,' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'I tell you it did happen!' shrieked Bunter.

'Gammon!' said Johnny Bull.

'Think I don't know whether I was kidnapped or not? I can tell you I shouldn't have dared to walk back to the school, only I got a lift from old Joyce. I never saw my pater at the station, either. He must have got tired of waiting for me, and gone. I shall have to write and explain that I was kidnapped—'

'Oh, my hat!'

'I say, you fellows, think I'd better go to Quelch about it?'

'Hardly!' chuckled Bob. 'If you spin a yarn like that to Quelch, old fat man, look out for whops.'

'But it's true!' yelled Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I mean to say, I don't feel safe with that man about. He might try it on again, as I got away this time.'

'The mightfulness is terrific,' chuckled the nabob of Bhanipur.

'What did he kidnap you for?' asked Bob. 'Think he'd heard that you were expecting a postal-order?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Well, people are kidnapped for ransom,' said Bunter. 'He may think that my people are rich - I—I mean, he may know that they are rich—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'If you fellows are only going to cackle—'

'You'd make a stone image cackle, with a yarn like that!' said Bob. 'Forget it, old fat man. You went to sleep under a tree and dreamed it, if you're not making it up from beginning to end. Wash it out.'

'Beast!'

The Famous Five walked on, laughing. The glare that Billy Bunter cast after them might almost have endangered his spectacles. The fat Owl had expected fellows to be quite electrified by his startling tale. So far from being electrified, the chums of the Remove did not believe a word of it. To them it was only one more of Billy Bunter's yarns; only a little more fantastic than usual. Whether Billy Bunter had gone to sleep under a tree and had a nightmare in the daytime, or whether he was drawing wholly on his fat imagination, seemed uncertain: but his tale of kidnapping by a one-eyed pedlar was altogether too steep to go down.

'Beasts!' breathed Bunter.

He rolled in at the gates. Whether he was believed or not, Bunter at least knew that the tale was true: and he did not feel safe from that one-eyed pedlar, outside the school.

Skinner and Snoop and Stott were loafing near the gates and he stopped to tell them the startling story.

'I say, you fellows, what do you think?' said Bunter, breathlessly, 'I've been kidnapped.'

They stared at him.

'Is that a joke?' asked Skinner.

'Eh! Of course not! Think it's a joke to be kidnapped, and bunged into a cart, and trundled off goodness knows where. I got away from him—'

'What a pity!' said Skinner.

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter rolled on. Skinner and Co. were no more electrified than the Famous Five had been. He stopped again, as he came on Vernon-Smith and Tom Redwing in the quad.

'I say, Smithy—!'

'Oh, scat!' answered the Bounder, over his shoulder.

'But I say, I've been kidnapped—'

'What?'

'Kidnapped!'

'You fat ass, have you been to the pictures, and has it got into your head?'

'I haven't been to the pictures,' howled Bunter. 'It was a one-eyed man - at least he had a patch over one eye - and he grabbed me in the lane, and bunged me into his cart, and - and trundled me away, and - I say, you fellows, don't walk away while a fellow's talking to you—' But Smithy and Redwing did walk away. Once more the startling tale failed to electrify. Why Billy Bunter was spinning that extraordinary and improbable yarn, they did not know: but they did not want to know.

The fat Owl rolled into the House. It was tea-time: and his wild adventure had had no diminishing effect on his appetite. He found his study-mates, Peter Todd and Tom Dutton, in No. 7 Study in the Remove. They were sitting down to tea in the study, when the breathless

Owl rolled in. For once, Billy Bunter did not give immediate attention to the foodstuffs. He had his startling tale to tell.

'I say, Toddy, I've been kidnapped—'

Billy Bunter had met with only Doubting Thomases so far. But if he hoped for better luck in his own study, it was a delusive hope. Toddy stared at him, and went on slicing a loaf. Tom Dutton, who was deaf, did not hear the startling communication. But it had no more effect on Toddy than on Dutton.

'Don't you understand?' hooted Bunter. 'Kidnapped! I've told a lot of fellows, and they don't believe me—'

'It would want some believing,' agreed Toddy.

'But it really happened,' howled Bunter. 'I tell you a one-eyed man collared me in the lane, and bunged me into a cart, and stuck a gag in my mouth, and trundled me away, and then—'

'And then you woke up?' asked Peter.

'You silly ass, do you think I went to sleep and dreamed it?' shrieked Bunter.

'Didn't you?' asked Peter.

'No, I jolly well didn't! I was kidnapped— I expect he was going to bung me somewhere and demand ransom - like they do on the films, you know—'

'Just like they do on the films!' assented Peter.

'Leave it on the films, old fat man, and don't try to stuff me.'

'I tell you it's true, and I'm going to Quelch about it. I ain't safe with a kidnapper after me. Think Quelch wouldn't believe it, Toddy?'

'I wouldn't bank on it,' grinned Peter.

'Don't you believe me, you beast?'

'Not so's you'd notice it.'

'I say, Dutton.' Bunter turned to his deaf study-mate. 'I say, I've been kidnapped by a one-eyed man, and I think it was for ransom—'

'No, I don't!' said Dutton.

'Eh! You don't what?'

'I don't think you're handsome. Look in the glass and you'll see for yourself.'

'I didn't say handsome - I said ransom!' howled Bunter. 'I was kidnapped by a pedlar—'

'Who's a meddler?'

'Not meddler - pedlar! He must have been watching for me - he had his cart all ready to pop me in. I'm jolly well going to tell Quelch.'

'W-E-L-S-H,' said Dutton. 'That's how you spell Welsh, Bunter, but you ought to know without being told.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' from Peter.

'Not Welsh - Quelch!' yelled Bunter.

'I don't care whether he's Welsh or not. I've never heard that Quelch was Welsh, and what does it matter, anyway?'

'Oh, you deaf ass! Can't you ever hear a fellow?' gasped Bunter.

'No need for you to bellow. I can hear you if you don't mumble. Don't you start bellowing at me.'

'I say, Toddy—' Bunter turned to Peter again.

'Chuck it,' said Toddy.

'It really did happen, Peter. Can't you take my word for it? Think I'd tell a crammer?'

'Yes, rather.'

'Beast!'

Bunter had to give it up.

CHAPTER 20

PROBLEM FOR QUELCH

'If—if—if you please, sir—'

'What is it, Bunter?'

'I—I—I—'

'You do not appear to have brought me your lines, Bunter. I warn you, Bunter, that if you persist in this idle procrastination, you will be caned.'

Mr. Quelch did not seem pleased to see that member of his form. After class, he had settled down in his study, for a quiet half-hour with Quintus Horatius Flaccus. He was, in fact, having another shot at that perplexing Ode, No. XXVIII in the First Book. Was it in truth a single Ode, or was it a couple of Odes that had somehow got mixed in the old manuscripts? It was a puzzling and yet entrancing problem. Quelch was deep in it, when the fattest member of his form presented himself.

Even if Bunter had brought his lines, Quelch would not have been pleased by the interruption. But Bunter hadn't. There was no sign of an impot about him. A smear of jam round his capacious mouth indicated that he had recently been busy with foodstuffs, not with lines. If he had come there with another untruthful excuse, Quelch was prepared to lay down his book and pick up his cane.

'Tut—tut—tain't the lines, sir!' stammered Bunter, 'I—I—I—'

'If you have anything to say to me, Bunter, be brief.'

'Oh! Yes, sir! I—I—I thought I ought to tell you, sir. I—I've told a lot of the fellows, sir, but they don't believe me. They—they think I made it up, sir. But he might get after me again, sir.'

This was so much Greek to Mr. Quelch. It was more perplexing than Ode XXVIII. His gimlet-eyes almost bored into Bunter.

'What do you mean, Bunter? Explain yourself at once,' he snapped.

'I—I—I— hope you'll believe me, sir—'

'What do you mean? Has anything happened?'

'Yes, sir! I—I—I—I've been kidnapped, sir!' Billy Bunter got it out at last.

He blinked at his form-master, not very hopefully.

A dozen Remove fellows had heard his strange story, without believing a word of it. He doubted whether Quelch would. But really, he had to tell Quelch. A fellow couldn't be kidnapped and say nothing about it. And suppose that awful pedlar got after him again? Quelch simply had to know.

The gimlet-eyes popped, as he made his startling statement. Whatever Quelch might have expected to hear, assuredly he had not expected anything like that.

'Bunter!' Quelch almost gasped. 'What—what did you say?'

'I—I—I've been kidnapped, sir—'

'You utterly absurd boy, what do you mean?'

'It's true, sir—!' almost wailed Bunter.

'Nonsense.'

'He—he—he got me in his cart and wheeled me away, sir, with a mag in my gouth - I mean a gag in my mouth—'

'Bunter!'

'He—he—he did really, sir, only I got away—the fellows are laughing about it, sir, but it—it did really happen, sir.' Mr. Quelch breathed hard.

'If someone has played an absurd practical joke on you, Bunter, you may tell me exactly what has occurred,' he said. 'Did you meet your father at the station?'

'He wasn't there, sir. I was late—'

'And why were you late?' snapped Mr. Quelch.

'Because that man collared me, and took me away in his cart, with a mag - I mean a gag—'

'Bless my soul! Tell me precisely what has happened, Bunter - if, indeed, anything has.'

The fat Owl babbled out his tale. Mr. Quelch listened to it, with doubt very plain in his face, but with close attention. What to make of it, when he had heard it, he hardly knew: unless it meant that some irresponsible person had played a fantastic practical joke on the fat junior. He sat staring at Bunter, quite blankly. He forgot even Ode XXVIII.

'Bunter!' he said at last, 'if you have fancied all this - or if you have concocted this extraordinary story to cause a sensation—'

'Oh, really, sir—'

'Pay attention, Bunter. If you adhere to this story, it will be my duty to notify the police, who will inquire into the matter.'

The gimlet-eyes were very keen on Billy Bunter's fat face.

Perhaps to Mr. Quelch's surprise, that fat face registered relief.

'Yes, sir! Of course, sir! I—I—I wouldn't dare to go out of gates again, sir, if that pedlar isn't run in, sir.'

'Very well, Bunter! You may go, and leave the matter in my hands. In the meantime, you will not go out of gates alone.'

The door closed on the distressed fat Owl. Mr. Quelch remained deep in thought. At length, he stepped to the telephone, dialled Courtfield Police-Station, and asked for Inspector Grimes. He hesitated to repeat so fantastic a tale to a hard-headed police-officer. But he felt that he had no choice in the matter. Obviously, it had to be looked into: even if it was nothing more than a hare-brained practical joke on a schoolboy.

'Good afternoon, Mr. Quelch! What can I do for you?' came the Courtfield inspector's plump voice.

'I have just heard a very singular statement from a boy in this school, Mr. Grimes. He states that, while out of gates this afternoon, he was seized by force, gagged, and carried away by an unknown man, whom he described as a pedlar in a hand-cart—'

'Eh?'

'That is what the boy has told me, Mr. Grimes.'

'Hem!'

'If his story is true, it is a very serious matter.'

'Oh, quite!' The inspector's tone was very dry.

'It is possible, sir, that the boy was romancing.'

Mr. Grimes's tone indicated that he thought it not only possible, but probable!

'It is possible, of course. But—'

'Some young people have very lively imaginations sir liable to be influenced by what they see on films' and television.'

'I am aware of it. But—'

'Is the boy you mention habitually truthful, Mr. Quelch?'

The Remove master coughed.

'Hem! hem! No, I am sorry to say, far from it. You have seen the boy, Mr. Grimes - his name is Bunter, whom you interviewed here last Wednesday—'

'Oh! Bunter! I did not form a very high estimate of his intelligence, Mr. Quelch, on that occasion.'

'Probably not. I believe, however, that something did occur which frightened him, although it may have been no more than a foolish practical joke on a foolish boy. He describes the man as a pedlar with a hand-cart - a bearded man with a black patch over one eye. If such a person is traced in the neighbourhood, Mr. Grimes—'

'I will certainly have inquiries made, Mr. Quelch. Such a person should be easy to trace, if Master Bunter saw him anywhere other than on a film.'

Mr. Quelch frowned, as he put up the receiver. Mr. Grimes's impression clearly was that it was a cock-and-bull story: and his own mind was full of doubt. As he turned from the telephone, a sound of laughter floated in from the quad, and he looked out of the open window. Five laughing faces met his view - and one, a fat one, red with wrath and indignation.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'Here's the old fat man - we haven't lost him.'

'Not kidnapped again, Bunter?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I say, you fellows, I tell you I was kidnapped, and I've told Quelch—'

'Oh, my hat! Did he laugh!'

'Beast!'

The Famous Five walked on, laughing. Mr. Quelch turned from the window, with a puzzled frown. Obviously, Billy Bunter's strange tale found no credence in his own form. What were the facts - if any? Finally, Mr. Quelch dismissed the matter with a shake of the head, and picked up Horace again - dismissing the Bunter problem in favour of the really much more interesting problem of Ode XXVIII.

BODYGUARD REQUIRED

'I SAY, you fellows.'

Billy Bunter wore a worried look on Saturday. He wore, of course, other things: but the worried look was the most noticeable. His fat face was, as the poet had expressed it, sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought, as he rolled up to the Famous Five in the quad after dinner. Harry Wharton and Co. were talking cricket. The Remove were booked that afternoon, to play Temple Dabney and Co. of the Fourth Form, and their thoughts were on the summer game. Which, to William George Bunter, was as moonlight unto sunlight, as water unto wine, compared with the much more important matter that weighed on his own fat mind.

'Like a walk this afternoon, you fellows?' asked Bunter.

'Cricket!' answered Harry Wharton.

'Oh, really, Wharton! I think you might chuck cricket for once. Can't you fellows ever think of anything but cricket?' yapped Bunter. 'Think it'll be the end of the world if you don't play cricket?'

Harry Wharton laughed.

'Not quite!' he agreed. 'But we're playing the Fourth. If you want a walk, you can walk down to the ground and watch.'

'If you think you could walk so far!' added Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

'I want you fellows to walk over to Cliff House with me. Just cut out the cricket for once, and come.'

'Ha, ha, ha.'

'What are you cackling at?' howled Bunter.

'Your little joke,' said Bob Cherry.

'I'm not joking—'

'Your mistake - you are!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Apparently the idea of cutting cricket, in order to take a walk with Bunter struck the chums of the Remove as comic. Anyhow, they laughed. The fat Owl gave them an irritated blink through his big spectacles.

'Look here, I've got to go over to Cliff House, to see my sister Bessie,' he yapped. 'It's important. Bessie's had a hamper - I mean, I'm jolly fond of my sister Bessie, and a chap has to be brotherly. I can't go alone.'

'Why not?' asked Frank Nugent. 'Do you want us to roll you along like a barrel when laziness comes on?'

'You know what happened yesterday!' hooted Bunter.

'Eh! Did anything special happen yesterday?' asked Bob Cherry.

'Haven't I told you I was kidnapped—?'

'Oh! that?' grinned Bob. 'You're not going to tell us that one again, are you? Why not make

up a new one?'

'An easier one!' suggested Nugent.

'That one's getting a bit stale,' said Johnny Bull.

'I tell you it happened, and I'm jolly well not going out of gates alone again, till that pedlar's run in. I'm not going to be stuck somewhere and held for ransom, I can tell you.'

'I wonder how much ransom they'd expect to get for Bunter?' chuckled Bob. 'A tanner or so, perhaps!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Look here, Bunter,' said Harry Wharton, 'don't be such a silly ass! If anything happened at all, it can't have been anything but a silly practical joke. But did anything? You're such a fibber—'

'I tell you that pedlar was waiting and watching for me in the lane.'

'That's rot!' said Johnny Bull. 'Nobody outside the school could know that you had leave from class.'

'Oh! I—I don't see how he could!' admitted Bunter. 'But there he was, with his cart all ready to pitch me in, and he asked me if I was Bunter, and then grabbed me. How do I know that he's not hanging about looking for another chance? If I go over to Cliff House alone, he may collar me just like he did yesterday. I can tell you, it's time for a chap's pals to rally round him, when he's in danger like this.'

'Good idea,' agreed Bob. 'Go and tell your pals about it.'

'Oh, really, Cherry—'

'And give us a rest,' said Johnny Bull. 'Anyhow, roll away, like a good barrel.'

Billy Bunter did not roll away. Apparently the Famous Five were the pals to whom he had alluded.

'Look here, you chaps,' he said. 'That kidnapper's after me. Suppose I disappeared all of a sudden, and you never saw me again! How would you like that?'

'Sounds good!' said Bob.

'The goodness is terrific.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Beast! I—I mean, look here, old chaps! I've got to go over to Cliff House. I can't miss that hamper - I mean, I can't let old Bessie down. You fellows come along with me - sort of bodyguard, see?'

'Oh, my hat!'

'Anybody keen to chuck cricket, and join up as Bunter's bodyguard, so that he can get a guzzle at Bessie's hamper?' asked Bob Cherry.

'Don't all speak at once.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The chums of the Remove did not all speak at once!

They did not speak at all! They chuckled loud and long. Evidently, there was not a hope that the Famous Five were going to cut cricket and enrol as Billy Bunter's bodyguard.

'What's the jolly old joke?' Herbert Vernon-Smith came up. 'Pretty near time to pitch

stumps, you fellows. What's the joke?'

'Bunter!' explained Bob. 'One of his funniest. He wants a bodyguard to keep off that pedlar he saw on the films—'

'It wasn't on the films!' yelled Bunter.

'Well, on television, then - whichever it was—'

'It wasn't on television, you beast. It really happened, and I ain't going out of gates alone till he's run in. I say, Smithy, suppose you and Redwing cut cricket this afternoon, and come along with me?'

'Suppose anything you like,' said Smithy.

'Well, will you?'

'Not in these bags.'

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter rolled away at last: perhaps in quest of more amenable recruits. He left the Famous Five laughing. But the Bouncer cast a very curious look after him.

'Can't be anything in it, I suppose,' he said, 'but it's odd the way he sticks to it, if it's all gammon.'

'Who could possibly want to kidnap Bunter?' said Nugent. 'A kidnapper might get after a fellow like you, Smithy, rolling in cash: but Bunter wouldn't be worth his keep to him.'

'A kidnapper wouldn't take him as a gift,' said Bob. 'Fancy Bunter up for ransom? Dear at twopence.'

'That's rot, of course,' said Smithy. 'That couldn't be the reason.'

'What else, then?' Vernon-Smith shook his head.

'I give it up,' he said. 'That fat ass is scared to go out alone, so it looks as if something did happen-though goodness knows what, or why. But never mind Bunter - time we got along to the cricket.'

And they got along to the cricket, and-sad to relate - forgot the fat existence of William George Bunter. That plump youth rolled down to the gates, and stood blinking out into the road through his big spectacles, for quite a long time, in a state of doubt and indecision. Bessie's hamper, over at Cliff House, drew him like a magnet. But his terror of that one-eyed pedlar held him back. He almost made up his fat mind to chance it. But not quite. Finally, he revolved on his axis, and rolled back to the House.

'Beasts!' he murmured, as he rolled.

If only those fellows had played up, and marched with him as a bodyguard, all would have been well. But, with the selfishness to which Bunter was so sadly accustomed, they preferred to play cricket. The fat Owl simply dared not make the venture on his own. So, sadly and sorrowfully, he had to let Bessie's hamper like the sunbeams pass him by!

But there was still, so to speak, balm in Gilead. With most of the Remove fellows on the cricket-ground, the studies were deserted. Billy Bunter looked into several of them, one after another. In Bob Cherry's he found a bag of dough-nuts: in Lord Mauleverer's a bag of cherries: in Johnny Bull's a box of chocs, and in Smithy's a bunch of bananas. So, on the whole, the fat Owl did not feel that he had wholly wasted his time that afternoon.

CHAPTER 22

MYSTERIOUS

'HALLO, hallo, hallo!'

'What's up?'

'Not bad news, old fat man?'

It was Monday morning, in break. As usual, many fellows were looking for letters in the rack. Billy Bunter, of course, was among them. Bunter was expecting a postal-order! That postal-order seemed to be taking its time to arrive at Greyfriars. But hope springs eternal in the human breast. This time it looked as if the hope might materialize: for there was a letter for Bunter, addressed in the parental hand. A fat thumb was immediately jabbed into the envelope. And then—!

Then Billy Bunter stood staring at his letter, with his eyes almost popping through his spectacles. Obviously, there was something surprising in that letter. It was, it seemed, so surprising that it had taken Bunter's breath away. He stared at that letter - he blinked at it - he goggled at it. A dozen fellows glanced at him. He found his voice at last.

'Oh, crikey!' he gasped.

Evidently, Bunter had had startling news. If a fellow had bad news from home, other fellows were prepared to be sympathetic. Even the Bounder, hard nut as he was, looked a little concerned. 'Anything wrong, Bunter?' he asked.

'Oh! Yes! No! Oh, crikey! I—I—I can't make it out! I—I—I suppose the pater can't have gone crackers, can he?'

'Wha-a-a-t?'

'I—I—I say, you fellows, I—I wrote home to tell the pater why I missed him at the station on Friday. And—and he says - Oh, crikey!'

'You didn't tell him that kidnapping yarn!' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'Yes, of course I did—'

'Oh, my hat!'

'I had to tell him why I missed him at the station, hadn't I? But—but—but - Oh, crikey! He—he—he says he wasn't there, and never expected to see me - he says he hasn't been down to Friardale at all, and never phoned to the Head to ask for leave from Quelch—I—I—I say, you fellows, what does it mean? You look at that letter '

Billy Bunter held out that surprising missive for inspection. It ran:

Dear William,

I have received your letter, which I quite fail to understand. You are a very stupid boy, William, and you may have been the victim of some thoughtless practical joke. That is the only explanation that occurs to me. I did not come down to Friardale on Friday, and I certainly did not telephone to your head-master to ask for leave from class for you. This is evidently a case of what schoolboys, I think, would call leg-pulling. Your absurd fancy that a kidnapping was intended, can only be due to the influence of American horror films, which I very strongly advise you to avoid seeing in future.

Your affectionate Father,
W. S. Bunter.

'I say, you fellows, what does it mean?' mumbled Bunter. 'The pater only got my letter on Saturday morning, and he can't have forgotten phoning the Head only the day before, can he?'

'Hardly - if he did!' said Bob.

'You fat spoofer,' said Johnny Bull. 'Did you make out to Quelch that your pater had phoned, just to get out of class?'

'Is that it?' asked Nugent.

'No!' howled Bunter, 'I tell you, I was in Quelch's study. It was about my lines, and then that man Philpot rang up, and said he was coming back here on Saturday if his suitcase hadn't turned up, and—'

'He hasn't come back,' said the Bounder.

'I know he hasn't, but that's what he said, and then the phone rang again, and Quelch thought it was him, and snapped into the phone, but it was the Head to tell him that my pater had phoned that he was going to wait for me at the station at Friardale, so Quelch gave me leave from class. I tell you I heard it all in Quelch's study - and now the pater says that he never phoned the Head at all, and wasn't at Friardale on Friday, and—and—and— Oh, crikey!' Billy Bunter gasped for breath. 'I say, you fellows, the pater doesn't seem to believe that I was kidnapped at all!'

'Does anybody?' asked Johnny Bull.

'Beast!'

'The believfulness is not terrific, my esteemed spoofing Bunter,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Better take your pater's advice, and keep away from gangster films, old fat man!' said Bob Cherry.

'But I tell you the said Head - I mean the Head said—'

'He couldn't have said that your pater had phoned him, if your pater hadn't,' said Frank Nugent. 'And your pater says he didn't.'

'I tell you he did! The Head called Quelch on the phone from his study, to tell him that

my pater had just phoned. I heard every word. I was quite near Quelch's phone, and I listened—'

'You would!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'I say, you fellows, the pater must have phoned the Head, as the said Head so - I mean the Head said so. That was why Quelch gave me leave from class on Friday. I couldn't have gone out if he hadn't - and then I shouldn't have been kidnapped - it wouldn't have happened at all—'

'That's all right - it didn't!' said Bob.

'Oh, really, Cherry—'

Harry Wharton rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

'Looks as if somebody may have been leg-pulling on the phone,' he said. 'If anything really happened to Bunter on Friday, and there's some silly practical joker about, he might have phoned the Head, using Mr. Bunter's name, to get the fat ass out of gates in lesson time. But—'

'But—!' said Nugent.

'The butfulness is terrific,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

There was an excited squeak from Billy Bunter.

'That's it! It was that pedlar phoned the Head - just a trick to get me out of gates and kidnap me for ransom—'

'Then he's lost out on it,' said Bob. 'He had to pay for that phone call, and now he won't get the tanner he was going to demand for restoring you to our loving arms.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Beast!'

The Famous Five went out into the sunny quad, laughing. That Billy Bunter had been kidnapped for ransom was altogether too improbable to be taken seriously. It was possible that some practical joker had played a trick on him: but the fat Owl was so hopeless a fibber, and so wont to give free rein to his fat imagination, that even that was uncertain. The hapless Owl was rather in the position of the youth in the fable, who cried 'Wolf!' so often when there was no wolf, that he was not believed when the wolf really came.

But the Bounder was not laughing. There was a very serious, and very thoughtful, expression on Vernon-Smith's face, as he joined his chum, Tom Redwing, in the quad. 'What do you think of Bunter's kidnapping yam, Reddy?' he asked.

Redwing laughed.

'I think something must have happened, from the way he sucks to it,' he answered. 'Some ass pulling his silly leg, I suppose, if anything did.'

'I suppose so. And yet—'

'My dear chap, how could anybody possibly want to kidnap Bunter?'

'I suppose nobody could!' agreed the Bounder.

He said no more about it. But the Bounder was very thoughtful in form that morning: and his thoughtfulness was not wholly concentrated on the valuable instruction he was receiving

from Mr. Quelch. Billy Bunter had found no believers so far: but it seemed that in Smithy he had found at least a half-believer.

DETECTIVE SMITHY

'HERE we are!' said Bob Cherry.

'What's on?' asked Harry Wharton.

'Anything special?' inquired Johnny Bull.

'Trot in!' said Vernon-Smith. 'It's a pow-wow.'

Five fellows were looking in at the doorway of No. 4 in the Remove. Why Smithy had asked them to call in at his study after class, they did not know: but they had called as requested. Smithy and Redwing were in the study. Smith's announcement that it was a 'pow-wow', was a little puzzling, as the Famous Five had no idea of anything to be 'pow-wowed' about.

However, they 'trotted' in, rather curious to learn why the Bounder had called the meeting.

'What's it all about, Smithy?' asked Nugent. 'Bunter,' answered the Bounder.

'Bunter!' repeated five voices in unison and surprise.

A pow-wow on a matter of interest, such as cricket, or a rag on Coker of the Fifth, would not have surprised them. But a pow-wow on the subject of Billy Bunter was quite unexpected. Really, nobody was interested in Billy Bunter: the fattest but otherwise least considerable member of the form.

'What the dickens about Bunter?' asked Johnny Bull, blankly. 'Has he been after the tuck in your study, or what?'

'Bother Bunter!' said Nugent.

'It's serious, you fellows, if Smithy's got it right,' said Redwing.

'No "if" about that,' said Vernon-Smith, incisively. 'I've thought it out, and I've got it right. I only wonder some of us never thought of it before. It leaps to the eye - if we'd only thought of it.'

'Of what?' asked Harry Wharton.

'Sounds jolly mysterious,' said Bob Cherry. 'What has Bunter been up to this time? Has his postal-order come?'

'About the kidnapping,' said Smithy.

'Oh, my only hat!' exclaimed Bob. 'Have you called a jolly old meeting about that? Fancy he really was kidnapped by a pedlar, Smithy?'

'Yes!' answered Smithy, quietly. 'Now I've guessed the reason I don't fancy he was kidnapped - I know he was. I've no doubt that if he had gone out alone on Saturday, he wouldn't have come back.'

'My dear chap—!' murmured Harry Wharton.

'Then he did need that jolly old bodyguard after all!' grinned Bob Cherry. 'We might have lost our Bunter, you chaps. What a loss!'

'The lossfulness would have been terrific.'

'Somebody lend me a hanky,' said Bob, 'this makes me cry! Fancy - no more Bunter - no more missing doughnuts from the studies—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'If you'll let a chap speak—!' suggested Vernon-Smith.

'Carry on,' said Harry.

'Only draw it mild,' said Johnny Bull.

'Nobody believed a word of it,' said Smithy. 'That was because nobody could think of any reason why anyone would want to kidnap that fat ass. But the reason sticks out a mile—once a fellow thought of it.'

'What was the man after, then?' asked Bob. 'Did he want Bunter's big gold watch - best quality brass? Or had he heard about his postal-order?'

Bob, evidently, was not taking the matter seriously.

'He wanted Bunter,' said Smithy.

'No accounting for tastes, if he did,' said Bob. 'I've never heard of anybody wanting Bunter before. Did he want him for a peep-show, as Fat Jack of the Bonehouse?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'He wanted him because of what happened last Wednesday,' said Vernon-Smith.

'Eh?'

'What?'

'I suppose you haven't forgotten what happened that afternoon,' snapped Smithy.

'Not at all', answered Bob. 'That was the day you stood us the tickets for the Shakespeare show at the Theatre Royal, and a Jolly good spread at the bun-shop after it. Oh! There was that bank raid, too!' added Bob.

'That's it!' said Vernon-Smith. 'Bunter's the only person who's seen that bank-raider without his disguise as a coloured man.'

'What about it?'

'Lots! Bunter's the only person who could identify him if he saw him again.'

'Not likely to,' said Harry. 'The rogue's far enough away, long ago. But what about it, anyway?'

'Only this - that's why Bunter was kidnapped.'

'Great pip!'

Harry Wharton and Co. stared at the Bounder. Not for a moment had they surmised any connection between Bunter's adventure, real or imagined, and what the fat Owl had witnessed from his perch in the tree on Courtfield Common. Apparently the Bounder had!

'Just think it out!' said Smithy. 'Owing to what Bunter saw that day, the police are looking for a white man, not a black man. They haven't got him yet: but that's what they're looking for. He knows that as well as we do, Bunter might run into him any day and recognize him. His game would be up then.'

'But he's miles away long ago,' said Johnny Bull. 'They say that he snooped a thousand pounds from the bank that day. Think he'd hang about here with all that loot in his pockets?'

'Hardly!' said Nugent.

'Oh, suffering cats!' exclaimed Bob. 'You fancy that that jolly old bank-raider is still in the offing, and that he bagged Bunter because that fat chump knows him by sight?'

'Just that!' said Smithy.

'But why the dickens? I'll bet he cleared off as fast as he could go. Why shouldn't he?'
'Suppose he was a local character?' said Smithy. 'It mightn't suit him to clear out of the neighbourhood.'

'Oh! Yes! But—'

'If he was a man who had reasons for staying in this quarter, he wouldn't dare take the risk of Bunter running into him and recognizing him. And it looks as if he was a local man.'

'How come?' asked Bob.

'He knew his way about that day. He knew that he could hire that trap from old Joyce. He knew the lie of the land on Courtfield Common, and just the spot for hiding his bag of tricks, ready for getting rid of his disguise after the raid. He had it all cut and dried, with plenty of local knowledge to help him out. He knew the country about here as well as we do.'

'Well, it does look rather like it,' said Harry Wharton, thoughtfully. 'But—'

'But—' murmured Nugent.

'The butfulness is terrific, my esteemed Smithy.'

'But it wasn't the same man, Smithy,' said Bob. 'Bunter's pedlar - if there ever was a pedlar - was a one-eyed man with a beard, according to his account. Nothing like the man he saw from that tree.'

'Fathead!' said Smithy.

'Thanks!' grinned Bob. 'Same to you, and many of them.'

'Don't we know that the bank-raider was disguised as a coloured man?' snapped Smithy.

'That shows that he was a clever rascal at disguising himself. Easy enough to get himself up as a pedlar, to hang about the lanes watching for Bunter. And as a pedlar, he could have that hand-cart all ready to bung him in.'

'Have you been reading those Sherlock Holmes yarns lately, Smithy?'

'No, I haven't. What do you mean?'

'Sounds a bit as if you had,' said Bob.

Vernon-Smith knitted his brows. Whether the startling theory he had formed was right or wrong, evidently he was quite convinced of it himself, and had no use for badinage on the subject.

'If you're going to be a funny ass—!' he snapped.

'Not at all, not at all,' said Bob, soothingly. 'If you've got it right, old chap, Bunter will want that jolly old bodyguard. But—'

'Look at it!' snapped Smithy. 'Somebody phoned the Head, using Mr. Bunter's name, and got that fat ass out of gates while the rest of us were in form. You could see that the fat ass was fairly knocked over by his father's letter this morning - just flummoxed. Why, even Bunter could guess that it was that kidnapper who had put in that call. Haven't you as much sense as Bunter?'

'I sort of hope so,' grinned Bob. 'But—'

'What do you think, Wharton? You've got more sense than that fathead.'

Harry Wharton smiled. 'Thanks,' he said. 'But—'

'But—but—but—!' mimicked the Bounder. 'Fat lot of use consulting you fellows, if all you

can do is to butt like a bunch of billy-goats.'

'Well, let's have it clear,' said Harry. 'If you've got it right, there's a sportsman about who might have a jolly good reason for collaring Bunter and parking him somewhere to keep him out of the way - if he knew that it was Bunter who spotted him on the common that day. But how could he know it was Bunter?'

'He couldn't,' said Johnny Bull, shaking his head. 'Old Grimes is acting on what they call "information received." Bunter's name hasn't been mentioned. Nobody outside Greyfriars knows that Bunter had anything to do with it.'

'We know, and Quelch knows, and Mr. Grimes knows,' said Harry. 'But all that black-and-white sportsman can know, is that the police have found out that he was not a coloured man. He couldn't know they got it from Bunter.'

'Hasn't it been the talk of the school?' snapped Vernon-Smith. 'Hasn't that fat ass told it, over and over again, to everybody who would listen?'

'Here, yes: but not outside the school,' said Harry. 'I don't see how that bank-raider, even if he's still in the neighbourhood, can have heard a word of it.'

'Unless he's given us a look-in!' grinned Bob. 'Any of you fellows spotted a bank-raider hanging about the quad or the studies recently?'

There was a chuckle in No. 4 Study. But the Bounder did not join in it. He scowled.

'If he's a local man, as I believe, why shouldn't he be in touch with somebody in the school?' he snapped. 'Nobody knows who he is. He may know somebody here. Might be a man that Quelch knows, for all we know.'

'Oh, my hat!'

'Draw it mild, Smithy.'

'Don't make it too thick.'

'The thickfulness is a little too terrific, my esteemed Smithy.'

Smithy's eyes glinted. In his role of amateur detective, he had been quite satisfied with the result at which he had arrived. But he had not succeeded in convincing the other fellows. Not that the scepticism of the Famous Five made any difference to his own conviction. Opposing opinions only confirmed him in his own.

'Well, I can tell you this,' he snapped, 'if I've got it right—'

'If!' murmured Bob.

'Oh, shut up! If I've got it right, that black-and-white rascal is still about, he knows that Bunter could identify him, and he will be watching for another chance to get at the fat ass.'

'Hem!'

'And if Bunter goes rambling out on his own, he won't come back!' said Vernon-Smith.

'That's that!'

'Hem!'

'Oh, get out!'

'Well, if that's the lot, we may as well,' remarked Bob Cherry. 'Thanks for the funny story, Mr. Sherlock Holmes.'

And the Famous Five crowded out of No. 4 Study, evidently not much impressed by Smithy's essay in the detective line. Vernon-Smith banged the door after them as they went.

OUT OF BOUNDS

'QUELCH!'

'And Prout!'

'Oh, my hat!'

'Copped!'

'The copfulness is terrific.'

Five exclamations of dismay came from five Greyfriars juniors, sitting in a row on a low wall facing the sea. Five bicycles were parked against the wall a few yards away. Having covered six or seven miles from the school, Harry Wharton and Co. were taking a rest before riding home, and cheerily sharing the contents of a bag of dough-nuts.

Only a few moments ago, they had been feeling quite happy and contented. It was a lonely but very attractive spot. Only one building was in sight - a bungalow far back from the beach, with a garden surrounded by a low brick wall - on which they were sitting in a cheery row. Whether the bungalow was occupied, they did not know. It was one of the many holiday bungalows dotted along the coast 'let furnished' from time to time to occasional holidaymakers, by the estate-agent at Courtfield. They were not interested in its inhabitants - if any. Anyhow, thick bushy laurels within screened them from the windows, if anyone might have been supposed to object to a party of schoolboys taking a rest on the wall.

Before them, the yellow sands shelved down to the sea, which rolled bright and blue in the sunshine, dotted here and there by the brown sail of some fishing-boat out from Pegg.

The fact that they were several miles out of school bounds did not worry them unduly.

Not that the Famous Five were reckless contemners of authority like the Bounder. Smithy liked to be a law unto himself, disregarding rules simply because they were rules. The Co. did not share that taste in the least. But active legs on swift wheels covered the ground at a great rate. They had come out for a spin, fully intending to turn back at the level-crossing at Pegg. But the open air and the sunshine had tempted them on for a ride on the sands beyond the fishing-village, so there they were! Really there was no harm in it: there was ample time for a quick run back to Greyfriars for roll-call. But—!

But the sight of two figures coming along the beach reminded them that Greyfriars juniors caught several miles out of school bounds were booked for a spot of trouble. One of the figures was tall and angular, that of Mr. Quelch, master of the Remove. The other was shorter and plumper, easily recognizable as Mr. Prout, master of the Fifth.

Wherefore did the chums of the Remove utter the dismayed ejaculations with which this chapter opens. Prout might have rolled by without noticing them on the garden-wall. Not so Quelch! Little ever escaped that gimlet-eye!

'Copped!' repeated Bob Cherry. 'Bother old Quelch and his grinds! He's always walking the other beaks off their legs.'

'Prout looks all in,' said Nugent.

'They're not looking this way,' said Harry, 'they've not seen us yet.'

'They will in a minute.'

'Nip over the wall,' said Harry. 'Quick, before Quelch spots us.' He swung himself down on the inner side of the wall.

'Oh, my hat! If somebody sees us from the windows—'

'Chance that.'

'Oh, all right.'

Four fellows slipped down from the wall, after the captain of the Remove, on the inner side. It was a chance, at least, of escaping the gimlet-eye. They ducked their heads, to keep them below the level of the wall, grinning at one another breathlessly.

'Okay!' murmured Bob, 'if there's anybody at the bung, they can't see us through these laurels. Keep your nuts low.'

Keeping their heads low, the juniors waited, and listened.

A crunching sound of footsteps on sand came to their ears. 'Here they come!' whispered Bob.

'Quiet!'

Five pairs of ears listened anxiously to that sound of crunching footsteps. Once they had passed on, and died away, the coast would be clear. But, to the renewed dismay of the breakers of bounds, they did not pass on. They stopped. The five culprits did not venture to speak: but they exchanged eloquent looks. Had Quelch noticed the bikes parked at the wall, and did he suspect—? Then came a rich and fruity voice.

'Are you not fatigued a little, Quelch?'

'Not in the least!' came the incisive voice of the Remove master. 'I hope you are not fatigued, Prout.'

'Not precisely fatigued, Quelch. But I think I should like to rest a little before proceeding further.'

Bob Cherry winked at his chums, who grinned. Quelch, as usual, was walking poor old Prout off his legs. Quelch, on his 'grinds' was tireless. He was lean and active. Prout was neither. Prout was tired and wanted a rest.

And, unluckily for five juniors ducking their heads behind the garden-wall, he had discerned a favourable spot. They ceased to grin, as the fruity voice went on: 'There is a garden-seat in that garden, Quelch. You can see it over the gate. I shall be glad to sit down for a few minutes.'

'We can scarcely do so without permission from the tenant of that bungalow, Prout.'

'Probably it is unoccupied, Quelch. These bungalows are empty half the time.'

'As I can see several cycles leaning on the wall, Prout, I conclude that it is occupied.

However, the tenant no doubt will give us permission to sit in his garden for a few minutes. It will certainly be necessary to ask.'

'Oh, crumbs!' murmured Bob, under his breath.

There was a click as the gate opened, a few yards away.

Five breathless juniors huddled in the laurels under the wall. They were fairly well screened from view, but if Quelch looked round—!

Fortunately Quelch, having no reason for looking round, did not do so. Through the interstices of the laurels, they watched him walk straight up the gravel path from the gate to the door of the bungalow.

Prout followed him as far as the garden-seat. There the portly Prout plumped down, breathing heavily, and wiping a spot of perspiration from a plump brow. Quelch arrived at the door, and knocked.

'Game's up!' murmured Bob.

Hopes sank to zero. Had both the masters walked up to the door, there would have been a chance of dodging back over the wall, while their backs were turned. But Prout, where he sat, was almost facing the laurels, at only six or seven yards distance. Prout was short-sighted, and had no idea that those laurels were inhabited. But any movement on the part of the hidden juniors would have apprised him of it. And when Quelch joined him on the bench, much sharper eyes than Prout's would be bent in the same direction. The game was up!

'Booked!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Extra School all round,' mumbled Nugent. 'Bang goes the half, on Wednesday.'

'We were rather asses to push on out of bounds,' grunted Johnny.

'True, O King: but a little too late,' grinned Bob.

'Quiet!' breathed Harry Wharton. 'We're not spotted yet.'

'Quelch will spot us the minute he sits down with old Prout. Catch Quelch missing a thing!' growled Johnny.

Knock! knock! Then the juniors heard the sound of an opening door. What they heard next made them jump. It was Quelch's voice, in surprised tones.

'Bless my soul! Is it you, Captain Philpot?'

'Mr. Quelch!'

The juniors looked at one another. They had almost forgotten the Old Boy, whose brief visit to Greyfriars had terminated so suddenly, after the 'shipping' of his room. It was quite a surprise to learn that he was the tenant of that lonely bungalow on the beach.

'I had no idea you were in this neighbourhood, Captain Philpot. My impression when you telephoned was that you were calling from London.'

There was a pause before the captain replied. Probably he was as surprised as Mr. Quelch by the unexpected meeting.

'A friend has lent me this bungalow for a few days, Mr. Quelch. Only a few days - but if my suit-case has been found, it may be sent here, instead of to the address I gave you in London.'

'I regret to say that it has not yet been found. I can assure you that the search for it has been most thorough and meticulous.'

'Why have you called, Mr. Quelch?'

'Only to ask permission to rest for a few minutes in your garden - I had not the remotest idea that you were the tenant here—'

'Pray walk in, Mr. Quelch. I am alone here - fending for myself for a few days - and I am very

glad to see you.'

'Thank you, Captain Philpot.' Mr. Quelch turned his head, and called, 'Mr. Prout! Pray come here, Mr. Prout.'

Five breakers of bounds, in the laurels under the garden-wall, exchanged almost blissful glances. Discovery had been practically certain. Hardly a hope remained. Already they could see themselves in 'Extra' on the Wednesday half-holiday, while luckier fellows were playing cricket or pushing out boats on the Sark. And now—

Prout rose heavily from the bench, and rolled up the gravel path, to join Mr. Quelch at the door. Both masters entered the bungalow, and the door closed after them. The coast was clear!

'Is this luck?' breathed Bob Cherry. 'The luckfulness is terrific.'

'Too jolly good to be true!' said Nugent. 'Fancy that Old Boy turning up again around here, and getting us out of a jam like that.'

'Cut!' said Harry.

'What-ho!'



PROUT JOINED MR. QUELCH AT THE DOOR

There was a swift clamber over the garden-wall. How long Quelch and Prout were likely to remain in Captain Philpot's bungalow they did not know: but they knew that it was judicious not to lose a moment. And they did not lose one. Scarcely able to believe in their good luck, the Famous Five hooked their bikes from the wall, mounted, and drove at the pedals. They fairly whizzed along the sands back to Pegg, and did not slacken speed till they had passed the level crossing, and were safe and sound within school bounds again.

MAKING THE PUNISHMENT FIT THE CRIME

'BEASTS!'

Bob Cherry grinned.

That mumble from No. 1 Study seemed to amuse him. Prep was over, in the Remove studies. Most of the Remove fellows had gone down, and were gathered in the Rag. Bob had stayed up in No. 13, because he had a translation to do for Monsieur Charpentier. That 'trans' should really have been done earlier: but a bike ride out of bounds had rather taken up the time. However, there was time, after prep and before supper, to get it done, so Bob had stayed up and put it through. Now he was coming down the Remove passage to go down and rejoin his friends in the Rag before the supper-bell rang. But at No. 1 Study, he stopped.

The door of that study was half-open, and the light was on within. That looked as if Wharton, or Nugent, or both, had come up to their study. But the discontented mumble from within apprised him that it was neither Harry Wharton nor Frank Nugent in No. 1. Somebody else was paying a surreptitious visit to that study while its proprietors were downstairs: and that somebody else was William George Bunter.

Grinning, Bob looked round the half-open door.

He had a back view of the plumpest figure in the Greyfriars Remove.

Billy Bunter was standing at the study cupboard. He was peering into that cupboard through his big spectacles.

But he was not reaching into it. Which indicated that the cupboard was empty. Had there been edibles therein, Billy Bunter's fat fingers would have been immediately at work.

'Beasts!' Billy Bunter mumbled his dissatisfaction aloud. 'They had a cake - I jolly well know they had a cake. I suppose they've scoffed it! Never knew such a greedy lot! Not a crumb left! Not a spot of jam either. That jar's empty! Greedy lot! Some fellows are always eating! Beasts!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' roared Bob Cherry.

'Oh!' gasped Bunter. He jumped almost clear of the floor, at that sudden roar, and spun round in alarm. His eyes popped at Bob's grinning face in the doorway. 'Looking for something, Bunter?' asked Bob.

'Oh! Yes! No! I—I wasn't looking for anything I—I—I—'

'What are you up to in Wharton's study, then?'

'Oh! Nothing! I—I mean, I—I came in to borrow a book—I—I—I've lost my Virgil somewhere—' 'Wharton keeps his books on that shelf, not in that cupboard.'

'Oh! Does he?'

'You weren't looking for a cake, by any chance?'

'Oh! No! I never knew they had a cake! I—I mean, I—I knew they'd had it for tea - there's nothing at all in the cupboard - not that I was looking for anything, you know. I only came in to borrow Wharton's geography book—'

'As well as his Virgil?'

'I—I mean his Virgil. I—I—I say, what are you doing with that key?' exclaimed Billy Bunter. Bob, reaching round the door, extracted the key. He jammed it in the lock outside. Billy Bunter watching that process blankly. Then, as he realized what was about to happen, he made a rush for the door.

Slam! Click!

Bunter tugged at the door-handle. He tugged in vain.

The door was locked on the outside. Then he howled through the keyhole.

'Cherry, you beast - lemme out! Will you lemme out?'

There was a chuckle in the passage.

'Not till dorm, old fat man.'

'What?' yelled Bunter. 'Why, it will be supper in ten minutes. Think I'm going to miss supper?'

'Exactly.'

'Why, you—you—you—you—'

Words seemed to fail Billy Bunter.

'That's the big idea, you fat grub-scrounger!' came Bob's cheery voice through the door.

'Like the jolly old Mikado, you know - making the punishment fit the crime! It's time you had a lesson about nosing into other fellows' studies after tuck. Now you're going to get one.'

'Beast!' yelled Bunter. 'You lemme out! I tell you I wasn't after tuck - I only came here for Wharton's geography - I mean his Virgil—'

'They're both on the shelf, if you want them. You can sit down and enjoy them, if that's what you came for.'

'I'll bang on the door if you don't let me out.'

'Bang away!'

'Think I can miss supper?' shrieked Bunter.

'You're going to cut supper - I'm making the punishment fit the crime!' chuckled Bob. 'Don't you think it will be a jolly useful lesson to you and isn't it time you had one?'

'Beast!' roared Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

There was a sound of receding footsteps. Bob Cherry was going - with the key of No. 1 Study in his pocket. Billy Bunter thumped frantically on the door. 'Making the punishment fit the crime' by causing the voracious fat Owl to cut supper, seemed to Bob quite a bright idea, and a merry jest. But it was no jest to Billy Bunter. He yelled through the keyhole.

'I say, Cherry! Beast! I mean, look here, old chap! - dear old fellow - I say - Oh, crikey!' Bob Cherry was gone.

'Oh, lor!'

gasp'd Bunter. He was locked in that study-till dorm! One place at the supper-table was going to be vacant - Bunter's. Sometimes fellows had study suppers, and cut commons in hall. Now Billy Bunter was booked to cut commons - but there was no study supper for him! There was absolutely nothing to eat in No. 1. The cupboard was as bare as Mother Hubbard's.

'Beast!' groaned Bunter.

Downstairs, in the Rag, he had no doubt that the fellows would be laughing, when Bob told them, over that playful idea of making the punishment fit the crime. But it was no laughing matter for Billy Bunter. It might perhaps, as Bob had suggested, be a useful lesson to an unscrupulous grub-hunter, from whom no fellow's tuck was safe. But Billy Bunter did not want a lesson, howsoever useful. He wanted his supper.

A bell rang in the distance. It was the supper-bell.

Bunter thumped on the door again. The fellows would be going into hall now. If that indescribable beast, Bob Cherry, did not come up and let him out—! The supper-bell was generally a gladsome sound to Billy Bunter's fat ears. But it was not gladsome now. It told him that supper was on - and would soon be off!

It ceased to ring.

The hapless Owl thumped on the door till he was tired of thumping. The long, long minutes passed. It seemed ages to Billy Bunter before he heard another bell ring. This time it was the dormitory bell.

Then, at last, there was a sound of footsteps in the passage, mingled with laughter. They were coming up for him at last - too late for supper! A key clicked in the lock, and the door was thrown open.

Five laughing faces looked in: to be met by a glare that might almost have cracked Billy Bunter's spectacles. 'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'Had a good time, Bunter?' 'Beasts!' hissed Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Bob Cherry burst into melody:

'My object all sublime,
I shall achieve in time,
To make the punishment fit the crime,
The punishment fit the crime!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I say, you fellows, I'm hungry—'

'Take my tip, and chuck nosing into fellows' studies for tuck,' said Bob. 'Next time we catch you at it, we'll make the punishment fit the crime again.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The Famous Five walked away, laughing. Billy Bunter rolled out of the study, far from laughing. It was a sad and sorrowful Owl that rolled after the rest of the form to the Remove dormitory.

IT'S THAT MAN AGAIN

'I SAY, you fellows.'

It was a squeak in the darkness.

There was no reply. Only faint sounds of steady breathing came back to Billy Bunter's listening ears. Every other fellow in the Remove dormitory was fast asleep.

It was a late hour. At that hour, as a rule, any fellow who happened to wake, might have heard a rumbling snore from Bunter's bed. But for once, remarkable to relate, no snore was audible.

Generally, Billy Bunter's eyes closed almost as soon as his fat head touched the pillow, and did not reopen till the rising-bell rang in the dewy morn. Bunter's gifts were not many: but there were some things that he could do really well: and sleeping was one of them. In that line, as a rule, Rip Van Winkle had nothing on Bunter. He could almost have beaten Epimenides at his own game. Even the rising-bell often failed to draw him from slumberland, and he did not turn out till some kindly hand jerked off his bedclothes. For Billy Bunter to be wakeful, while other fellows slept, was a very unusual phenomenon. But on this particular night, matters were not as usual. Bunter had cut supper. Bunter was hungry. Other fellows might have cut a meal, or even two, without feeling that the end of the world was at hand. Not so Bunter. There was an aching void within his extensive circumference. Like Macbeth it murdered sleep! Slumber's chain did not, as usual, bind him. If he contrived to doze off, it was only in cat-naps. His snore was only intermittent. He woke again and again: and each time he awoke, he felt hungrier than before. Seldom, if ever, did Billy Bunter hear the chimes at midnight. Now he did.

'I say, you fellows!'

Bunter couldn't sleep. There was no reason, so far as he could see, why other fellows should, if he couldn't. He was more than tired of blinking at the starlit windows with sleepless eyes. And he was frightfully hungry! Bob Cherry had, perhaps, made the punishment fit the crime, not wisely but too well: not realizing that what was comedy to him, was tragedy to Billy Bunter. Bunter was feeling like a ship-wrecked mariner at sea.

'I say, you fellows,' howled Bunter.

Then there was a sound of stirring. Somebody had awakened. A drowsy voice came through the gloom. 'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Who's that? What's that?'

'I say, Cherry, old chap—'

'You fat ass, what's up?'

'I say, I'm hungry—'

'Have you woke me up to tell me that, you frumptious chump?'

'I say, if you've got any toffee, or - or chocs - or - or anything - in your pockets, old chap!' pleaded Bunter. 'You needn't get up, old fellow. I'll get up and get it, if you've got anything.'

'I haven't got anything, you guzzling gollywog. Now shut up and let a fellow go to sleep.'

'I say, Wharton! Are you awake, Harry, old chap?'

'Yes,' came another voice. 'You've woke me up. I've a jolly good mind to get out and wallop you with my pillow.'

'Beast! I mean, Harry, old fellow—'

'Shut up!'

'Is that Bunter burbling?' This time it was Vernon-Smith's voice. 'What are you blethering about, you fat frog?'

'I say, Smithy, if you've got any chocs or toffee or anything in your pockets, old chap—! Yaroooh!'

Whiz! A shoe whizzed with accurate aim. There was only a glimmer of starlight from the high windows. But the Bounder's aim was good. The missile thudded on a fat head, followed by a yell.

'Now shut up, if you don't want the other one!' came Smithy's voice.

'Owl Beast! wow!'

Billy Bunter rubbed the spot where the shoe had landed. It was borne in upon his fat mind, that if he persisted in waking up other fellows, the result was likely to be more painful than profitable.

His fat head sank on the pillow again. Once more he strove to woo balmy slumber. But he strove in vain. The fellows whom he had awakened dropped off to sleep again quite easily.

Once more slumber reigned in the Remove dormitory, with the single exception of a dismal and dolorous Owl. But that aching void in Bunter's extensive inside was too much for him.

His eyes closed: but they opened again. Slumber refused to be wooed.

He blinked dismally at starlit windows, and thought of breakfast. But breakfast was hours and hours away. For the first time in his fat career, Bunter would have been glad to hear the rising-bell.

Suddenly, he gave a jump: and his weary blink changed its direction, from the window to the door.

His little round eyes popped at that door.

It had opened.

The starlight from the windows was dim. But it was clear enough to reveal that the dormitory door had opened wide, almost without a sound.

The fat Owl stared at it blankly.

It was past twelve o'clock. It was some time since he had heard midnight chime from the clock-tower. Nobody, in the whole extent of Greyfriars, could be up at that hour. Yet the door had opened from outside.

Billy Bunter forgot that he was hungry! 'Burglars' was the alarming thought that flashed into his fat mind.

With his fat head lifted from the pillow, he stared at the doorway. There was no sound.

Whoever was there, was treading very lightly. But a figure appeared in the doorway.

It was a tall figure. It stepped silently in. A gleam of starlight fell upon the face. That face was almost hidden by a bushy beard and a black patch over one eye. It was a face that Bunter had seen before. He was not likely to forget it. For it was the face of the pedlar who

had kidnapped him in Friardale Lane.

Petrified, Bunter blinked at him.

The man stood still, his head slightly bent to listen: evidently to make sure that all were sleeping. The silence reassured him, and he moved again. The staring fat Owl discerned that a large sack was hanging from his arm. Billy Bunter was not quick on the uptake: but he did not need telling for what - and for whom - that sack was intended.

Nobody, except perhaps the Bounder, believed that a kidnapper was after Billy Bunter: and that, having failed once, he might try again. But he was there, within the walls of Greyfriars at midnight! And had the fat Owl been fast asleep, as usual, at that hour—!

But Billy Bunter was not fast asleep as usual. He was wide awake - very wide awake. His eyes, wide open, were fixed on that mysterious pedlar. And as the man moved towards the beds, the petrified Owl woke to sudden action. He grasped his pillow and hurled it with all the force of a fat arm.

Thud!

'Oh!'

Bump!

The next moment, Billy Bunter's frantic yells were waking the echoes of the Remove dormitory.

'I say, you fellows! Wake up! Help! Yarooooooh!' The patch-eyed man was sprawling on the floor. The sudden impact of the whizzing pillow had knocked him over like a skittle. But he was already scrambling up, as Bunter yelled and yelled.

'Help! Wake up! I say, Bob—I say, you fellows - Oh, crikey! Keep him off! It's that pedlar! He's after me! Yaroooh.'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo—!'

'What the thump—?'

'Is that Bunter again?'

'You fat ass, what's the row?'

'Keep him off!' yelled Bunter. 'It's that pedlar - that kidnapper - he's after me again - Keep him off.'

'You fat blitherer—'

'You're dreaming—'

'Shut up ! You'll have Quelch up here.'

'Oh, my hat!' came a startled shout from Bob Cherry. 'There's somebody here - Look! Who's that? Look!'

'He's after me,' yelled Bunter, 'keep him off.'

The midnight visitor did not need keeping off. The sudden alarm had been quite enough for him. He scrambled up and bolted for the door. With the awakened dormitory buzzing like a disturbed hive of bees, and Bunter's frantic yells ringing far and wide, he was thinking only of escape. Five or six fellows saw him clearly in the starlight, as he bolted. He was not silent now. He was in too much haste to be silent. Hurried footsteps echoed back as he ran down the passage to the stairs.

Harry Wharton jumped out of bed, and switched on the light. A dozen fellows turned out. They stared at a large sack that lay on the floor. Evidently the man had dropped it, when Bunter's pillow up-ended him, and he had not lingered to retrieve it. He was gone. The racing footsteps had died away. Bunter, sitting up in bed, was still yelling.

'Keep him off! It's that man again - that pedlar! He's after me! I say, you fellows, keep him off!'

'Shut up, you fat ass! He's gone.'

'Here comes Quelch!'

There were footsteps again in the passage. This time they were approaching. Evidently, Billy Bunter's wild yells had reached other ears. And even the alarmed fat Owl ceased to yell, as Mr. Quelch, in dressing-gown and slippers, and with a thunderous frown on his brow, appeared in the doorway, and stared or rather glared, into the Remove dormitory!

WHO—AND WHY?

'WONDERS will never cease!'

Bob Cherry made that remark, in the quad, in break the following morning.

That morning there was a very unusual spot of excitement at Greyfriars. There was but one topic: the amazing happening of the night before. One name was on every lip - Bunter!

Bunter, so to speak, had the house!

Bunter, the most inconsiderable member of a junior form, was the news! Billy Bunter loved the limelight, which very seldom came his way. Now it came in abundance. From great men in the Sixth, prefects like Wingate and Gwynne and Loder, down to the smallest fags in the Second Form, William George Bunter was an object of interest.

Somebody - goodness knew who or why - had attempted to kidnap Bunter! It was incredible. But it had happened! There was no doubt about it now - not the slightest doubt - not the smallest possible shadow of doubt - no possible doubt whatever. It had happened! Fellows who had laughed over his tale of kidnapping, the week before, did not laugh over it now. It had to be taken seriously. That one-eyed pedlar, so far from being merely a figment of the fat Owl's imagination, had actually penetrated into Greyfriars in the dark hours. A dozen Remove fellows had glimpsed him - three or four had seen him plainly in the starlight: plainly enough to note the bushy beard and the patched eye. It was, as Bunter had said, 'that man again'. Who he was, and why he wanted Bunter, nobody could guess - unless the Bounder could! But that he was 'after' Bunter was certain. He had tried once, and failed: he had tried again, and almost succeeded. It was Bob Cherry's jest in 'making the punishment fit the crime' that had saved the fat Owl from the kidnapper. Had Billy Bunter been asleep, he would have been missing in the morning. For, amazing as it was, inexplicable as it was, there could be no doubt that he would have been bundled into the big sack, and carried off like a sack of coal. Luckily, he had been awake.

The fact that anybody could possibly want to kidnap Billy Bunter, was surprising. Even more surprising, in some fellows' opinions, was the fact that the fat Owl had, after all, been telling the truth about his adventure in Friardale Lane. Nobody really expected facts from Bunter. According to Skinner, if Bunter said it was raining, a fellow had to look out of the window before believing him. That was why Bob Cherry remarked that wonders would never cease! 'It did happen,' went on Bob. 'We all supposed that it was gammon as usual - but it did happen! There really was a pedlar - and he really did bag that fat chump in the lane last Friday. As Bunter said so, of course we all supposed it wasn't so. But it was!'

'Looks like it, now,' said Harry Wharton. 'It was the same man - just as that fat ass described him, patched eye and all.'

'But who?' asked Nugent.

'And why?' said Johnny Bull.

'The whyfulness is terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a puzzled shake of his dusky head.

'Goodness knows,' said Harry. 'Unless—!' He paused.

'Unless Smithy had it right, when he called that pow-wow yesterday!' said Bob. 'Is that what you're thinking of?'

'That's it.' Wharton's face was very thoughtful. 'We know now that there really is a kidnapper after Bunter. He nearly had him last Friday, though we didn't believe a word of it then. But we've got to believe what happened under our own eyes last night. It's all rot about ransom, of course - the fat ass isn't worth a pound note. Well, the man, whoever he is, must have a reason, and a jolly strong one, for taking such risks. Smithy thought up a reason - that that bank-raider is still about here somewhere, and is afraid of Bunter coming across him and identifying him. It sounds steep - but - what else?'

'Here comes Sherlock Holmes!' grinned Bob.

The Bounder came up to the group of juniors. There was a sneer on his face.

'Well, what do you fellows think now?' he asked, not pleasantly. 'Do you fancy we all dreamed what happened in the dorm last night? Do you believe that there's a kidnapper after Bunter, or that he was after our shirts and socks to stuff into that sack?'

'You win, Smithy,' said Bob.

'He was after Bunter,' said Harry, 'and he would have got him, if the fat ass hadn't been awake, and spotted him. But—'

'But,' said Johnny Bull, 'if it was that bank-raider, as you think, Smithy, and he wants to park Bunter out of the way somewhere, I'd like to know how he knows that it's Bunter who could identify him.'

'That's a jolly old mystery,' said Bob.

'Not much of a mystery, if he's a local character, and in touch with somebody here,' snapped Smithy. 'Somebody who's been about the school some time.'

'Hem!'

'That's that, because that's the only way of explaining it,' said Vernon-Smith. 'If we'd collared him last night, and hooked off that beard and the eye-patch, I've no doubt that Bunter would have known him at once, as the man he saw on the common.'

'Hem!'

'He was disguised, of course - just as he was that day he raided the bank last week. He doesn't mind if the police go over all Kent with a small comb looking for a one-eyed pedlar,' sneered the Bounder. 'Old Grimes has been here about it this morning - Quelch got him on the phone, I suppose. And he may pass him in the High Street at Courtfield any old time, without beginning to guess that he's the man he wants.'

'Hadn't you better put him wise?' suggested Bob Cherry with a wink at his friends. 'From what I've read, they were always glad at Scotland Yard to get a tip from Sherlock Holmes. Grimes might be grateful for a tip from a Greyfriars chap - perhaps!'

'The perhapsfulness is terrific,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, rats!' snapped the Bounder, and he stalked away, leaving the chums of the Remove grinning.

'I say, you fellows—'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's our Bunter! He will want that jolly old bodyguard after all. We mustn't lose our Bunter.'

'I say, you fellows, it's jolly serious,' said Billy Bunter. 'That pedlar jolly nearly had me last night. Suppose he barges in again tonight?'

'Not likely,' said Harry.

'That's all very well - tain't you he's after,' said Bunter. 'I've asked Toddy to stay awake tonight and keep watch, and he only laughed. Selfish, you know. What about you fellows? You could take it in turns, sitting up in bed and keeping watch? What about that?'

'Not a lot!' chuckled Bob.

'Oh, really, Cherry! I hope you're not going to be selfish like Toddy!' said Bunter, with a reproachful blink. 'That awful pedlar may get me next time, if somebody doesn't keep watch. I happened to be awake last night, because I was too jolly hungry to go to sleep—'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at!' hooted the indignant Owl. 'I can jolly well tell you it's up to some fellow to keep watch, in case he butts in again. A chap ain't safe with a kidnapper about. What would you feel like if you missed me in the morning?'

'Awful!' said Bob. 'Look here, you chaps, Bunter's right - somebody had better sit up all night, and prop his eyes open for that pedlar—'

'Rot!' said Johnny Bull.

'The rotfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bob.'

'You fellows shut up!' exclaimed Bunter. 'Old Bob ain't selfish like you, are you, old chap? You'll sit up and keep watch tonight, won't you, old fellow?'

'Not exactly,' answered Bob, 'but I know the chap to do it.'

'Who?' asked Bunter.

'You!'

'Eh?'

'You, old fat man. You sit up all night—'

'Oh, really. Cherry—'

'Jolly good' idea!' said all the Co. together.

Billy Bunter did not seem to think it a good idea. He gave the Famous Five a devastating blink through his big spectacles, and rolled away. Bunter was uneasy on the subject of that awful pedlar: but evidently the idea of sitting up on watch at night did not appeal to him at all.

'I wonder,' said Bob, thoughtfully. 'That johnny, whoever he is, seems to want Bunter, and want him bad. He might try it on again. I expect Grimey will run him in before long, but until he does, the fat chump isn't safe. We'll fix it up somehow to bag him if he butts in again. Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's the bell.'

In third school that morning, Mr. Quelch's eyes turned many times on the fattest face in his form. Inexplicable as it was, almost incredible as it was, that plump member of the Remove had had a narrow escape of being spirited away over-night. After what had happened,

Quelch had to take that kidnapper seriously: and Inspector Grimes had to take him seriously. Precautions had to be taken, to ensure the safety of the fat Owl - until that mysterious pedlar fell into official hands. It was a perplexing puzzle that the Remove master could not begin to solve. It was a worry on his mind. It was also a worry on Billy Bunter's. But there was a silver lining to the cloud, so far as Bunter was concerned.

'You will go on, Bunter.'

Harry Wharton, on 'con', stopped at 'peragenda prius'.

Billy Bunter blinked at what came next. As too often happened, Bunter had been too busy sitting in an armchair, to give much attention to prep the evening before. He blinked at 'latet arbore opaca, aureus et foliis et lento vimine ramus' without the least idea that it referred to the celebrated Golden Bough. But prep or no prep, he was ready for Quelch this time.

'If you please, sir—!' squeaked Bunter.

'Proceed!' rapped Mr. Quelch.

'If—if you please, sir, I—I don't feel quite well—I—I was so upset by that man in the dorm last night, sir'

Mr. Quelch gave him a look. However, to the fat Owl's relief, he left it at that.

'You will go on, Cherry.'

Bob Cherry went on. Billy Bunter sat out the rest of the lesson, untroubled further by Virgil or Quelch. Which, to a lazy fat Owl who had a rooted objection to the acquisition of knowledge in any shape or form, was quite satisfactory.

BODYGUARD IN ACTION

SNORE!

Several fellows in the Remove dormitory chuckled. It was after lights out.

Billy Bunter had announced that he couldn't, and wouldn't, sleep a wink that night.

Nevertheless, five minutes after Mr. Quelch had seen lights out for the Remove, and the dormitory door had closed on him, a sound resembling the rumble of distant thunder became audible. It proceeded from Billy Bunter's bed. Bunter had been slower to nod off than usual. But that rumble indicated that he had done so. With his eyes shut, and his mouth open, William George Bunter was fast asleep - and snoring.

'Oh listen to the band!' murmured Bob Cherry.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Easy for that pedlar johnny, if he gave us another call tonight,' said Bob. 'But the old fat man's got a bodyguard to look after him this time. Bunter won't wake up: but we shall wake up fast enough, if anybody butts into this dorm. He won't be looking for a cord to catch his feet in, if he calls.'

'Nobody will,' said Johnny Bull. 'They've let Gosling's mastiff loose in the quad, and you can bet that there's a bobby keeping an eye on the place, since Quelch called old Grimes in.'

'Safe as houses,' said Nugent.

'Well, you never know,' said Bob. He slipped out of bed, and lighted a candle-end. 'Semper paratus, you know - always be prepared! No harm done if he doesn't butt in - but I'm fixing up that cord to catch him if he does.'

'What on earth's that game?' asked Vernon-Smith, staring from his bed, as Bob uncoiled a coil of thin cord.

'Trap to catch that kidnapper, if he comes,' answered Bob. 'Can't risk losing our Bunter, can we? I'm fixing this up inside the doorway. He won't see it in the dark and if he comes down wallop, we shall hear him all right.'

'Rot!' said Smithy. 'He wouldn't risk it twice. More likely to hang about watching for a chance to catch the fat ass outside the school.'

'He wouldn't have a hope of that,' answered Bob. 'Bunter's too jolly funky to put the tip of his nose outside the gates. If he wants him he's got to call for him - and if he calls tonight, we'll jolly well bag him, and hand him over to Grimes on a plate.'

Bob Cherry moved off to the door, with his candle and cord. Most of the Remove fellows sat up in bed, watching him. From Billy Bunter's bed came the fat Owl's snore, like the 'unending melody' in Wagnerian music, though hardly so melodious. Evidently, had the mysterious pedlar called again, he would have caught Bunter napping! It did not seem probable: but it was possible, and Bob was taking measures to guard against the possibility. Those measures consisted of stretching a cord across the floor, to catch the intruder if he came. It would be invisible in the dark and could hardly fail to trip up any intruder. '

There was a chair beside every bed. Bob lifted out a couple of them, and planted them on

either side of the doorway, at a little distance from the door. He tied the ends of the cord to chair-legs, six or seven inches from the floor. The cord stretched taut from chair to chair.

'How's that?' said Bob, when he had finished.

'Out!' said Johnny Bull. 'Nobody will come.'

'Not likely,' said Nugent.

'The likefulness is not terrific, my esteemed Bob.'

'Rot!' said the Bounder.

'Well, if he does come, we shall hear him!' said Bob. 'He will walk into that cord, and then - wallop! Bump! He will be one of those things that go bump in the night! Mind you turn out the minute you hear him - if you do!'

'If!' said Johnny.

'Oh, we'll turn out fast enough - if we hear him,' said Harry Wharton. 'He won't get away if he does butt in. But I fancy we shan't hear anything before rising-bell - except Bunter's snore.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'That's that, anyhow,' said Bob, and he blew out his candle, and went back to bed.

Slumber settled down on the Remove dormitory. There was silence in the long, lofty room, broken only by the unending melody from Bunter's bed.

By the time ten o'clock boomed from the clock-tower, every occupant of that dormitory was as fast asleep as Billy Bunter. When eleven sounded through the starry night, most of the other inhabitants of Greyfriars School were asleep also. By half-past, nobody was awake excepting Mr. Quelch, sitting up in his study with Horace and Ode XXVIII to keep him company. Quelch had a special reason for sitting up late that night. Precautions had been taken, to secure the member of his form who was so mysteriously in peril from a mysterious kidnapper: but Quelch was going to make a final round, before going to bed, to make assurance doubly sure, as it were. In the meantime, Ode XXVIII was quite enjoyable company.

The night grew older.

Midnight chimed - unheard by any ear in the Remove dormitory. The last stroke died away, unheard. Also unheard was a slight sound that followed - the opening of the dormitory door! If the Remove fellows were dreaming they did not dream that the door had opened. '

But a moment or two later came a sound, much louder, that scattered dreams.

Bump!

'Oh!'

It was a loud, heavy bump, followed by a loud startled exclamation. It did not wake Billy Bunter. But it awakened almost every other fellow in the dormitory.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'What's that?'

'He's come!' roared Bob. He fairly bounded out of bed.

'Oh, my hat!'

'He's come!'

'There he is—!'

'Collar him!'

'Quick - scrag him!'

It was an excited hubbub of voices in the hitherto silent dormitory. A dozen pairs of eyes were on a figure sprawling on the floor: dim in the starlight from the windows but visible. Bob Cherry reached it with a bound, and landed on it heavily. He planted a knee in a wriggling back.

'Got him!' yelled Bob.

'Back up, you fellows!'

But the fellows did not need telling. Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, were only seconds after Bob. Vernon-Smith Peter Todd and five or six other fellows, were only seconds after the Co.

They had not expected an intruder that night. But the intruder had come - and he had walked into the trap laid for him by Bob Cherry - and tripped and bumped! And he had not the ghost of a chance of getting up again. Billy Bunter's bodyguard were too quick off the mark for that.

Bob Cherry's knee was grinding in his back. Incoherent splutterings came from him, as Johnny Bull sat on his head, flattening his features on hard oak planks. Three or four fellows tramped on his legs. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent grabbed an arm each. Other fellows grasped him wherever there was room to grasp. He almost disappeared under them.

'Got him!' gasped Bob, breathlessly.

There was no doubt about that. They had 'got' him!

Never had a nocturnal intruder been so well and truly 'got'.

He wriggled spasmodically. He gurgled for breath.

He writhed and squirmed and heaved. But they had undoubtedly 'got' him.

'Shove on the light, somebody,' shouted Bob. 'Now we've got him, we'll have a look at him.

Yank him up - but mind you don't let go. Get that light on. Keep hold of him, you chaps.'

'We're holding him all right—'

'The holdfulness is terrific.'

'He won't get away.'

Vernon-Smith ran to the light-switch. Light flashed on, as the prisoner, helpless and gasping in the grasp of innumerable hands, was dragged to his feet. He became visible, clearly visible, in the sudden illumination of the dormitory. All eyes turned on him. And then—! Everyone expected to see the man of the night before - the pedlar with the bushy beard and the patch over his eye. Who else could it be? But the tottering prisoner in the grasp of many hands was not the patch-eyed pedlar. He bore no resemblance whatever to a patch-eyed pedlar. And the grasping hands fell away from him, as there was a general gasp from the crowd of Removites.

'Quelch!'

CHAPTER 29

ONLY QUELCH

'QUELCH!'

'Oh, suffering cats!'

'Oh, crumbs!'

'Quelch!'

The many hands that had been grasping the tottering figure, released him as if that figure had suddenly become red-hot. Eyes bulged at him. It was Quelch! It was not the kidnapper. It was not the patch-eyed pedlar! It was Quelch! It was the master of the Remove who stood tottering and gulping for breath. The juniors stared at him as if they could hardly believe their eyes - as indeed they hardly could.

They had not really expected a nocturnal visitor that night. But the nocturnal visitor had come, and walked into the trap. He had tripped, and bumped, as per programme. They had gone into action without a second's delay. And they had 'got' him. Everything, in fact, had gone according to plan - excepting that it was not the kidnapper, but their form-master, whom they had so promptly and efficiently 'got'.

Silence fell, after the recent uproar, broken only by the breathless gurgles of the Remove master, and the snore of Billy Bunter. Bunter was still rivalling Rip Van Winkle. But every other fellow in the Remove dormitory was awake - very wide awake indeed. Some fellows, Skinner and Snoop and Stott, had not turned out of bed. They were very glad now that they hadn't! Every fellow who had, was sorry that he had! Obviously, there was going to be stormy weather when Quelch recovered his breath. For a long minute he was too helplessly winded to speak.

Really, they were not to blame. They might, perhaps, had they thought of it, have surmised that Quelch might, in the circumstances, make a late round before he went to bed. But they hadn't thought of it. Now they realized that he had done just that! He had stepped into the dormitory, merely to ascertain that all was quiet on the Remove front, so to speak. Had he switched on the light, all would have been well. But Quelch was too considerate to awaken fellows at midnight. A glimpse of a fat face in the glimmering starlight would have assured him that all was well: and he would have gone as quietly as he came. Unhappily, Bob Cherry's masterly plan for catching the kidnapper had put paid to that.

It was a good minute before Mr. Quelch recovered his voice. It seemed a very, very long minute to the staring Removites. But he found it at last. He glanced down at the stretched cord, in which his feet had so unexpectedly caught. He breathed hard, and he breathed deep. The juniors exchanged dismayed glances. The thunder was about to roll!

'What does this mean?' Quelch's voice came like the grinding of a saw. 'I seem to have tripped over a cord — Who placed it here?'

'I—I—I—!' stammered Bob Cherry. '

Was it you, Cherry?'

'Y-e-es, sir! I—I—I—'

'It was put there for that kidnapper, sir!' said Harry Wharton, hastily. 'Bob thought - I mean we thought - that he might come again, sir—'

'We didn't know it was you, sir!' said Nugent.

'Hadn't the faintest idea, sir,' said Johnny Bull. 'We all thought it was that man again—'

'That pedlar, sir, after Bunter—'

'We couldn't see who it was in the dark, sir—'

'We thought we were collaring that pedlar, sir—'

'So sorry, sir—'

'The sorrowfulness is terrific, esteemed sir.'

'Hope you're not hurt, sir—'

'We hadn't the least idea—'

'If we'd known it was you, sir—'

Now that they had started, nine or ten fellows were speaking all at once. All realized how necessary it was for Quelch to understand, as soon as possible, that that onslaught in the dark hadn't been intended for him! It was urgent to make that clear without delay.

Quelch's brow was thunderous. Rhadamanthus and Aeacus combined could hardly have produced the look he fixed on the dismayed juniors. But, to their immense relief, it cleared a little, as they stammered out their explanations. If he had supposed that this was an unheard-of 'rag' on a 'beak', he had to realize that it had been only an error in the dark. The thunderous brow cleared a little, if only a little.

'Kindly do not speak all at once!' snapped Mr. Quelch. 'Wharton, you may speak.'

'Yes, sir! We're so sorry, sir!' said Harry, meekly. 'We had no idea you might be coming up, sir. When we heard you bump, sir, we all thought it was that kidnapper again, so we piled on him—I—I mean you - but we thought it was him—'

'You mean, I presume, that you thought it was he!' snapped Mr. Quelch.

'Eh! Oh! Yes, sir. We all thought it was him - I mean he—'

'Cherry!'

'Yes, sir!' mumbled Bob.

'Take away that cord! If you ever play such a foolish, unthinking prank again, I shall cane you with the utmost severity.'

'Oh! Yes, sir.'

'You will take five hundred lines, Cherry.'

'Oh, crumbs! I—I mean, yes, sir.'

'Every boy who is out of bed will take a hundred lines,' said Mr. Quelch. 'Now go back to bed at once! At once!'

'Yes, sir.'

The Removites crowded back to bed, under a gimlet-eye. Then a fat squeak was heard. Billy Bunter, at last, had awakened.

'I say, you fellows, what's the light on for? I say, what's up? Oh, crikey! Is it that man again? Yaroooh! Help!'

'Silence, Bunter, you foolish boy.'

'Oh! ' Billy Bunter blinked at a frowning face. 'Is it you, sir? Is anything the matter, sir?'

'Nothing is the matter, Bunter! Be quiet.'

'If—if—if that man's about, sir—'

'I have told you to be quiet, Bunter,' rumbled Mr. Quelch.

'Oh, yes, sir! But, sir—'

'Silence.'

Billy Bunter was silent: but he blinked about him very uneasily. He realized that something had happened. Having slept, and snored, all through the uproar, he had no idea what it was; but 'that man again' haunted his fat mind.

The Removites were very quickly in bed. Then Mr. Quelch switched off the light, and the door closed on him. Then several voices were heard.

'You ass, Cherry!'

'You silly fathead!'

'Might have been a whopping all round! Quelch looked like it.'

'Well, how was I to know that Quelch would be coming up?' exclaimed Bob. 'If it had been that kidnapper, we should have caught him all right.'

'Like to try it on again?' asked the Bounder, sarcastically. 'The Head might give us a look-in next. Like to catch the Old Man?'

'Oh, rats!' said Bob.

'I say, you fellows—'

'Oh, shut up, Bunter, and go to sleep.'

'But I say, what's happened?' squeaked Billy Bunter. 'What was Quelch here for? He looked all rumpled and crumpled. Can't you tell a fellow what's happened?'

'What's happened is that Quelch came up, fathead, and we took him for that kidnapper in the dark, and piled on him!' growled Bob. 'And we've got a hundred lines all round, and I've got five hundred, and all on your account, you fat blitherer.'

'Oh, crikey ! You piled on Quelch— No wonder he looked shirty! He, he, he!' A fat chuckle floated from Bunter's bed.

'He, he, he!'

'You fat chump! Think it's funny?' hooted Bob.

'He, he, he!' Apparently Billy Bunter did think it funny. 'He, he, he! I say, you fellows, you must have been silly asses to collar Quelch. I wonder he didn't whop you all round. You jolly well asked for it! He, he, he!'

Bunter, evidently, was amused.

'You fat ditherer, I've got five hundred lines!' roared Bob.

'He, he, he!'

Bob Cherry stepped out of bed. He stepped towards Bunter's, taking his pillow with him. The amused Owl was burbling on.

'I say, you fellows, you'd better make sure who you're collaring, next time. He, he, he! I say - yaroooh ! Wow! What's that? Who's that? Whoo-hoop!'

Swipe!

'Ow! wow! Keep that pillow away! Wow! Stoppit! Wow!' yelled Billy Bunter, ceasing to be amused all of a sudden. 'Wow! Beast! wow!'

'Now laugh that one off!' hooted Bob. 'And if that kidnapper comes after you again, you fat frog, we won't stop him - we'll jolly well lend him a hand shoving you into his sack!'

'Ow! Beast! wow!'

There were no more chuckles from Billy Bunter.

JUST LIKE BUNTER

'APPLES!' murmured Billy Bunter.

He sniffed appreciatively.

There was a pleasant scent in No. 4 Study in the Remove.

It was the unmistakable scent of ripe apples. Billy Bunter, blinking in at the door of that study through his big spectacles, sniffed, and sniffed again. Then, like Moses of old, he looked this way and that way: and, like Moses again, saw no man! The Remove passage was deserted. Cricket was the order of the day that afternoon. Stumps had been pitched, and most Remove fellows were on Little Side. On a sunny half-holiday, few fellows were likely to be up in the studies.

That suited Billy Bunter. But the fat Owl's blink up and down the passage was very wary. No. 4 was a very attractive study to Bunter: the wealthy Bounder 'did himself' very well indeed, and that study was often like unto a land flowing with milk and honey. But it was rather dangerous ground for Billy Bunter's tuck-hunting operations. Smithy was by no means remarkable for either patience or good temper. He was not likely to 'make the punishment fit the crime' in Bob Cherry's playful way. He was much more likely to boot a voracious Owl the length of the passage and back again. Often as Billy Bunter had been booted for his sins, he had never grown to like it. So, even with that enticing scent of ripe apples tickling his fat little nose, he hesitated to roll into No. 4.

But Smithy was in the Remove eleven: and Redwing was certain not to miss watching a game in which his chum was playing. So nobody would be coming up to that study. Seldom, if ever, could William George Bunter resist the lure of tuck. That fragrant scent from No. 4 tempted him: and he fell. He rolled into the study.

'Oh! Good!' breathed Bunter.

There was a box on the table, open. Smithy, evidently, had started unpacking it, and no doubt helped himself from some of the contents. But it was still almost full of ripe, red, rich apples. Billy Bunter's eyes, and spectacles, dwelt on them almost ecstatically. Smithy was an open-handed fellow, and likely to hand round those apples freely in the Remove. No doubt Bunter might have come in for one or two. But one or two would not have been of much use to a fat Owl who had an almost infinite capacity for packing away foodstuffs. Bunter liked to take on cargoes in bulk.

A fat hand grabbed the nearest apple, and transferred it promptly to the widest mouth in the Greyfriars Remove. There was a sound of munching and crunching in No. 4 Study. But that was merely provisional, as it were. There were more than a dozen apples in the box. With a capacious mouth full, munching and crunching, a pair of fat hands were busy at the same time, cramming apples into pockets. With cricket going on, it was unlikely that Smithy would be coming up. But evidently it was safer to retire to some more secluded spot to

devour his prey.

Apple after apple was crammed into pockets. Bunter began to bulge all over. There was barely accommodation for the final apple. But Billy Bunter, in such matters, was no man for half-measures. He crammed it in somehow. Then, in haste, he rolled out of the study. The sooner he was at a safe distance from No. 4, the better it would be, if Smithy did chance to come up.

He rolled happily down the passage to the landing. Then, from the bottom of the fat heart, Billy Bunter was glad that he had lost no time. A Remove fellow was coming up the stairs. It was Herbert Vernon-Smith.

'Oh, crikey!' breathed Bunter.

He blinked down in alarm at the Bounder. With added alarm, he noted that Smithy's face had a clouded and sullen look. He did not look in a good temper. Neither was he: having been dismissed from his wicket in the first over, by Hobson of the Shell. Smithy was a bad loser: and he had slouched off the field in a far from amiable mood.

Billy Bunter blinked at him, as he came up, in deep alarm. He was conscious of bulging pockets. Apples bulged all over him. If Smithy noticed it - if he guessed - and Smithy was as keen as a hawk— He dared not pass him on the stairs.

He turned to the landing balustrade, and leaned on it, hoping that the Bounder would pass him unnoticed. Leaning there, the bulges were less conspicuous.

The Bounder glanced at him as he came across the landing. 'Loafing about, as usual, you fat slacker!' he said.

He did not seem to notice the bulges. And there was nothing unusual in Billy Bunter leaning on banisters. Bunter always leaned, if there was anything at hand on which to lean.

'I—I—I say, Smithy, ain't you playing cricket?' mumbled Bunter.

'I'm out!' grunted Smithy. 'May as well get my lines done for Quelch - I shan't be wanted till we go into the field.'

He walked on, much to Billy Bunter's relief. Then, to the fat Owl's renewed alarm, he stopped and glanced back.

'Like an apple, Bunter?'

'Eh!'

'I've got lots in my study. Roll along and have one.' At any other time, Billy Bunter would have rolled along, and like Iser in the poem, he would have rolled rapidly! But not this time - with all Smithy's 'lots' of apples crammed in his pockets! Smithy was going to his study! The moment he entered it, he would discover what had happened. His company was the very last that Billy Bunter could want at such a moment.

'Oh! Thanks!' gasped Bunter. 'I—I—I—'

'Well, come on, you fat ass. I dare say you'd have helped yourself, if I hadn't come up.'

'Oh, really, Smithy, I—I—I don't like apples, old chap! Thanks all the same,' gasped Bunter.

'Please yourself!' snapped Smithy, and he tramped on into the Remove passage.

Billy Bunter gave his departing back a blink, and rolled to the stairs. He descended those stairs at unaccustomed speed. His fat little legs fairly twinkled as he went. An apple dropped

from an over-crowded pocket, and rolled down from stair to stair. Bunter did not linger for it. He had no time to lose.

A breathless fat Owl emerged from the House, into the sunny quad, at a trot. He did not pause there. Skinner and Snoop, loafing in the quad, stared at him as his fat little legs twinkled past.

'What's the hurry, Bunter?' asked Skinner. 'That pedlar after you?'

'I—I say, if—if Smithy comes out, tell him I've gone down to watch the cricket, will you?' gasped Bunter.

And he twinkled on - not in the direction of Little Side, but heading for the old Cloisters: leaving Skinner and Snoop staring.

The old Cloisters were cool and shady. Billy Bunter paused there, to recover his breath. Then he rolled on to the ancient wall that bordered a leafy lane outside the precincts. Under that old ivied wall was a stone seat: and the breathless fat Owl plumped down on it. Smithy was not likely to look for him in that secluded spot.

But was he not?

Hardly a minute had elapsed, and the fat Owl had not yet commenced operations on the purloined apples, when a shouting voice woke the echoes of the Cloisters.

'Bunter! You fat sweep! Where are you, you pilfering porpoise?'

It was Smithy's voice.

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter.

There was a sound of footsteps, coming along. Smithy was not in sight. But evidently he was looking there for Bunter. His voice came again.

'Where are you, you fat villain? I know you're here - Skinner told me you came this way! I'm going to boot you all round the quad! Show up!'

Billy Bunter jumped up from the stone seat. Smithy had not seen him yet. But he was coming - and it was a matter of only moments. Already, it seemed to the fat tuck-raider, he could feel the impact of a hefty foot on his tight trousers. He jumped on the seat, and clambered in haste over the ivied wall, and dropped in the lane outside.

Bump! 'Wow!'

It was quite a low drop: but it was like Bunter to land in a heap. A couple of apples exuded from his pockets as he bumped. He did not even notice them. He scrambled up, and scudded. Since his alarming adventure in the pedlar's hand-cart, Billy Bunter had not, as Bob Cherry had said, put so much as the tip of his nose outside the gates. But he was not thinking of kidnapping pedlars now. Smithy was a nearer danger! He charged up that little leafy lane, and did not stop till there was not a run left in his little fat legs. Then he rolled into the shade of the trees beside the lane, plumped down in the grass, and pumped in breath.

He was safe from Smithy there. Smithy was welcome to search the old Cloisters from end to end: and anywhere else within the precincts of Greyfriars, as long as he liked. And having, at length, recovered his wind, Billy Bunter proceeded to unpack his pockets, and deal with his booty.

Crunch! Munch! Crunch! Munch! It was a happy Owl.

They were quite luscious apples. Billy Bunter enjoyed every one of them. And not till every one of them had disappeared on the downward path, did the cheery sound of munching and crunching cease. It was followed by another sound - that of a rustle in the thickets. And then—!

Something suddenly descended on Billy Bunter. It was the open end of a large sack. He did not know it was coming, till it came. It enveloped him, suddenly shutting off the daylight. It muffled the sound of a startled, terrified squeak that escaped him. Frantically, the fat junior wriggled in the enveloping sack. He wriggled and squeaked and yelled. Unseen hands tied the end of the sack under his feet. Then he felt himself heaved up bodily on broad shoulders.

On Little Side at Greyfriars, Harry Wharton and Co. were in the field. Smithy was consoled for the loss of his wicket in the first innings, by a catch in the field that sent Hobson of the Shell bootless home. He did not even remember Billy Bunter's fat existence. Neither did anyone else. Nobody missed the fat Owl - fallen, at last, into kidnapping hands.

CHAPTER 31

MISSING!

'BUNTER!'

No reply.

'Bunter!'

Mr. Prout was calling the roll. He repeated the name, booming. But no fat voice squeaked 'adsum' in response.

Prout frowned, marked 'Bunter' absent, and went on with the roll. He did not heed the incident unduly: a junior late for calling-over was not a particularly uncommon occurrence. But Mr. Quelch's eyes turned at once on his form, from which one member was missing. No more than Prout would he have attached any particular importance to the incident, in normal circumstances. Unpunctuality, in fact, was one of Billy Bunter's many sins. There was nothing surprising in Bunter being late for rolls, or for lessons, or for anything else excepting a meal. But the circumstances were not, at the moment, normal. Billy Bunter was, at present, in the unusual state of requiring to be kept under watch and ward: with that mysterious kidnapper still at large!

Some of the Remove fellows were exchanging glances and whispers. They had missed the fattest figure in the form from their ranks.

'Where's that fat chump?' murmured Bob Cherry.

'Not here,' said Nugent.

'Haven't seen him since before the cricket,' said Harry Wharton. 'Anybody seen him about?'

'I saw him in the quad,' said Skinner. 'He was cutting off to the Cloisters, with Smithy on his track.'

'Oh! You seen him, Smithy?'

'No! He wasn't in the Cloisters when I looked for him. But I want to see him - I'm going to boot him for bagging my apples from my study.'

Calling-over finished without a late-comer putting in an appearance. Mr. Quelch called to the captain of the Remove as the Famous Five were leaving hall.

'Wharton!'

'Yes, sir!' Harry stopped and turned.

'Bunter has not answered to his name. Do you know where he is?'

'No, sir! Nobody seems to have seen him for some time.'

'You will oblige me, Wharton, by looking for him, and sending him to my study immediately.'

'Very well, sir.'

'Oh where and Oh where can he be?' chanted Bob Cherry, as the juniors went out. 'I say, Quelch was looking jolly serious. Think he's got that kidnapper on his mind?' 'Let's look for the fat ass, anyhow,' said Harry.

They proceeded to look for Billy Bunter. The Bouncer joined them in the search, with the

full intention of administering the delayed booting as soon as the fat Owl was found. But Bunter was not found.

Nobody had any news of him. Nobody had seen him about. He was not in the quad, or the old Cloisters, or in the Rag, or up in the studies. More and more fellows joined in the search, as the news spread that Bunter was missing. But they failed to spot Billy Bunter's fat face, or the gleam of his spectacles. It had to be realized that Bunter was not in the school at all. And the thought of the mysterious kidnapper was in every mind now. Smithy quite forgot his intention of booting him when found. It was clear that Billy Bunter was not going to be found.

'Nothing doing!' said Bob Cherry, at last. 'He isn't around anywhere, you fellows. Must have gone out.'

'Might be coming in late,' said Nugent.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

'Not so late as this, if he could help it,' he said. 'If he did go out, and that man was hanging about on the look-out for him—! That's what Smithy thought he was likely to do, and it looks like it now.'

'Poor old Bunter!'

'I'd better go and tell Quelch we can't find him, anyhow.' There was nothing else to be done. Harry Wharton proceeded to his form-master's study, tapped, and entered. Mr. Quelch was standing at the telephone. He was speaking to the porter's lodge: and Gosling's crusty voice came through.

'No, sir! I never see him going out, sir. But there's crowds of 'em in and out on a 'arf-'oliday, sir.'

'Very well, Gosling.'

The Remove master put up the receiver, and turned to Wharton. His face was grave and troubled. 'You have not found Bunter, Wharton?'

'No, sir.'

'You have made a thorough search, I presume?'

'We've looked everywhere, sir! Dozens of fellows have been helping. Bunter isn't in the school, sir.'

'It is very singular,' said Mr. Quelch. 'I had expressly told him not to go out alone, until this matter was cleared up: yet it appears that he must have gone out of gates. You knew nothing of his intentions, Wharton?'

'Nothing, sir.'

'Very well. Thank you, Wharton! you may go.' Harry Wharton left the study. He left Mr. Quelch pacing the room, in a very troubled frame of mind. He was both anxious and angry. Bunter, evidently, must have gone out, as he was not in the school. It was possible that something had delayed his return, and that he would roll in late. Quelch hoped that that was so: and it was not improbable, for Billy Bunter was exactly the fellow to lose his way, or miss a bus, or forget the time. If that was so, the vials of wrath were ready to pour on his fat head when he did roll in. On the other hand, there was that kidnapper, whose existence

Quelch could no longer doubt: and Billy Bunter was precisely the fellow to walk into his hands, if he was lurking in the vicinity on the watch.

Between wrath, if there was nothing the matter after all, and anxiety, if there was something very much the matter, Quelch was in rather a mixed state of mind, and deeply disturbed. If Bunter did not come in, the police-station at Courtfield had to be apprised that a Greyfriars boy was missing.

The raucous note of the telephone-bell interrupted his troubled reflections.

Buzzzzzz!

An impatient exclamation escaped Mr. Quelch, as he turned to the instrument. He was in no mood to be bothered by phone calls now. He almost snatched off the receiver.

'Well?' It was quite a bark.

'Mr. Quelch—'

The Remove master's eyes glinted over the telephone.

It was Captain Philpot's voice that came through. Quelch, with this new trouble on his mind, had almost forgotten that Old Boy's existence. Indeed he would have quite forgotten it, but for a daily phone-call inquiring after a suit-case. He did not want to be reminded of it now, with the worry over a missing Owl on his mind.

'Is that Captain Philpot?' He almost bit off the words.

'Yes, Mr. Quelch. As I have not heard from you, I conclude that my suit-case has not been found?'

'I regret to tell you that it has not, Captain Philpot. I regret that there should have been such an occurrence when you visited Greyfriars. But—'

'You have not discovered who played that inexcusable prank in my room a week ago?'

'I regret to say, no. You may be assured that every effort has been made, and the culprit will certainly be discovered - and punished—'

'You are aware, Mr. Quelch, that there are important business-papers in that suit-case. It must be found.'

'Every effort—'

'Yes, yes, but it seems that all efforts have failed, and I have no resource but to take the matter in hand myself. I shall therefore return to Greyfriars in the morning, sir.' Mr. Quelch compressed his lips hard.

'I have already assured you, Captain Philpot, that you are very welcome to do so. Indeed I am surprised that you have not done so already, if the suit-case is a matter of such importance - as surprised, sir, as I was by your leaving so abruptly while your property was missing. Good-bye.'

The Remove master jammed back the receiver without waiting for a good-bye from Captain Philpot. He resumed pacing his study. For some minutes his mind dwelt on the affair of the Old Boy, and the rag in his room, of which the perpetrator had never been discovered. It was an exasperating state of affairs. But it did not specially concern Quelch, who had not the remotest idea that the unknown perpetrator was a member of his own form. He was much more concerned about a missing Removite, than about a missing suit-case: and his

thoughts soon returned to Bunter. Where was Bunter?

That question was being asked all over Greyfriars, In No. 7 in the Remove, Billy Bunter did not turn up for prep. No fat figure sprawled in the armchair while Toddy and Dutton sat at the table with their books. And when the bell rang for dorm, there was still no Bunter. One bed in the Remove dormitory remained unoccupied: no rumble of a snore from that bed woke the echoes. Billy Bunter was missing - and he remained missing.

A STARTLING SUSPICION

'POOR old Bunter!'

'The poorfulness of esteemed old Bunter is terrific.'

'It's rotten!'

'Too jolly bad!'

'But where on earth can he be?'

'Goodness knows!'

'That pedlar's got him.'

'No doubt about that, now.'

'But where - and why?'

It was a hopeless problem. The morning was bright and sunny: but the faces of the Famous Five, usually as cheery as the sunshine, were thoughtful and clouded. They could not help feeling concerned about the missing Owl.

Billy Bunter, it was true, was nobody in particular. His manners and customs did not make for popularity. If he was present, fellows often wished that he wasn't. Absence, in Bunter's case, did not make the heart grow fonder. His fat squeak was music only to his own fat ears. His unscrupulous depredations in other fellows' study-cupboards had resulted in innumerable bootings. His last known act was the 'snooping' of Smithy's apples.

Nevertheless, now that he was missing, in such mysterious circumstances, fellows seemed disposed to forget all about his many sins of commission and omission. His faults, though their name was Legion, faded into the background. To the Famous Five, and to most of the Remove fellows, he was now 'poor old Bunter'.

They came out in break that morning, hoping that there might be news of him. But there was no news. Where was Bunter? Why had he been spirited away? Almost everyone was asking that question: nobody knew the answer.

'Where - and why?' repeated Bob Cherry. 'I—I wonder if Smithy got it right, you fellows - about that bank-raider. Not that it would help, as nobody knows who he is, or what he looks like - except poor old Bunter. Hallo, hallo, hallo, there's Smithy - who's he scowling at?'

Vernon-Smith, lounging in the quad, was not exactly scowling, as Bob expressed it. But the look on his face was very unpleasant, and his eyes glinted-fixed on someone at a distance. Harry Wharton and Co. looked round, following the direction of the Bounder's stare, to see who was the object of that fixed inimical stare.

'Oh! That chap!' said Bob. 'The man Smithy barged over with his bike.'

'That Old Boy!' said Harry.

'So he's here again,' said Nugent.

It was Captain Philpot. The young man had come out of the House, and the Bounder's eyes had turned on him at once. Apparently the Old Boy had arrived while the Remove were in form. This was their first intimation that he was at Greyfriars again.

Evidently, from Smithy's look, he had not forgotten his grudge. That savage smack at his

head, which had knocked him spinning, still rankled, as bitterly as ever.

He gave the Co. a sneering glance.

'Look at him!' he said. 'Who'd guess, from his looks, that he had been sacked from this school?'

'No business of ours,' said Bob.

'Like his cheek to barge in. He may get another tip that he isn't wanted here, if he hangs on,' muttered the Bounder.

'Don't be a goat, Smithy,' said Harry Wharton, sharply. 'Once is enough, and more than enough. Most likely the man's come back about that dashed suit-case, as it has never turned up.'

The Bounder laughed.

'If that's so, he can hunt for it!' he said. 'I wish him joy of it. Looks now as if it won't be found in a hurry, doesn't it?'

'Not unless the silly ass who walked it off, coughs it up!' said Nugent.

'Know who it was?' grinned Smithy.

'We can make a pretty good guess,' grunted Johnny Bull. 'The guessfulness is terrific, my esteemed Smithy,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Then you'd better keep your guesses to yourselves,' sneered the Bounder. 'If I know anything about it, he won't get any help from me. If he's so jolly anxious about it, no reason why he shouldn't have stayed on last week, and hunted for it then, if that's what he's come back for.'

'Look here, Smithy—'

'Oh, rats! If that's what he wants, he can whistle for it,' snapped Smithy. 'Any news of Bunter?' he added, changing the subject.

'Nothing that we've heard,' said Bob. 'It looks as if that pedlar got him yesterday, though goodness knows why.' The Bounder shrugged his shoulder.

'I've told you why,' he said. 'It's that bank-raider who's got him, to park him somewhere and keep him quiet. Who else could have any reason for bagging the fat ass?'

'Can't think of any reason,' admitted Bob. 'But—'

'I suppose it's possible,' said Harry Wharton, slowly.

'But if it's so, Smithy, it can only mean that the man must have been around here last week, to pick it up that it's Bunter who could identify him. He couldn't have heard it outside the school.'

'I know that.'

'Well, it seems jolly steep. And that's not all. If he was afraid of Bunter spotting him, all he had to do was to give Greyfriars a wide berth, and keep at a safe distance. Why shouldn't he?'

'He jolly well would!' said Johnny Bull. 'No need for him to bag Bunter - all he had to do was to keep out of his sight.'

Bob Cherry winked at his chums.

'If that johnny was around last week, he may want to come around again,' he said. 'Think

that's it, Smithy?'

'Why not?' snapped Smithy. 'Nobody knows who he is, or what he looks like. He could walk into the school this morning, if he liked, and nobody the wiser - now Bunter's gone.'

'Oh, my hat!'

'Why should he?' asked Nugent.

'How should I know?' snapped the Bounder, irritably. 'But I know this much - he's nobbled Bunter, because Bunter could identify him - and that means that he's got some reason why he can't keep at a safe distance. That's why Bunter's gone, and if you can't see it, it's because you're a bunch of fatheads who can't see what sticks out a mile.'

'Thanks,' said Harry Wharton, laughing.

'The thankfulness is terrific,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Smithy's got it all sorted out,' said Bob. 'Somebody was around last week, picking up the news, and he's parked Bunter somewhere, so that he can call again. Is this where we say "Wonderful", Mr. Sherlock Holmes?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, go and eat coke!' snapped Smithy, and he stalked away with a knitted brow, leaving the chums of the Remove smiling.

But their faces became grave again. Whatever was the explanation, Bunter was missing. For whatever reason he had been kidnapped, he was in the hands of a kidnapper. That could not be doubted now.

'Poor old Bunter!' said Bob, for the umpteenth time. 'Nothing a fellow can do - only wait for news from old Grimey. I—I wonder if Smithy's got it right? But that wouldn't help, anyhow.' Vernon-Smith, as he stalked away frowning, had no doubt that he had 'got it right', as Bob expressed it. And he had no doubt that, if that was so, it would help. For it would only mean that the mysterious bank-raider was some man who, wholly unsuspected, had access to the school, where he dared not venture so long as Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles might fall upon him. He must have been about the place at least once, or he would have known nothing about Bunter. He must have some reason for coming again, or he would not want the fat Owl out of the way. Who was it? What stranger had recently been within the gates, who had some reason for calling again?

As if in answer to that question in the Bounder's mind, a fair-haired young man, sauntering in the quad, passed under his eyes, at a little distance. Smithy gave a violent start. His eyes almost bulged at Captain Philpot.

The captain gave him a careless glance in passing.

Otherwise he did not heed Vernon-Smith. But the Bounder's eyes followed him, as he went. He stood quite still, startled, almost stunned, by the sudden suspicion that had flashed into his mind. Was it possible? Was it only his dislike of the man that was father to the thought? Could it be?

With his thoughts racing, the Bounder stood, like a fellow in a trance. A bell rang, and he did not even hear it. Break was over, and the Greyfriars fellows heading for the form-rooms.

Smithy did not stir. A Stentorian voice came to his ears.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Gone to sleep standing up like a horse, Smithy? Didn't you hear the bell?' roared Bob Cherry.

'Oh!'

Vernon-Smith joined the crowd of Remove fellows.

His eyes were gleaming: his face almost pale with suppressed excitement. He went into the Remove form-room with the rest of the form, his mind in a whirl. The usually most inattentive member of Quelch's form was absent: but in third school that morning, there was one Removite who was more inattentive than Billy Bunter had ever been - during that hour, Herbert Vernon-Smith hardly heard a word uttered by Mr. Quelch.

SMITHY SORTS IT OUT

'COME up to the study.'

'What for?'

'Don't jaw - just come,' snapped Vernon-Smith.

The Famous Five did not seem in haste to obey that behest. They had come out after dinner into the sunny quad, and Bob Cherry had suggested that there was time for a knock at the nets before class was due. That afternoon it was French with Monsieur Charpentier: and a spot of cricket was attractive, before going into Mossoo and French irregular verbs.

'Another pow-wow?' yawned Bob.

'No news of Bunter?' asked Harry Wharton. 'If you've heard anything, Smithy—'

'Nobody's heard anything, so far. But—'

'Better come, you fellows,' said Tom Redwing. His face was very grave. 'Smithy's told me. I can't quite get it down - but it's jolly serious, and we'd better put our heads together about it.'

'Sherlock Holmes on the track again!' said Bob. 'Look here, leave it till after class, and let's get down to the nets now—'

'Get down to the nets, and be blowed!' snapped the Bounder, and he scowled and stalked back into the House.

The Co. exchanged a grin.

'All right, Reddy, we're coming!' said Harry. 'Come on, you fellows. May as well hear what it is.'

And they followed Vernon-Smith. The Bounder tramped up to the Remove studies, the Co. and Redwing at his heels. He tramped into No. 4 Study, and looked round at them far from amiably, as they followed him in. Then, to their surprise, he stepped back to the door, and glanced up and down the Remove passage, before closing it. Then he shut the door carefully. Apparently he was anxious that other ears should not hear what he had to say.

'What the dickens!' said Bob Cherry. 'Think somebody's going to listen at the keyhole, Smithy?'

'I wouldn't put it past him,' snapped Smithy.

'Him! Who? Poor old Bunter's not here, and nobody else ever does.'

'Who's "him"?' asked Nugent.

'That rat,' said the Bounder, with gleaming eyes. 'He's been rooting all over the place - some fellows have seen him up in the attics - searching for that suit-case of his. I don't want him to hear, if he came this way.'

'You don't mean Captain Philpot?' exclaimed Harry Wharton, in astonishment. All the school knew that the captain was 'rooting' about the place, as Smithy put it. He had been seen in all sorts of unexpected places, evidently in search of that missing suit-case.

'I do mean Captain Philpot!' snapped the Bounder. 'I don't want to disappear like Bunter: and I might, if he heard a word of this.'

They gazed at him.

'Mind telling us what that means, if it means anything at all?' asked Harry Wharton. 'Sounds like blether, to me.'

'I'm going to. We've got to be wary of that man.'

'Why?'

'Because he's the Courtfield bank-raider that Bunter spotted on the common last week.'

There was a general jump. Five fellows jumped almost clear of the floor.

'What?'

'Mad?'

'Smithy, you ass—'

'Dreaming?'

'Oh, my hat!' gasped Bob Cherry. 'Go to sleep and dream again, Smithy! Is he a bank-raider because he smacked your head?'

'You mad ass, Smithy—'

'For goodness sake, don't talk that rot outside this study.'

The Bounder listened to those exclamations, quietly, with a sneer on his face. He waited unmoved for silence, before he spoke again. 'If you'll listen, I'll put it in words of one syllable, that even you can understand,' he said, sarcastically. 'I've told Redwing already. He knows.'

Five pairs of eyes turned on Tom Redwing.

He nodded. 'Listen to Smithy, you fellows,' he said.

'You don't believe—?'

'I do.'

'Oh, my hat! Get on with it, Mr. Sherlock Smithy, and tell us when we say "Wonderful" like Dr. Watson!' said Bob.

'I've told you already that it's that bank-raider who kidnapped Bunter, to keep him out of the way—'

'We've had that!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'He was about here last week, and heard what Bunter saw on the common. That's the only way he can have known about Bunter.'

'So you say.'

'Captain Philpot was here last week, on the day of the bank raid. He left suddenly the same evening. Fellows had seen him about in the afternoon. Nobody saw him about after Bunter got in with his news. He was keeping his room till he left. And he left after lights out for the Remove - when Bunter was fast asleep in bed.'

'He had his back up about that rag in his room,' said Johnny Bull. 'That's what everybody thought.'

'And what he wanted them to think!' sneered Smithy. 'Now, on the Friday, the Head got a spoof telephone-call that took Bunter out of gates. Bunter was in Quelch's study, and you remember he heard Philpot on the phone, telling Quelch he was coming back on Saturday. He never came: but he meant to come, and he would have come, if that pedlar had got

away with Bunter in his hand-cart.'

'Oh!'

'Next came that row in the dorm,' went on Vernon-Smith. 'He failed again, owing to the fat ass being awake and seeing him, when of course he expected everybody to be fast asleep. He dared not try that game again - he had to hang about on the watch to catch the fat ass outside the school - and yesterday Bunter walked into his hands, like the silly fathead he is. And the next morning, Captain Philpot shows up at Greyfriars again! He was only waiting till the coast was clear - and it's clear for him now.'

'Oh!'

'You see, he had to come back!' sneered Smithy. 'He couldn't, while Bunter was about - but he had to come - after that suit-case.'

'Something very special in it?'

'Very special, I think! The thousand pounds that the bank-raider lifted from the bank at Courtfield!' said the Bounder, coolly.

'Oh, holy smoke!'

'Look at it,' sneered Smithy. 'It all sticks out a mile, if you open your eyes. That bank-raider had his disguise outfit hidden in that wood on Courtfield Common. We know all that from Bunter. His visit here began on Wednesday. What was he doing, only a mile from the school, on the Monday before? You remember he was carrying a suit-case, when my bike knocked him over—'

'Oh! Yes!'

'Isn't it plain enough? He was there, to hide that suitcase, with his nigger outfit in it, all ready for what he planned for Wednesday. That's why he visited Greyfriars at all. It suited him to walk in here as an Old Boy, after the raid. Wherever old Grimes thought of looking for a bank-raider, this is about the last place he would have thought of looking in. The rat would have stayed out his visit here, and then cleared off safe and sound with his plunder - but for what Bunter had seen. That scared him off.'

'But—'

'We thought he didn't know us again,' went on Smithy, in the same sneering tone. 'He didn't choose to. He didn't want any talk about fellows seeing him around a couple of days before he was due here.'

'But—'

'If his suit-case hadn't been missing, he would have taken it with him when he skipped, and never shown his nose here again. But—' The Bounder laughed sourly: 'he had to come back for that! - and Bunter had to be shifted out of the way, so that the coast would be clear for him to come.'

Bob Cherry whistled.

'It jolly well does seem to fit in,' he said. 'Any more, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?'

'Yes! That fat ass wasn't able to give anything like a description of the man he saw getting the black off. But there was one thing that even that dithering owl noticed - that the man had fair hair. What colour is Philpot's?'

'Fair!' said Harry Wharton, slowly.

'And don't we know he's a bad hat? Think he was sacked for nothing, twenty years ago?' jeered Smithy. 'He's gone from bad to worse, since then. Fat lot he cared about his old school! He was just making use of Greyfriars for cover. But for Bunter, he might have pulled off another bank raid, from his cover here.'

'Oh, my hat!'

'I wouldn't wonder if that was his game. Anyhow, he's the man!' The Bounder's eyes glinted. 'The man who pitched into me that Monday, and the same vicious brute who cut me with his whip when I tried to stop him getting away after the bank raid on Wednesday. He's parked Bunter somewhere to keep him out of the way - and I can tell you this, he's not far off.'

'How come?' asked Bob.

'He's off the scene till Philpot's through here. But the man's got to keep an eye on him, and keep him fed. He must be somewhere in touch.'

'Um! But - where?'

'The wherefulness is terrific.'

'The day he had him in that hand-cart, Bunter got away at the level crossing. That's a clue. I'd give ten to one that the fat ass is parked in some lonely spot on the other side of Pegg.' Harry Wharton and Co. exchanged startled glances at that. The Bounder's words recalled the episode out of bounds two or three days ago. They remembered Mr. Quelch's surprise at finding the Old Boy at that lonely bungalow on the beach.

'By gum!' breathed Bob Cherry. 'If it's possible - we know that that pedlar was wheeling Bunter in that direction - could he be at that bung?'

'Philpot was alone there,' said Nugent. 'We heard him tell Quelch that he was fending for himself for a few days—'

The Bounder broke in irritably.

'What bung? What are you talking about?' he snapped. They told him, in a few words. Vernon-Smith's eyes blazed with excitement.

'That settles it! He had to fix up some place to park Bunter, and he fixed up that lonely bung. I've seen it - right back from the beach - a long garden in front, and a mile from anywhere.'

Smithy drew a deep, deep breath. 'Look here, you don't half believe that I've sorted it out—'

'About half!' grinned Bob.

'We'll put it to the test. Come and get out the bikes, and we'll ride over, and scout round that bung, and see.'

'Out of bounds,' said Johnny Bull.

'Fathead!'

'And we should be late back for class with Mossoo—'

'Ass!'

'Look here, Smithy—'

'Oh, pack it up! I'm going! Come on, Reddy.' Smithy turned to the door.

'Come on, Johnny,' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'We'll chance it out of bounds, and we'll

chance it with Mossoo. We've got to know.'

'We jolly well have!' said Bob. 'Come on.'

Five minutes later, seven juniors were pushing at pedals.

And they pushed hard and fast. Smithy's face was set. He had no doubts. Harry Wharton and Co. hardly shared his conviction. In fact, they did not quite know what to think. But they were going to know: that was settled. They pushed hard at the bikes, and the miles flew under the whirling wheels.

CHAPTER 34

RESCUE

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

He put all his beef into it.

In fact, had it been a practical proposition to yell one's head off, William George Bunter's fat head, at that moment, might have been in danger of becoming detached.

Billy Bunter could hardly believe his eyes and his spectacles, as he blinked through a chink in a wooden shutter, at a sight that was so unexpected, so unhopod-for, that he almost fancied that he was dreaming.

Where was Bunter? He did not know - any more than he knew why he was there. It was a hopelessly puzzled, perplexed, and mystified Owl. The past twenty-four hours seemed like a nightmare to him - as it might have seemed, really, to any fellow, headed up in a sack, dumped into a wheelbarrow, and wheeled away he knew not where.

He had seen nothing of his captor, though he had no doubt that it was that terrifying pedlar. He had been wheeled on and on and on, till at length he had been hauled out, and dumped down in some building or other. Without a word, he had been left to wriggle out of the sack. He was in a small room, barely furnished, with a single small window, which was covered by a locked wooden shutter. There was a chink in that shutter, through which the sunlight glinted. Many times had Bunter's eyes and spectacles been applied to that chink. All that he could see through it was a long garden, ending in banks of laurels, with a glimpse of beach beyond, and the sea rolling in the distance.

There was one gleam of comfort for a scared and bewildered Owl. A supply of foodstuffs had been left in the room. He was not going to miss his meals, at any rate.

And he did not miss any!

Hours had dragged by, and nobody came to the room.

Night came: and for quite a long time, he forgot his woes in slumber. Another spot of comfort was that there was no rising-bell to wake him in the morning. He slept, and he snored, till quite a late hour.

Still nobody came to the room, as the morning wore on. The previous afternoon, he had heard sounds of someone moving about in other rooms. But there was no sound to be heard since he had rolled out of bed. It seemed that his captor must have gone, leaving him alone in the building.

The morning wore away.

Thinking was not much in Billy Bunter's line: but if he had thought ever so hard, he could never have sorted out what it all meant. The kidnapper, whoever he was, seemed to have no use for him. He had simply dumped him there and left him there.

Now it was afternoon again: and the dismal fat Owl was blinking at the chink in the shutter - a hopeless blink. The garden was long. The laurels screened the view. He could not have

seen a passer-by, if anyone had passed on the beach. The distance was too great for a howl to carry. There was no hope of help or rescue - unless that man chose to come back and let him go. Bunter remembered that it was French with Mossoo that afternoon. There was a gleam of consolation, in getting out of French with Mossoo! But only a gleam. Actually, Billy Bunter, though never keen on lessons, would have preferred just then to be back in the Remove form-room, even with Quelch at his grimmest.

Wearily, he blinked through that chink in the shutter.

Twenty-four hours ago - only twenty-four hours - he had been happily munching Smithy's apples. From the bottom of his fat heart, he wished that he had left those apples alone. Often and often had his unscrupulous disregard of the rights of property, in matters of tuck, landed him in trouble. But never such trouble as this!

Not a soul came in sight. He did not really expect a soul to come in sight, unless it was that man returning. It was a hopeless Owl.

And then—!

Did his little round eyes deceive him? Were his big spectacles playing him false? Or did he behold, suddenly, a bunch of Greyfriars juniors coming up the garden path? He blinked at them with an almost unbelieving blink. He blinked from face to face, as they came nearer and clearer. Harry Wharton, Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull, Bob Cherry, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, Tom Redwing, Herbert Vernon-Smith - seven of them. How they were there, why they were there, Billy Bunter could not begin to guess. But they were there - his little round eyes, and his big round spectacles, were not deceiving him. And he yelled: 'I say, you fellows!'

He saw them all start, and stare. They were near enough to hear that yell. So far as Bunter could see, they couldn't have known that he was there. But they knew it now!

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' came back an answering roar.

'I say, you fellows! Help! I'm locked in!' yelled Bunter. 'I say, come and let me out!'

Seven heads bobbed outside the shuttered window.

Seven voices, all speaking at once, came to Bunter's fat ears.

'Bunter!'

'You're there?'

'Oh, my hat! He's there. '

'You win, Smithy!'

'We've found him.'

'The foundfulness is terrific.'

'Brace up, old fat man! We'll get you out!'

'I say, you fellows, buck up! That man might come back!' yelled Bunter. 'I say, there's nobody about now - but he might come back—'

'We'll handle him all right, if he does, old porpoise! He won't get through your jolly old bodyguard,' chuckled Bob Cherry.

'Okay, you fat ass!' said Vernon-Smith, 'that man's far enough away - he's at Greyfriars now, rooting after a suitcase, while you're bunged here out of the way. You fellows got that into

your heads at last?' added the Bounder, sarcastically.

'No doubt about it now,' said Harry Wharton. 'This is Philpot's bungalow, and there's Bunter, shut up inside. That settles that.'

'By gum! It will be a bit of a shock for him, when we walk Bunter in!' said Frank Nugent.

'And a bigger shock, when old Grimey looks into that suit-case of his!' said the Bounder. 'I fancy I can tell Grimey where to look for it.'

'I fancy you can,' grunted Johnny Bull.

'I say, you fellows, don't stand there jawing!' yelled Billy Bunter. 'I tell you that man might come back - I say, hurry up - I - say—'

'Give us a rest, old fat man, and we'll get you out.'

The juniors moved away to the door of the bungalow.

It was, as they expected, locked, like the shutter on Bunter's window. But locks were not likely to stop them now. Their intention had been to scout round the bungalow, and ascertain whether it had an occupant. That was not needed now. The solitary occupant had made his presence known as soon as they were within hearing. And it was not necessary to stand on ceremony, in releasing a kidnapped prisoner.

'The window!' said Bob. 'We'll soon get through that shutter. Get a rock up from the beach, and bust it in.'

'Good egg!'

'Come on!'

'I say, you fellows,' came an impatient yell. 'I say, what are you hanging about for? Want that man to come back and find me here! I say, can't you get a move on? Come and let me out, will you?'

Billy Bunter was almost dancing with impatience. He yelled and yelled. Unheeding his yells, Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry tramped back to the beach, and returned with a heavy rock.

'Here goes!' said Bob. 'Stand away from the window, Bunter.'

'Shan't! Will you come and let me out, or won't you?' yelled Bunter.

Crash!

'Yarooooooh!'

Billy Bunter jumped away from the window, as the rock crashed on the wooden shutter. He jumped like a kangaroo.

Crash! Crash!

It was a stout shutter, and the lock was a stout one.

But it was not built to stand a shock like that. Broken wood, a broken lock, and broken glass, flew in all directions. The juniors dragged fragments away, and the window was clear. Bob Cherry's cheery grinning face looked in.

'All serene now, fatty,' he said.

'Beast!'

'Eh?'

'Making a fellow jump like that!' hooted Billy Bunter, indignantly. 'You always were a clumsy

fathead, Bob Cherry.'

'You fat, fozzling, frabjous, burbling bloater—'



BUNTER JUMPED LIKE A KANGAROO

'Yah! Do you want me to climb out of that window?'

'Not at all—stay where you are!'

'Beast! I—I mean, lend me a hand to get out, old chap.'

Fortunately, Bob Cherry's good-nature was inexhaustible. He lent the required hand, and the fat Owl clambered through the window. Billy Bunter was no whale on fresh air: but for once he was very, very glad to find himself in the open air again. In the midst of his 'bodyguard', he rolled down the garden path to the gate.

CHAPTER 35

'HIM!'

TAP!

'Come in!' snapped Mr. Quelch.

Quelch was not in a happy mood that afternoon. He was at leisure, the Remove being up to Monsieur Charpentier. Normally, Quelch had many uses for his hours of leisure: a ten-mile grind, or a shot at his History of Greyfriars, or a cheery perusal of Lucretian hexameters, or perhaps another go at the elucidation of Ode XXVIII.

Now, however, Quelch, like Gallio of old, cared for none of these things. He was too worried and troubled over the missing member of his form. Where was Bunter?

Inspector Grimes had the matter in hand. Quelch hoped for news. But there had been no news. Where was Bunter? It was true that Billy Bunter, when he was present, did not make life brighter. He was, in fact, one of those pupils who cause a schoolmaster to wonder whether, after all, a schoolmaster's career is a mistake. But absent, he was more trouble than when he was present. Quelch was anxious. He was perturbed. And his temper was a little tart. And as the door opened, he frowned at the sight of Herbert Vernon-Smith.

'Vernon-Smith! What does this mean? You should be in class with Monsieur Charpentier.'

It was an angry snap.

'If you please, sir—'

'Return to your class-room immediately.'

'I thought you'd like to know that we've found Bunter, sir!' said the Bounder, meekly.

'WHAT!'

Mr. Quelch fairly jumped. A middle-aged school-master was not given to jumping. But Mr. Quelch jumped, at that, almost clear of the carpet.

'He's here, sir!' said Smithy. 'Come in, Bunter.'

A fat figure rolled in. Mr. Quelch gazed at it. He gazed at a fat face, adorned by a pair of big spectacles. Billy Bunter was not a thing of beauty. He was far from being a joy for ever. But he was, at that moment, the most welcome sight that could have met Mr. Quelch's eyes.

'Bunter!' gasped Mr. Quelch.

'Yes, sir!' squeaked Bunter.

'Bless my soul! It is Bunter! I am very glad to see you safely back, Bunter. Where have you been, Bunter?'

'I've been bunged in a bung, sir—'

'What? What? Vernon-Smith, explain this. Where and how did you find Bunter?'

'We found him in a bungalow, sir, the other side of Pegg. Some other fellows came with me, sir. They've gone into class now, sir, and perhaps you'll excuse us for cutting the French class, sir, as we've found Bunter,' said Vernon-Smith, in his meekest tone.

'What? What? Certainly. In the circumstances, certainly. Most certainly.'

'Thank you, sir. Bunter was locked up in the bungalow, but we got him out. He had been locked up there since he was kidnapped yesterday. Perhaps Captain Philpot can explain how

he was there, sir.'

'Captain Philpot?' repeated Mr. Quelch, quite blankly. 'It was his bungalow, sir.'

'Is it possible? Are you sure of this, Vernon-Smith?'

'Quite sure, sir.' Smithy's voice was quite silky. 'No doubt Captain Philpot can explain, sir, if you will ask him to step here.'

Mr. Quelch gave him a sharp look. Then he touched a bell. The study door opened on Trotter's chubby face.

'You rang, sir?'

'Yes, Trotter. Please find Captain Philpot immediately, and request him to step here. Lose no time.'

'Yes sir.'

Trotter - after a stare at Bunter - departed. Mr. Quelch stood silent, with a very disturbed expression on his face. Bunter had been found - locked in Captain Philpot's bungalow. Obviously that was a matter that required explaining without delay. Mr. Quelch hardly knew what to think, as he waited impatiently for the captain to come.

Vernon-Smith winked at Bunter - receiving a puzzled blink in response. Neither the fat Owl, nor the Remove master, had any suspicion of what was in the Bounder's mind. With cool, malicious amusement, Smithy waited to see what would be the effect of the sudden sight of Bunter, on the man he was convinced was the bank-raider whom the fat Owl had watched from the tree on Courtfield Common.

The door opened.

'Please step in, Captain Philpot,' said Mr. Quelch. 'A most extraordinary—'

He was interrupted.

Billy Bunter's little round eyes, and big round spectacles, were fixed, in a startled and terrified stare, on the fair-haired young man framed in the doorway. His eyes almost popped through his spectacles.

'Oh, crikey! It's him!' yelled Bunter.

'Bunter—!' gasped Mr. Quelch.

Billy Bunter made a bound, to get behind his form-master.

From that safe cover, he goggled at the man in the doorway.

'It's him! Keep him off! Oh, crikey! You keep him off, Smithy! Help!'

'Bunter!' almost shrieked Mr. Quelch.

'It's him - that bank-raider—'

'What?'

'That man who was a nigger - I mean who wasn't a nigger—'

Mr. Quelch, utterly astounded, stared at Bunter, and then at the man in the doorway.

Captain Philpot, staring at Bunter, stood quite still for some moments. Smithy looked on, with a malicious grin. The man stood, for some moments, as if petrified.

The 'bad hat' who had been sacked from Greyfriars, and who had taken to crooked ways since, had plenty of nerve. He was a cool and calculating rascal. But the sudden, unexpected sight of the fat schoolboy who was able to identify him as the bank-raider of Courtfield, and

whom he had believed to be safe under lock and key six or seven miles away, had taken him utterly aback. He stared at Billy Bunter, as if Bunter had been the ghost of a fat Owl.

Mr. Quelch, with a feeling as if his head was turning round, stared from one to the other.

'Bunter!' he gasped. 'Bunter! What do you mean - what does this mean? Captain Philpot, what is the meaning of this? What—what—?' Quelch was scarcely coherent.

'It's him!' howled Bunter. 'That man I saw - the black man - I mean he wasn't black at all - Keep him off! It's him!'

Billy Bunter was not likely to consider grammar, at such an excited moment. 'Him! I tell you it's him.'

'Captain Philpot—!' gasped Mr. Quelch. 'What - Bless my soul! Where are you going? Stop!'

For several moments, the man in the doorway had stood petrified. But he stirred suddenly.

Mr. Quelch stared at an empty doorway. Hurried footsteps sounded in the corridor, then died away. The game was up, for that Old Boy of Greyfriars, and he was going while the going was good!

BUNTER AS USUAL

'I SAY, you fellows.'

'Nothing doing, old fat man.'

'Oh, really, Cherry—'

'Try Smithy's study.'

'Oh, blow Smithy! Never mind Smithy,' said Billy Bunter. He rolled into No. 1 Study, shut the door after him, and, to the surprise of the five fellows in the study, plumped down a parcel on the table.

It was tea-time.

There had been exciting happenings that afternoon.

Those happenings were the talk of the school. It was likely to be a nine days' wonder at Greyfriars. Inspector Grimes had been there. A sooty suit-case had been extracted from a chimney. Harry Wharton and Co. could guess who had given the inspector a hint where to look for it. It was known that the banknotes raided from the bank in Courtfield had been found, stuffed in the pockets of a jacket in that suit-case. And it was known that Mr. Grimes was getting busy looking for an Old Boy whose visit to his old school had been, for a second time, suddenly cut short: and who had vanished from Greyfriars like a ghost at cock-crow - extremely unlikely ever to visit his old school again!

But, exciting as all these happenings were, they were not likely to cause Billy Bunter to forget a meal-time. First things came first, with Bunter.

As a matter of fact, the Famous Five were thinking of tea also. But, comparing notes in No. 1 Study, they discovered - not for the first time - that funds were short, a state of affairs not uncommon in junior studies. So it looked like the scramble in hall for the chums of the Remove - when Billy Bunter rolled into the study with his parcel.

'Lots!' said Bunter, blinking through his big spectacles at five surprised faces, 'I've brought my parcel here to whack out with you fellows. You got me out of a jam, didn't you? Well, I'm whacking out my parcel, see?'

'Corn in Egypt!' said Bob Cherry. 'Thanks, old fat man.'

'The thankfulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter.'

It was rather a surprise. It had never been very noticeable that gratitude was strongly developed in Billy Bunter. Apparently he was turning over a new leaf in that respect. And undoubtedly a bulky parcel of tuck was a welcome sight in a study temporarily 'stony'. Bunter's parcel could not have happened more opportunely. It came, as Bob remarked, like corn in Egypt, in one of the lean years.

Fat hands proceeded to unpack the parcel. Appreciative eyes watched all sorts of good things come to light. There was, as Bunter had declared, 'lots'. Seldom or never had Bunter had such a parcel from home.

'Pile in, you fellows,' said Bunter, cheerily. 'Lots to go round. You got me out of a jam. One good turn deserves another, what? That's why I've brought my parcel here, to whack out

with you chaps. Pile in.'

'Good man!' said Nugent. 'So we will - but why not ask Smithy to join up? It was really Smithy who got you out of that jam - we only helped.'

'Oh, never mind Smithy!' said Bunter, with his mouth full, 'just pile in. Try this ham! Have some of that pie? Help yourselves to the cake! And these dough-nuts are jolly good. Never mind Smithy. He ain't likely to butt in here - more likely to look in my study—'

'Eh!'

'What?'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo, here's Smithy.'

The study door opened, and Herbert Vernon-Smith looked in.

'Oh, crikey!' breathed Billy Bunter.

The Bounder glanced at the well-spread table, and laughed.

'You fellows seem to be doing yourselves pretty well,' he remarked. 'I was going to ask you to a spread in my study - I've had a parcel from home—'

'Oh!' ejaculated five fellows, in a breath.

'But you seem to be pretty well fixed. Another time,' said Smithy, and with a nod, he turned to depart.

'Hold on, Smithy!' exclaimed Harry Wharton. He gave a fat face a deeply suspicious look.

'Where's your parcel?'

'Eh! In my study. Reddy's unpacking it now—'

A call came along the passage. It was Redwing's voice.

'Smithy! Where's that parcel?'

'I left it on the table. Can't you see it?'

'It's not here.'

Billy Bunter jumped to his feet. He had scarcely started on that spread in No. 1 Study. Good things galore were under his fat little nose. But his fat hands no longer clutched at them.

Bunter was suddenly anxious to go!

'Bunter, you fat sweep—'

'Bunter, you podgy pirate—'

'Bunter, you bloated brigand—'

'I—I—I say, you fellows, I—I—I've got to see Quelch!' gasped Bunter. 'I—I forgot I'd got to see Quelch—I—I say, that ain't Smithy's parcel—I never saw it on his table when I looked into his study, and I never looked into his study - I haven't been near his study. If you think I brought it here because I thought Smithy might look in my study, I can jolly well say – Yarooooooh!'

Billy Bunter roared.

He had reason to roar. Five feet landing on tight trousers were enough to make any fellow roar. A roaring Owl bolted for the door, where Smithy landed one more as he dodged out, and Redwing yet another as he bolted down the passage. After which, there was a spread for seven in No. 1 Study - while Billy Bunter, at a distance, was expressing his feelings in a

series of breathless gasps: 'Yow! wow! wow! -' as if he would never leave off yowing and wowing.

The next book in	
	THE BILLY BUNTER SERIES
Will be	
	BIG CHIEF BUNTER