

'I WON'T COME!' HOWLED BUNTER

BIG CHIEF
BUNTER

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CHAPTER 1

INKY!

'YAROOOOOOH!'

It was a sudden, unexpected, and quite terrific yell.

It roused every echo in the Remove form-room at Greyfriars. It caused every fellow in the form to jump. It caused even Mr. Quelch to jump, almost clear of the floor. Mr. Quelch jumped, dropped his chalk, and spun round from the blackboard like a spinning-top.

Every eye turned on Billy Bunter.

Bunter had not intended to utter that yell. Nothing had been further from his thoughts. He uttered it involuntarily, because he was suddenly startled. A wet and clammy ink-ball, suddenly landing on a fellow's nose, might have startled any fellow. It startled Billy Bunter to such an extent that he shattered the silence of the form-room with that frantic yell.

Up to that moment all had been quiet on the Remove front.

Latin grammar was the order of the day. Quelch had been expounding the vagaries of irregular verbs to a more or less attentive form. Few fellows, probably, were really eager to hear more about the irregularities of Latin verbs: and it was probable, too, that many thoughts were wandering to the approaching holidays.

So it was quite a relief when Quelch ceased to expound orally, picked up his chalk, and proceeded to illustrate on the blackboard the mysteries of the verb 'fero'. The Remove relaxed.

And then, suddenly, it happened!

Authority had its back turned. The master's eye was off the class. Several fellows - Harry Wharton, Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent - noticed Tom Brown kneading an ink-ball under his desk, and guessed who was the intended target. Billy Bunter really had asked for it. Bunter had a weird gift of ventriloquism, and could make a dog growl at a fellow's heels, causing that fellow to jump. It had amused Bunter, in the quad that morning, to make Browney jump. Now Browney was going to make him jump in his turn.

He certainly succeeded.

The ink-ball whizzed, impinging suddenly and squashily on a fat little nose. Bunter not only jumped. He fairly bounded. And at the same time he let loose the startled yell that woke all the echoes.

'Yaroooooh! Oh, crikey! What's that? Ooooooh!' yelled Bunter.

Two fat hands clawed at an inky nose, streaking ink over a fat face.

'There's a picture for you!' murmured Bob Cherry.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Silence in the class.' Quelch's voice was both loud and deep. 'Bunter!'

'Oooogh! Woooogh! Groooogh!'

'Bunter, you absurd boy, what does this mean? Why have you inked your face in that ridiculous manner?' thundered Mr. Quelch.

'Oh, crikey! I-I haven't!' gasped Bunter. 'Something hit me on the nose-something all inky-urrrrrggh!'

'Oh!' Mr. Quelch realised that this was not an absurd prank on the part of the fattest member of his form. He had seen nothing, till Bunter's sudden yell had caused him to whirl round like a teetotum. But ink-balls, though strictly forbidden, were not quite unknown in junior form-rooms.

'Has some boy here thrown an ink-ball?'

Silence broken only by mumbles from Billy Bunter as he dabbed at ink, followed that question. Quelch's eyes, as sharp as gimlets, scanned the form. Every face that met his view assumed its most innocent expression—Tom Brown's as innocent as the rest. The gimlet-eyes failed to discern any sign of guilt.

Mr. Quelch compressed his lips hard.

Such an interruption of the lesson was intolerable. It was a waste of valuable time. If nobody else in the Remove form-room cared whether 'fero' in the present indicative became 'tuli' in the perfect tense, or whether it didn't, Quelch certainly did. He had been going on quite happily with 'tuli, tulisti, tulit', when Bunter's yell called a halt. Thunder gathered on Quelch's brow.

'The boy who threw that ink-ball will stand out before the form.'

Quelch's voice, never very musical, resembled the grinding of a saw, as he uttered that command.

Generally, in the Remove form-room, to hear was to obey. But on this occasion there was an exception. Nobody stood out before the form. Quelch had picked up the cane from his desk. It was well-known in the Remove that Quelch could whop! Tom Brown, by that time, perhaps repented him that he had yielded to the impulse to make Billy Bunter jump while the master's back was turned. But he had no desire whatever to bend over under that cane. He sat tight.

There was a pause: quite an awful pause.

Then Mr. Quelch glanced at the form-room clock. It indicated a quarter to eleven. Morning break was due in fifteen minutes.

'Very well!' said Mr. Quelch, at last. 'Very well!'

The form will not be dismissed for break this morning. We shall continue with Latin grammar until third school.'

'Oh!' gasped at least a dozen fellows, involuntarily.

Mr. Quelch picked up his chalk. Remove fellows exchanged dismayed glances. It was a fine morning, with a fresh breeze blowing in the sunny quad. Many fellows had been counting the minutes to break. Sitting it out in the form-room, to an accompaniment of irregular verbs, was a dismaying prospect. Morning break really was one of the necessities of life. The fellows who knew the culprit's identity gave Tom Brown significant glances.

But the New Zealand junior did not need them. There was only one thing to be done in the painful circumstances, and Browney was the fellow to do it. He rose in his place. 'If you please, sir-!' he said, meekly.

'Well?' rapped Mr. Quelch.

'It was I that buzzed the ink-ball at Bunter, sir.'

'Good old Browney!' murmured Bob Cherry.

The gimlet-eyes fixed on Tom Brown. He braced himself for what had to follow. But, somewhat unexpectedly, it did not follow. There was a pause—a long pause—and then, to the general relief and particularly to Tom Brown's, Mr. Quelch replaced the cane on his desk.

'Brown!' he rapped.

'Yes, sir.'

'You will take a hundred lines.'

'Oh! Yes, sir! Thank you, sir!' gasped Brown. The incident was closed!

'Bunter!' rapped Mr. Quelch.

'Oh, lor'! I'm all inky—'

'You will leave the form-room at once and wash your face, Bunter.'

'Oh, yes, sir! Certainly, sir!' answered Bunter, promptly. Even with an inky face, Billy Bunter was not especially keen on a wash: but he was undoubtedly glad to get out of the form-room, and leave 'fero' and 'tuli' to the other fellows. He fairly skipped out of his place.

But he paused for a moment on his way to the door, as he passed Tom Brown, to whisper 'Beast!'

'Bunter!' came a sharp rap.

'Oh! Yes, sir! I-I wasn't speaking to Brown, sir-I didn't call him a beast-!' gasped Bunter.

'You will take a hundred lines for untruthfulness, Bunter.'

'Oh, crikey!'

'Now leave the form-room this instant.'

Billy Bunter was glad, at least, to leave the form-room that instant! The door closed behind his fat figure. And for the next quarter of an hour the rest of the Remove suffered under irregular verbs, the only consolation being that time was too limited for Quelch to get on to the subjunctives.

CHAPTER 2

A ROLAND FOR AN OLIVER

'BEAST!'

Billy Bunter uttered that ejaculation, standing at the letter-rack and blinking through his big spectacles at the letters therein.

Bunter had been five minutes out of the form-room.

Less time than that had sufficed for his much-needed wash. Bunter often wasted time: but he seldom wasted it on soap and water. What other fellows described as a 'cat-lick' was generally good enough for William George Bunter. He had washed, but his fat face was still a little smudgy. He was thinking of more important things than soap and water. Letters were put in the rack for Greyfriars fellows to take when they came out in break. Being, luckily, out of the form-room, Bunter had a pre-view.

There was always a hope, if a faint one, that his long-expected postal-order might have arrived. A remittance from home might have consoled him somewhat for the ink-ball from Browney and the lines from Quelch. But once more the old folks at home seemed to have forgotten their hopeful son at Greyfriars. There was no letter for Bunter.

Having ascertained that fact, the Owl of the Remove proceeded to blink at the letters generally. Inquisitiveness was one of Bunter's besetting sins; and he had time on his hands, for he was in no hurry to return to the form-room and suffer under irregular verbs. It was always possible - for Bunter - to invent excuses for delay.

He noted that there was a letter for Harry Wharton, another for Johnny Bull, and one with an exotic stamp for Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Then his eyes and spectacles fell on one addressed to Tom Brown. It was then that he ejaculated 'Beast!'

Billy Bunter did not like ink-balls on his fat little nose.

Neither did he like lines from Quelch. His feelings towards the New Zealand junior, just then, were extremely inimical. Indeed, had it been a practicable proposition, he would have punched Browney's own nose when he came out in break. He gave that letter a glare.

It was addressed to Tom Brown in typing. Mr. Brown, at Taranaki in far-off New Zealand, was a quite affectionate parent, but an extremely busy man, a director of Island Air Lines with seldom a minute to spare. Even his letters to his son at Greyfriars were typed by his secretary, to hurried dictation at odd moments. A letter addressed in typescript, among two or three dozen others addressed by hand, was a little conspicuous, and Billy Bunter's spectacles could not fail to pick it out.

'Beast!' repeated Bunter.

He was aware, from talk among the juniors, that Browney was expecting a letter from home, about arrangements for the holidays. New Zealand was a far cry from Greyfriars, but air travel almost abolished distance and Tom was hopeful of a run home by air in the vacation. For two or three days he had scanned the letter-rack for a letter with a New Zealand post-mark, as keenly as Billy Bunter had scanned it for a postal-order from Bunter Villa. This, evidently, was the expected letter.

Bunter, having given it an inimical glare, blinked inquisitively at the other letters, and then turned away. But he still had time to kill, for he had no intention of returning to the form-room till dismissal was due. Then, as he idled about, an idea germinated in his fat brain, exemplifying the truth of the ancient proverb that there is always mischief for idle hands to do.

He turned back to the rack, and picked out the letter with the typed address. A fat grin overspread his face, almost from ear to ear, as he did so.

'He, he, he!' chuckled Bunter.

He slipped the letter into his pocket. Brown had ink-balled him. It was not a practical proposition to punch Brown's nose for that dire offence. But the fat Owl was very keen to give him a Roland for an Oliver. Keeping him waiting for that expected letter seemed, to Bunter, quite an amusing form of 'tit for tat'. Later - perhaps considerably later - he would slip that letter back into the rack for Tom to collect. In the meantime, Tom Brown could whistle for it, and be blowed to him! Serve him jolly well right for buzzing a clammy ink-ball at a fellow's nose!

The first stroke of eleven from the clock-tower warned Bunter that it was high time to show up in the Remove form-room. He rolled off in that direction and arrived as Mr. Quelch was dismissing the form.

A gimlet-eye transfixed him as he rolled in.

'Bunter! You have been absent a quarter of an hour.'

'Oh! Have I, sir? I'm so sorry-I-I couldn't find the soap, sir-'

'Indeed! I shall inquire of Mrs. Kebble why no soap was available, in that case, Bunter.'

'Oh, lor! I-I don't mean the soap, sir,' stuttered Hunter. 'I-I-I mean the-the towel, sir. There wasn't a towel on the soap-rail, sir-I-I mean there wasn't a soap on the towel-rail-I-I mean-'

'Bunter, you have been deliberately wasting time.'

'Oh, no, sir! I haven't been looking at the letters in the rack, sir, and there wasn't one for me after all, and-and-'

'That will do, Bunter. As you have wasted at least ten minutes, you will remain in the form-room for ten minutes during break-'

'Oh, crikey!'

'And make up for lost time by writing out the present, imperfect, and future tenses of the verb "fero", in the indicative and subjunctive moods-'

'Oh, jiminy!'

'The rest of the form will dismiss!' said Mr. Quelch.

A dismayed fat Owl rolled dismally to his desk. The rest of the Remove marched out, glad to have done with the irregularities of the verb 'fero'. Billy Bunter was left alone in the form-room, with a Latin grammar to keep him company-company that he did not enjoy in the very least. Dismally he proceeded to scrawl, with a due allowance of blots, 'fero, fers, fert, ferimus, fertis, ferunt', and so on to the bitter end. But there was still, so to speak, balm in Gilead. His scrawl finished, and left on Quelch's desk for subsequent inspection, the Owl of the Remove rolled out into the quad. There still remained five minutes of break: time for a dash to the tuck-shop, and the expenditure of half-a-crown he had borrowed that morning from Lord Mauleverer. In the quad he rolled past a group of juniors-Harry Wharton and Co. and Tom Brown. The New Zealand junior was speaking.

'Nothing for me this morning! I was sure it would be here to-day. But it hasn't come.'

'Anything special in it?' asked Bob Cherry.

'Well, yes, rather, as it's about the hols. You know, the pater runs an Air Line down under. Wouldn't it be topping if a fellow could get a run out to N.Z. in the hols, taking a few pals with him?'

'Topping!' agreed Bob.

'The topfulness would be terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I'd like you fellows to come, if it can be fixed up, if you'd care to-'

'No "if" about that,' said Johnny Bull.

'Not many fellows would say "no" to a trip like that!' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'Jolly good of you, Browney, and I hope it will come off. Sure you haven't overlooked a letter in the rack?'

'He, he, he!'

That amused cachination caused the juniors to look round, at the grinning face of Billy Bunter.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! What's the he-he-heing about, Bunter?' asked Bob.

'He, he, he! That's telling!' chuckled Bunter. And he rolled on, grinning.

It was an amused Owl that expended Lord Mauleverer's half-crown in the tuck-shop. Tom Brown, evidently, had scanned the rack for that letter from N.Z. He could go on scanning it as long as he liked: he was not likely to find a letter that was safely parked in a fat Owl's pocket. How long he was going to keep Browney on tenterhooks about that letter, Bunter had not decided: but for the present, at least, it was going to stay where it was, and the fellow who had buzzed an ink-ball at his fat little nose could whistle for it!

CHAPTER 3

WASH-OUT!

'I SAY, you fellows!'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'I say, Quelch has gone out!' said Billy Bunter, breathlessly.

'What about it?'

'Trotter, or somebody, has left a pail of water in the passage, quite near his study door. Forgotten to take it away.'

'Careless!' said Bob Cherry. 'But what the dickens does it matter to you, or to us, or to anybody?'

Harry Wharton and Co., after class, were sauntering in the quad, discussing the delightful possibility of an air-trip to New Zealand in the hols. So far, it was only a possibility: but a very attractive and interesting one. They were interested in that topic and not in the least in Billy Bunter, or in the circumstance that Quelch had gone out, and that Trotter or somebody, who had apparently been mopping in the passage, had carelessly left a pail of water uncollected near the Remove master's study. Why Bunter was interested was a mystery to them. But evidently he was! His fat face was full of excitement.

'Can't you see what a chance it is?' exclaimed Bunter.

'Chance of what?' asked Harry Wharton, blankly.

'Booby-trap for Quelch-!'

'What!' exclaimed all the Famous Five, together.

'Suppose one of you fellows nipped in, and shifted that pail to the top of Quelch's study door-!'

'Oh, suffering cats!' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'You howling ass!' said Johnny Bull. 'I can see one of us fellows doing it-I don't think.'

'The don't-thinkfulness is terrific!' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'It wouldn't take a couple of minutes,' urged Bunter. 'You could do it easily, Bob. You could reach the top of the door, with those clothes-props of legs of yours-I mean, because you're such a fine tall chap-'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Fancy Quelch!' chuckled Bunter. 'He finds his door ajar when he comes in, pushes it open, and then-"Whoooooosh! Down it comes on his nut! He, he, he!'

'And suppose he walked in while a fellow was fixing up that surprise for him?' asked Frank Nugent.

'That's all right! I heard him tell Prout he was going down to the Vicarage. That means chess with old Lambe. He won't be back for hours. Safe as houses.'

Billy Bunter, evidently, was full of that bright idea.

From the point of view of a fat and fatuous Owl, it was the chance of a lifetime: an opportunity not to be missed. But it failed to evoke any enthusiasm whatever on the part of the Famous Five. They had not the remotest desire to drench their form-master with a bucket of water: and still less to face the tremendous row that would certainly follow such an exploit.

'Forget it, fathead!' said Harry Wharton.

'You'll do it, won't you, Bob?'

'Not in these trousers.'

'What about you, Bull?'

'Fathead!' was Johnny Bull's reply.

'Don't be a silly ass, Bunter,' advised Frank Nugent. 'Quelch isn't a bad old bean. Look how he let Browney off this morning with lines, because he owned up to that ink-ball. Leave Quelch alone.'

'He jolly well kept me in, in break, writing out a rotten Latin verb!' hooted Bunter, indignantly. 'And he gave me a hundred lines, just because I called Brown a beast, though I told him I hadn't-'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You can cackle,' snapped Bunter. 'But I've got it in for Quelch, I can tell you. I've got a hundred lines to do-'

'Browney's got the same, and he's in his study doing them now,' said Harry Wharton. 'You'd better cut in and write your lines too. Much safer than fixing up booby-traps for a beak.'

'But I say, you fellows- I say, don't march off while a fellow's talking to you!' howled Bunter.

But the Famous Five did march off. Evidently they had no use for Billy Bunter and his bright ideas. They were going to let that chance of a lifetime pass them by like the idle wind which they regarded not. Billy Bunter had to realise that, if that bucket of water was going to be shifted to the top of Quelch's study door, the shifting had to be carried out by his own fat hands.

Billy Bunter was very, very keen on that bright idea.

But he was not so keen on carrying it out personally. Much, very much indeed, he would have preferred other hands to perform the operation. Nevertheless, it was, or at least seemed, as he had said, safe as houses. Quelch, deep in chess at the Vicarage, was safely off the scene for hours. Quelch would get the ducking when he came in, but how was he to know, or guess, who was the ducker? He just couldn't. Billy Bunter considered the matter from every angle, and at long last, made up his fat mind, and rolled into the House.

He blinked cautiously into Master's passage. Prout, Capper, and Hacker, he had seen out in the quad. If other beaks were in their studies, the doors were closed, and there was no eye to fall upon a cautious Owl. And that forgotten pail of water, carelessly left by whoever had been mopping, was still where the fat Owl had seen it. Nothing could have been safer and easier.

For once, the fat Owl moved swiftly. He whipped into the passage, picked up the pail with one hand, and opened Quelch's study door with the other. A moment more, and he was in the study, closing the door.

'He, he he!' chuckled Bunter, breathlessly.

All was plain sailing now. To fix up the booby-trap over the door, and then drop from the study window, was a matter of only minutes. It would have been easier work for Bob Cherry, who was a good many inches taller than Bunter. Billy Bunter's little fat legs certainly couldn't have stretched to the required extent. But standing on a chair made the thing quite simple-at least so far as planning went. Plans, it is true, do not always work out according to schedule.

Bunter lifted a chair close to the door. He placed the door ajar a few inches. Then he lifted the pail close to the chair, and mounted on the latter. All that remained was to lift the pail and lodge it on top of the door, resting against the lintel of the doorway. Thence, of course, it would topple over immediately the door was pushed open from outside, drenching the person who entered. It was really very simple-in fact, simplicity itself! Or might have been for anyone but William George Bunter.

He stooped and lifted the pail. Carefully, very carefully, he lifted it to the level of the door-top, to lodge it thereon. He had not the slightest intention of giving the door a push in doing so. He did it quite unintentionally and inadvertently. But-he did it!

The door closed.

The pail, left without any visible means of support, naturally tipped over-on Bunter.

Swoooooosh!

'Yaroooooh!'

A flood of water, intended for the majestic nut of Mr. Quelch, descended on the fattest head in the Greyfriars Remove. The pail crashed on the floor. Billy Bunter crashed after it.

'Oh! Oh, crikey! Oooooogh!' spluttered Bunter. He tottered to his feet. Water ran down his neck. It drenched his fat head, his collar, and his jacket. He blinked round him dizzily. 'Ooooh! Urrrrgh! Groooogh! Oh, crikey!' mumbled Bunter.

The pail lay on its side, empty. Its contents, excepting the amount that drenched the upper half of Billy Bunter, spread over the study floor. For the second time that day, Bunter had had an extra wash! And that booby-trap for Quelch was evidently a wash-out!

Not that Billy Bunter was thinking any longer of booby-trapping anybody. What Bunter needed chiefly was a towel: and he lost no time in rolling out of Quelch's study in search of one.

It was half-an-hour later that Trotter, having remembered that forgotten pail, came to collect it, and was surprised to find it upset inside Quelch's study. Trotter had some more mopping to do, before he departed with the pail. And an hour or so after that, Mr. Quelch came in, and sat down cheerfully at his typewriter for a happy hour with his 'History of Greyfriars', never even dreaming what a narrow escape his majestic nut had had! And in No. 7 Study in the Remove a fat Owl, still feeling a little damp, scribbled Latin lines, the most disgruntled fellow at Greyfriars or anywhere else.

CHAPTER 4

COALS OF FIRE

'BLOW!' growled Billy Bunter.

He paused in his scribbling to utter that ejaculation. Bunter was distinctly disgruntled.

As a rule Bunter was a good-tempered fellow, as plump people generally are. But the happenings of that day would have tried the serenest temper. First of all, Browney had ink-balled him in the form-room, simply because he had played a ventriloquial trick which, in Bunter's opinion, ought really to have amused Browney. Then Quelch had given him a hundred lines for untruthfulness, merely because he hadn't told the truth! Then he had been kept in, in break, writing out a beastly Latin verb. Then Harry Wharton and Co. had turned down his bright idea of giving Quelch a ducking, with the unexpected and disastrous result that Bunter had given himself that ducking. Now he had to sit in his study doing his lines: a slow and laborious task to a fellow who was almost too lazy to live. He was feeling rather like the Raven's unhappy master whom unmerciful disaster followed fast and followed faster!

There were some spots of consolation. Browney was still whistling for that expected letter from N.Z., and serve him jolly well right! And Bunter had found a packet of toffee in Vernon-Smith's study, and it was some comfort to chew Smithy's toffee while he scribbled his lines.

But the toffee was finished now, and the lines were not.

So the fat Owl paused in his labours to ejaculate 'Blow!' Then he counted the lines he had written. He had started at 'Arma virumque cano', and he had progressed as far as 'dare jussus habenas'. So thirty-seven lines yet remained to be transcribed.

'Blow!' repeated Bunter.

Then a heavy tread sounded in the Remove passage. It sounded as if the largest feet in the Remove were passing the study. Billy Bunter uttered a hurried squeak.

'I say, Bob! Is that you, Cherry? Come in a minute, will you, old chap?' The footsteps stopped at the door. It opened, and Bob Cherry's cheery, ruddy face looked in.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Anything happened?' asked Bob.

He stared at Bunter. The fat Owl was sitting at the table in his shirt-sleeves. His jacket, collar, and tie, were spread in the study window, to dry in the summer sun. Evidently, something had happened.

'Eh! Oh! Yes! I got wet,' said Bunter.

'The house dame would dry your things for you, fathead, if you asked her. Much better than sticking them there.'

'Well, she might want to know how I got them wet,' explained Bunter. 'I'd rather keep that dark.'

'Why the dickens-?'

'You see, it was in Quelch's study. That beastly pail of water tipped over on me when I was putting it up on the door-'

'Oh, my hat!'

'I was jolly well soaked-'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Think it's funny?' howled Bunter, indignantly. Evidently Bob Cherry did: for he roared. Billy Bunter gave him an indignant glare. There was nothing, so far as Bunter could see, of a comic nature, in that mishap in Quelch's study.

'Oh, do stop cackling!' hooted Bunter. 'Look here, you beast-I mean, look here, old chap, I've done only sixty-three out of my hundred-lend me a

hand with the other forty-nine, will you?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'If you can't do anything but cackle-'

'Your arithmetic would make a stone image cackle, old fat man. Sixty-three out of a hundred leaves thirty-seven, not forty-nine.'

'Does it?' said Bunter, doubtfully. 'Well, if it does that's not much between us, old chap. Look here, if it's thirty-seven, you do twenty and I'll do the other nineteen-'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

You're wasting time cackling-'

'Right on the wicket!' agreed Bob. 'I've come up for my bat-we're going down to the nets. Cheerio!'

'Oh, blow the nets! Blow cricket! Blow you! Go and eat coke!' yapped Bunter.

Bob Cherry turned to the doorway. But he turned back. He was not disposed to 'blow cricket', even for so important a matter as writing Bunter's lines for him. But he was always good-natured.

'Look here, you fat duffer, you might get a chill if you put on a damp jacket,' he said. 'I'll take it down with me and ask Mrs. Kebble to get it properly dried, without putting her wise how it got wet.'

He stepped across the study towards the window. Up jumped Billy Bunter in alarm. He remembered that there was a letter addressed to Tom Brown in the pocket of that jacket!

'Here, you leave that jacket alone!' he exclaimed. 'Don't you touch it.'

'Why not, you dithering ass?'

'Oh! Nothing! There isn't a letter in the pocket, or-or anything! But-but you jolly well leave it alone.'

'You fat, foozling, frabjous frump!' roared Bob. 'Do you think I'd look at another fellow's letter?'

'Eh! Yes! I mean, no. But you leave that jacket alone. If you ain't going to help me with my lines, you can jolly well get out of my study.'

'I'll get out fast enough,' hooted Bob. 'But I'll jolly well bang your silly head before I go.'

'Here-I say-I didn't mean-Wow! Yaroooooh!' roared Billy Bunter, as a sinewy hand grasped his fat neck, and his bullet head contacted the study table. 'Owl wow! Leggo! Whooooop!'

Bob Cherry, red with wrath, stalked out of the study, the door closing behind him with a bang. Billy Bunter was left rubbing his fat head.

'Ow! Beast! Wow!' mumbled Bunter.

Really, Billy Bunter hadn't suspected Bob of his own predilection for prying. But he certainly could not have risked that jacket passing through the hands of the house-dame, with the purloined letter in the pocket. And, having expended several minutes in rubbing his fat head, he did not immediately resume his lines. He rolled to the window, and picked up the jacket.

It was still much too damp for putting on. And so long as he was not wearing it, that purloined letter, obviously, would be much safer in his trousers' pocket. So he groped for it and drew it out.

'Oh, crikey!' he ejaculated, as he blinked at the envelope. A jacket could not be drenched in water without some, at least, penetrating the pockets. Some had evidently penetrated that pocket, for the envelope was damp, and the typed address on it smudged.

Billy Bunter blinked at it in dismay.

The obtuse fat Owl had fully intended to restore that letter to the rack, after keeping Browney on tenterhooks about it for a day or two, perhaps a few days, as a richly-deserved reprisal for the ink-ball. Nobody would know that it had been in his hands. Browney, when he found it, could only suppose that it had arrived later than expected. But now--!

Now, it leaped to the eye that it had been out of the letter-rack. It had been somewhere where there was wet about! In fact it was obvious that it had been in a wet pocket. And, Bunter remembered with trepidation, one fellow at least knew that his jacket had been soaked with water. If that letter was replaced in the rack in its present state, Browney would want to know who had meddled with it: and Bob Cherry would remember the wet jacket and Bunter's alarmed objection to other hands touching it.

'Oh, crikey!' repeated the dismayed Owl.

He forgot the thirty-seven lines of Virgil's deathless verse that remained to be transcribed. He stood turning that smudged envelope over in his fat hands, wondering what he could do with it now. Already he could almost feel a vengeful boot landing on his tight trousers.

Then he made another discovery. The damp had loosened the flap of the envelope. It came open as his fat fingers fumbled with it.

There was a folded letter inside. Billy Bunter blinked at it.

Inquisitive as a jackdaw as he was, even Billy Bunter had a limit: he would never have opened the letter himself. But now it was open in his hands. Sad to relate, the fat Owl had no scruple whatever about reading another fellow's letter if it came his way.

He gave a cautious blink at the door. He would not have liked either of his study-mates, Todd and Dutton, to come in just then. But on a fine sunny afternoon after class, nobody seemed to be coming up to the studies. Fat fingers drew the letter from the envelope, and unfolded it. The letter, like the envelope, was typed. It was only slightly damp, and the typing was all clear. It looked just like Quelch's typescript, which Bunter had often seen: the same size type, on a similar purple ribbon. Billy Bunter began to read, without reflecting for a moment what a young rascal he was.

But alas for Bunter's inquisitiveness. He had got no further than 'Dear Tom' when there was a step outside, and a bang at the door. Bunter gave a gasp of alarm. He had barely time to shove the letter into one trousers' pocket and the envelope into the other, when the door flew open. His hands were still in his trousers' pockets when Tom Brown looked in. Billy Bunter's little round eyes almost popped through his big round spectacles at Browney. The New Zealand junior was the very last fellow he wanted to see, at that moment.

'Done your lines?' asked Tom. Then, like Bob Cherry before him, he stared at Bunter's shirt-sleeves, and the damp jacket and collar at the window.

'What's up? Been taking a bath with your clobber on?'

'Oh! I-I got wet,' stammered Bunter. 'I say, you hook it. What are you barging into my study for, I'd like to know? I've got my lines to do.' Tom Brown laughed.

'I'll hook it if you like,' he answered. 'But I thought I'd lend you a hand with your lines, as it was partly my fault that you got them. I've done my own hundred. Like me to do a few?'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter.

Tom Brown's letter was in his trousers' pocket. He had been going to read it. And here was Browney, with a kind offer of the help that a lazy fat Owl so sorely needed! It was like heaping coals of fire upon his guilty head! At that moment, even William George Bunter had the grace to feel a little ashamed of himself.

'Oh!' he repeated. 'I-I say, there's thirty-seven to do-'

'I'll finish them for you.'

'Oh! mind you make your fist a bit like mine-you know Quelch-'

Tom Brown glanced at the scrawl on the study table, and grinned. It was easy work to produce a similar scrawl.

'Okay,' he said. 'Leave it to me.'

Billy Bunter was only too glad to leave it to him-and to leave him to it. That letter seemed almost to be burning a hole in his trousers' pocket. Indeed, he would have handed it over to Browney there and then, had it been possible to explain how it had come into his possession.

'Sorry about that ink-ball,' added Browney. 'But you shouldn't play your ventriloquial tricks on a fellow, you know. I'll finish your lines for you, anyhow, and I won't forget to drop a few blots, so Quelch won't know a thing. Leave it to me, old fat man.'

Tom Brown sat down in Bunter's chair, picked up Bunter's pen, and proceeded to scrawl in the Bunter manner: not unlike the trail of a spider that had crawled out of an inkpot. Billy Bunter blinked at the jacket and collar in the window: but they were still too damp for use: and there was no change nearer than the dormitory, which meant climbing a staircase, and the fat Owl loathed stairs. However, even climbing stairs was an improvement on writing Latin lines: and Billy Bunter rolled out of the study, leaving Tom Brown to carry on from 'dare jussus habenas' to 'Simois correpta sub undis'-the letter from New Zealand still in his trousers' pocket.

CHAPTER 5

NO LUCK FOR BUNTER

CLICK! click! click! click!

Billy Bunter heard that cheery sound, as he rolled past Mr. Quelch's study window.

It brought a frown to his fat brow.

Quelch, evidently, had come in, after his chess with Mr. Lambe, and was sitting at the typewriter in his study: no doubt adding another chapter to his 'History of Greyfriars': the constant companion of his leisure hours: enjoying life in his own way. Which he certainly would not have been doing, had Billy Bunter's booby-trap worked out according to plan. 'Beast!' murmured Bunter, as he rolled on.

However, he dismissed Quelch from mind. He had other matters to think about. That letter from New Zealand worried him. From the bottom of his fat heart he wished that he had left it in the rack that morning.

Replacing it there was no way out, since it was now obvious that it had passed through other hands. Billy Bunter was very anxious that it should never transpire that those hands were his own.

He rolled away to a bench under a shady elm, and disposed his fat limbs there at ease: to think it out, and to see what was in the letter.

Prying, naturally, came first-with Bunter. Billy Bunter had a conscience-but it was a very elastic one. It could, indeed, stretch to almost any extent. Undoubtedly it could stretch far enough to read Tom Brown's letter.

He drew it from his trousers' pocket, and blinked at it.

From talk he had heard among Tom and his friends, he could guess that it referred to the coming holidays, and a possible air-trip to the far South. Billy Bunter would have been very pleased to join in that air-trip, if it came off. He was, as so often happened, in an unsettled state about the hols. Smithy had asked two or three fellows to join him in an expensive holiday on the Continent: but those two or three did not include William George Bunter. The Famous Five were going off somewhere together: but had exhibited no desire whatever to make the five six. Mauleverer Towers was an attractive place: but Lord Mauleverer always somehow contrived to dodge a chat about the hols with Bunter. An air-trip to New Zealand, at the expense of Mr. Brown, would have suited Bunter admirably. But there was, he sadly realised, hardly a hope-even if the trip came off.

He was going to know, at any rate, whether the trip was coming off or not, since that letter had, by accident, come open. And his first blink at the clear typing of Mr. Brown's secretary revealed that it was!

Dear Tom,

All is settled now. I am making arrangements with my agent in London for the trip. He will communicate with you, and you will let him know how many seats to book for you and your school friends. Half-a-dozen if you like. I shall be very glad to see again the boys I met on my last visit to England. Very nice young fellows I thought them. Of course I remember their names-Harry Wharton, Nugent, Cherry, Hurree Jampot Bingham, and Bull. Please give them my regards, tell them that I shall be glad to see them all, and that I remember with pleasure that tea in No. 1 Study.

Your affectionate Father,

T. Brown.

Billy Bunter sat blinking at that letter, under the shady branches of the old elm. No wonder Tom Brown was eager about it, when it was expected to

contain such gorgeous news. A run home in the hols, over thousands of miles of land and sea, taking his friends with him-that did not often come any fellow's way. That letter, when it was produced, would certainly elate Tom Brown, and that elation would certainly be shared by the Famous Five. Billy Bunter would have been elated, too, had a sixth name been added to the list-that of W. G. Bunter.

And why shouldn't it have been? It was rather beastly of Mr. Brown to have forgotten Bunter, when he remembered much less attractive fellows like Wharton, Nugent, Cherry, Hurree Singh, and Bull. Bunter had met him, just as they had: but apparently he had not lingered in Mr. Brown's memory.

Only the term before, Mr. Brown had paid a flying visit to the old country, in connection with his air-line business: and busy man as he was, he had found time to run down to Greyfriars to see his son at the school. Naturally, Tom had introduced his friends, and there had been quite a royal spread in No. 1 Study, to entertain the genial gentleman from New Zealand to tea. Nobody had thought of including Billy Bunter in the party: but that cut no ice, for Bunter had thought of it for himself. Not that Bunter was interested in the distinguished visitor from a far land. Bunter was wholly and solely interested in the spread. Mr. Brown had reached an age when, though he certainly seemed to like the company of a bunch of cheery schoolboys, a schoolboy 'spread' probably had little appeal for him. But it had a tremendous appeal for Billy Bunter. Billy Bunter had butted in, in his happy way, cheerfully overlooking the trifling circumstance that he hadn't been requested so to do. The Famous Five had refrained from booting him out, in the presence of Brown's pater, which was as warm a welcome as Bunter really required.

What impression he might have made on the gentleman from N.Z., Bunter did not know, and did not care. He had, in fact, forgotten Mr. Brown's existence, till now, when talk of a possible holiday in New Zealand revived his recollection. But he certainly had met Mr. Brown, just as much as Harry Wharton and Co. had: and would gladly have met him again-on holiday in New Zealand. But Tom, evidently, had not mentioned him in his letters home: and Mr. Brown did not mention him in the letter at which the fat Owl was now blinking.

Billy Bunter re-read that letter. One sentence looked a little hopeful. 'Half-a-dozen if you like'. Was it possible that Browney might make it half-a-dozen, by adding William George Bunter?

Bunter knew, if nobody else did, what a charming fellow he was-the fellow to make any party a success. Brown hadn't thought of asking him, but it was quite easy-for Bunter!-to ask Brown. Now that he knew, for certain, that that gorgeous trip was coming off, he was going, at least, to try it on.

'Oh!' ejaculated Bunter, in sudden alarm, as a Remove fellow came along the path under the elms. It was the fellow he was thinking of-Tom Brown. In a second or less, that letter from N.Z. disappeared into Billy Bunter's pocket. Whatever chance there might be of joining the party for New Zealand, it would most assuredly have vanished, on the spot, had Browney spotted that letter in his fat hands.

Brown, evidently, had finished those lines. He did not glance at the fat junior on the bench, till a fat squeak apprised him that Bunter was there.

'I say, Browney, old chap, stop a minute,' squeaked Bunter. Tom Brown stopped.

'It's all right,' he said. 'I've done the lines, and I haven't forgotten to drop the blots.'

'Jolly decent of you to do them for me, old chap!' said Bunter. 'But you always were a jolly good sort. I've always admired you for it, old fellow.'

Browney stared at him.

'What's the soft sawder for?' he inquired. 'Oh, really, Browney-'

'Rats!' said Browney.

He walked on. Apparently he had no use for 'soft sawder' from a fat Owl. Billy Bunter very nearly ejaculated 'Beast!' But he repressed that impulse to tell Browney what he thought of him! He heaved up his extensive weight from the bench, and rolled on with Browney.

'I say, old chap, about the hols-' recommenced Bunter. 'You'll be going home to New Zealand-'

'I hope so,' said Tom. 'It's not settled yet, till I get a letter from home.'

'Oh! Yes! No! Of-of course,' stammered Bunter.

He realised that he had to be wary. It was hardly judicious to reveal that he knew more about Browney's holiday prospects, than Browney himself did. 'But I-I say, when-I mean if-if you get that trip, you'll be taking some pals with you.'

'Five fellows will be coming, if we get it fixed up. What about it?'

'Well, we've always been jolly good pals, haven't we?' said Bunter, with his most ingratiating blink.

Browney gave him a stare.

'Have we?' he asked. He seemed surprised to hear it.

'Oh, really, Browney-'

'Is that the lot?' asked Browney. He quickened his pace a little: just as if he didn't want Bunter's company. It often happened that fellows accelerated, when the Owl of the Remove favoured them with his fascinating society.

Again Billy Bunter had to repress the impulse to ejaculate 'Beast!' He accelerated to keep pace with the New Zealand junior.

'I say, lots of fellows have been asking me for the hols,' he said. 'But I'd turn them all down for a fellow I really like. I-I'll come with pleasure, old chap, if you say the word.'

Tom Brown laughed. He knew now what the 'soft sawder' had been turned on for! Bunter, as usual, was 'on the make'.

'I'd like to see New Zealand,' went on Bunter. 'I've heard that it's a wonderful country.'

'Quite!' agreed Browney.

'We had a trip in the South Seas, you know, a term or two ago,' continued Bunter. 'My pater fixed it up, and Wharton and his pals came. But I didn't really like it, because it turned out that there were cannibals about. I suppose there ain't any cannibals in New Zealand?'

'Not a lot!' grinned Tom Brown.

'Well, that's all right, then,' said Bunter. 'If we meet any natives, I could talk to them in their own lingo-I heard enough of it at Lolulo last time. They call it pidgin-English. I dare say you've heard it.'

'I dare say I have,' assented Tom Brown.

'We went by sea last time,' continued Bunter. 'But this is going to be an air-trip, isn't it? In a plane from start to finish?'

'Yes-if it comes off.'

'Oh! Yes! Of -course-if it comes off,' said Bunter. 'Of-of course, I-I don't know whether it's coming off or not. How could I? But-but when it comes off-I mean, if it comes off-I should be jolly glad to see your pater again, Browney. I-I suppose he remembers me?'

'Not that I know of.'

'Well. I met him, you know, when we had that spread in Wharton's study,' urged Bunter. 'You remember that?'

'I remember you barged in,' said Browney. 'I shouldn't wonder if the pater remembers you. He doesn't often see such a waist-line.' Again 'Beast!' trembled on Billy Bunter's lips. Again he repressed it. Browney's remarks could not be considered encouraging. But hope springs eternal in the human breast. If Billy Bunter could possibly pull off that magnificent holiday trip, Billy Bunter was going to pull it off. Mr. Thomas Brown had, for some reason, forgotten to include his name in the list of the schoolboys he had met, and would like to meet again. But that omission, annoying as it was, would be rectified, if Browney made it half-a-dozen instead of five-which, as the fat Owl knew from the letter in his trousers' pocket, Browney could do if he liked.

'Well, look here, old chap-' said Bunter. 'I've had a letter from that chap D'Arcy, at St. Jim's, asking me for the hols. He's so pressing that a chap hardly knows how to say "no." But-I'd turn him down like a shot, if you wanted me to come along on that plane to New Zealand.'

'That's a large size in "ifs",' said Tom Brown. 'Just say the word, old fellow-'

Tom Brown appeared to reflect. A pair of little round eyes watched his face hopefully, through a pair of big round spectacles. He spoke at last.

'There's only one word I can say to that!' he said.

'What's that?' asked Bunter.

'Rats!' said Browney.

'Eh?'

'Rats!'

Having uttered that unwelcome word, Tom Brown walked on. Billy Bunter did not roll with him further. That expressive word was enough to convince even Billy Bunter that there was nothing doing.

'Beast!' hooted Bunter. It came out at last!

Then the fat Owl rolled disconsolately back to his bench under the elm: a disgruntled Owl, and not at all sure now that he would ever let Browney have that letter from New Zealand at all.

CHAPTER 6

QUITE A BRAIN-WAVE!

'BLOW old Quelch!'

Mr. Quelch frowned.

Mr. Prout smiled faintly.

It was the following day, after class.

Billy Bunter had had a spot of bother in class with Quelch-as only too often he had. In the History lesson he had stated that the Spanish Armada came in 1066-very considerably ante-dating that event. Quelch seemed to expect even Bunter to know better than that.

Bunter's recollection of dates was vague: but he had a dim idea that there was a double number in that particular date, and he chanced it with 1066.

The unhappy result was that he had to write out, twenty times, the correct date: as if it mattered a bean whether the Armada came in 1066 or in 1588. Either date, or indeed any other date, would have satisfied Bunter. Unluckily, it was Quelch who had to be satisfied.

So it was quite natural that an aggrieved Owl should be expressing his opinion of Quelch, to two or three other Remove fellows, in the quad, after class. It was just ill-luck that he expressed it, quite unintentionally, in his form-master's hearing.

Quelch was taking a walk in the quad with Prout, master of the Fifth. Bunter, having his back to them, did not know that they were in the offing.

He was apprised of it by an unexpected deep voice behind him.

'BUNTER!'

'Oh, crikey!'

Billy Bunter blinked round in alarm. Skinner and Snoop and Stott, to whom he had been speaking, grinned. Bunter did not grin! The thunderous frown that met his view as he blinked round did not encourage grinning.

Both the masters had heard him. Prout was faintly amused. Quelch, only too evidently, was not. Far from it.

'Bunter! How dare you allude to your form-master in that impertinent and disrespectful manner?'

'I-I-I didn't!' gasped Bunter, 'I-I never said "Blow old Quelch", sir. You can ask Skinner, sir! He heard me.'

'Go to my study at once, Bunter, and wait there till I come in.'

'Oh,lor'!'

Mr. Quelch resumed his majestic amble with Prout.

Billy Bunter blinked after them with a devastating blink. Then, slowly and sadly, he rolled off to the House: to wait for Quelch in his study-with the dismalest anticipations of what was going to happen when Quelch came in.

The Fat Owl blinked round that study inimically, through his big spectacles. Gladly he would have emptied Quelch's inkpot into Quelch's armchair, for his form-master to sit in: or poured it over the papers on the table: or gummed the books, or given him any other Roland for his Oliver.

But he shook a fat head. Quelch would know at once that he had done it, and his last state would be worse than his first.

But his eyes, and his spectacles, lingered on a neat pile of typescript, beside the typewriter on the table.

Evidently, Quelch had been at that interminable 'History' of his, before he went out for a spot of fresh air in the quad.

Suppose a fellow upset the inkpot, by sheer accident of course, over that pile of typescript? What a jolt for Quelch!

For a few moments the fatuous fat Owl considered it.

But again he shook a fat head. Quelch wouldn't believe in that accident!

He had doubted Bunter's word before: and he would doubt it again.

Reluctantly, the disgruntled Owl realised that he had better not play any tricks while he waited in the study.

Quelch was, of course, a beast to keep a fellow waiting there. Goodness only knew how long he would be, walking and talking with old Prout-half-an-hour, very likely. But reprisals were too perilous. Billy Bunter gave a last inimical blink at the typescript, and turned away.

But that typescript reminded him of the letter in his trousers' pocket: the typescript was so similar. That letter from New Zealand might, in fact, have been typed on Quelch's machine in Quelch's study, so far as appearances went. That letter, after the lapse of more than twenty-four hours, was still in the fat Owl's possession. He had, in fact, more than half-forgotten it. Important as it was to Tom Brown, and to Harry Wharton and Co., it was quite unimportant to Billy Bunter, since there was no prospect whatever of including his own fat self in the party for New Zealand. However, Quelch's typescript reminded him of it now.

He drew the letter from his pocket, and blinked at it.

What he was going to do with that letter he hardly knew. A fellow who said 'Rats', when Bunter offered his delightful company on a holiday trip, deserved to lose that letter, and be left wondering why it didn't come. He was almost tempted to reduce it to fragments, and dispose of them at the bottom of Quelch's waste-paper basket, under the cram of discarded Form papers that almost filled it. But once more he shook a fat head. Even Billy Bunter's elastic conscience could not stretch quite so far as that.

And then, as he blinked at the letter, so similar in the typing to the typescript on Quelch's table, the Big Idea slowly germinated in his fat brain. He caught his breath. It was quite a brain-wave!

'Oh, crikey!' breathed Bunter.

His little round eyes glistened behind his big round spectacles as he thought it out.

Mr. Brown, in far-off Taranaki, seemed to have forgotten Bunter, though he had remembered the less attractive fellows in the tea-party on the occasion of his visit to Greyfriars. Why, Bunter did not know: for he must surely have noticed what a very pleasant and agreeable fellow Bunter was. Suppose that spot of forgetfulness on the part of Mr. Brown could be set right. To set it right, all that was needed was the addition of Bunter's name to those enumerated in Mr. Brown's letter. And, just as if Mr. Brown had really asked for that addition to be made, there was a blank space; exactly where it was required. One line contained only two words 'and Bull'. It was even possible that Mr. Brown had intended to add 'and Bunter', in that blank space but had somehow omitted to do so. To Bunter, at least, it seemed possible. Billy Bunter had a really wonderful faculty for believing what he wanted to believe.

'Oh, crikey!' repeated Bunter. He hesitated.

But it was said of old that he who hesitates is lost! The more he thought it over, the more attractive that idea seemed. His unsettled state about the 'hols' would be at an end. Smithy could keep his Continental holiday, and be blowed to him. Lord Mauleverer could keep Mauleverer Towers, and be blowed to him also. An air-trip to the South Seas far out-weighed anything that Smithy or Mauly had to offer. Bunter made up his fat mind. He flattened out the letter, which had become somewhat crumpled in his trousers' pocket, very carefully. Then, with equal care, he inserted it on the roller of Quelch's typewriter.

Billy Bunter was seldom careful in anything he did. But he realised that he had to be awfully careful now. Those added words had to look as if they had been typed with the rest. Slowly, carefully, sedulously, meticulously, he posed that letter on the roller, till he was quite, quite sure that it was exactly in place. Then, to make assurance doubly sure, he typed a full stop as a trial run. His sedulous and meticulous care had not been wasted. That full stop was precisely in line. The rest was easy. He had only to tap the keys. Then the two words 'and Bull' were followed by four others 'and of course Bunter'. There's plenty of room for them: they did not wholly fill the available space.

'He, he, he!'

Bunter chuckled breathlessly.

He turned the letter off the roller, and replaced it in his pocket. Tom Brown had to have that letter now, and the sooner he had it, the better. Bunter's only problem now was to get it to him, without risk of revealing that it had ever passed through his fat hands. Somehow or other he was going to solve that problem, and then all would be calm and bright. It was quite a cheerful Owl that waited for Quelch to come in, after that. He didn't care how long he waited, and hardly whether Quelch made it 'whops' or not. That opportunity, which Quelch had unconsciously given him of including himself in the holiday party for New Zealand, was worth even 'whops'.

Quite a long time elapsed before Quelch came in. No doubt the pleasant summer weather had tempted him to prolong his walk. Possibly he had forgotten that a fat member of his form was waiting in his study, for he gave a little start as he saw Bunter there.

'Oh!' said Mr. Quelch. 'Bunter!'

'Yes, sir!' mumbled Bunter.

Quelch glanced at a cane that lay near the typescript on his table. But he only glanced at it. To the fat Owl's great relief, he did not stretch out his hand to it. After so long a delay, he was not going to administer the 'whops' that that fat member of his form undoubtedly deserved. There was a pause, and then came a rap:

'You may go, Bunter.'

'Oh! Thank you, sir!' gasped Bunter.

He lost no time in going!

CHAPTER 7

BUNTER TOO

'TROT in!'

Five voices in unison gave that cheery welcome.

Prep was over in the Remove. Harry Wharton and Co. had gathered in No. 1 Study, and were agreeably engaged in disposing of a bag of dough-nuts, before going down to the Rag, when Tom Brown looked in. The New Zealand junior had a letter in his hand, and a puzzled frown on his brow.

'Just in time before they're all gone!' said Bob Cherry. 'Take a pew and have a dough-nut, old boy.'

'Anything up?' asked Harry Wharton.

'Well, yes, and no!' answered Tom. 'I can't make this out, but perhaps you fellows can. First of all, it's all right about that air-trip in the hols. That's fixed and settled.'

'Hurray!' from Bob.

'Topping!' said Nugent.

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

'But it's a bit of a puzzle,' said Tom. 'There was no letter in the rack for me to-day, and I thought that it still hadn't come. But-it had! Here it is.'

He held up the letter in his hand.

'Somebody forgot to put it in the rack?' asked Johnny Bull.

'No, that isn't it. It's been taken out of the envelope, and slipped into the Virgil in my study.'

'What!'

'Of course, I hadn't the faintest idea that it was there.

It just fell out when I opened the book for prep. You can guess that it made me jump when I saw it.'

'It jolly well would!' said Bob Cherry. 'Who the dickens can have been playing tricks with a fellow's letter?'

'It beats me,' said Tom. 'I suppose a fellow, in a hurry perhaps, might open the wrong letter by mistake, but why the dickens couldn't he hand it to me, if he did?-instead of sticking it in my Virgil for me to find in prep?'

'Might have thought you'd punch his head for opening it,' said Bob. 'It must have been a silly mistake-no fellow here would open another fellow's letter on purpose-even Bunter wouldn't.'

'Well, whoever he was, I'd rather like to punch his silly head, for keeping me waiting so long for the letter,' said Tom. 'But I've got it now, and that's the chief thing, and it's just what I hoped to get from the pater. But-there's a bit of a puzzle in the letter, too.'

'How come?'

'You fellows remember my pater dropping in last term?'

'Yes, rather. We had him to tea in this study,' said Harry.

'Do you remember that Bunter butted in?'

'Did he? I expect he did-Bunter wouldn't miss a spread, if he could wedge into it. Yes, I remember now that he barged in. What about it?'

Grunt, from Johnny Bull.

'Yes,' he said. 'And I remember that he wolfed everything he could lay his paws on. I saw your pater look at him two or three times. I expect he was wondering where the fat cormorant put it all.'

'Well, I didn't suppose for a moment that he would remember Bunter,' said Tom. 'I asked him, in my last letter home, if he remembered you fellows, because I'd like you to come along, if the air-trip came off. Of course I didn't mention Bunter, or think of him. But-'

'But what?' asked Bob.

'Well, it seems that he did remember Bunter, from this letter. Look at it.'

Tom Brown laid the letter on the study table. The Famous Five all read it together. One sentence made them stare.

'Or course I remember their names-Harry Wharton, Nugent, Cherry, Hurree Jampot Bingham, and Bull, and of course Bunter.'

There was nothing to indicate that the last four words in that sentence had been added on Mr. Quelch's typewriter. They passed muster with the rest.

'The pater's got your name a bit mixed, Inky,' said Tom. 'But he's got the rest all right. But-'

'Of course Bunter!' read out Bob Cherry. 'He seems to make a special point of Bunter, from that.'

'It beats me,' said Tom. 'I never thought that the pater noticed Bunter at all, unless he noticed that he was sticky all over. But it seems that he did, and that he would like him to join the party, as he mentions him specially. You fellows mind if I ask Bunter to join up?'

Harry Wharton laughed.

'It's your party, old man,' he said. 'You ask whom you like. But I don't see how you can help it, from the way your pater puts it in that letter.'

'Well, if you fellows think you could stand him-'

'My dear chap,' said Bob. 'We've stood him before, and we can stand him again. Your pater says that he will be glad to see him, and that settles it.'

'Well, if you all agree-'

'The agreefulness is terrific, my esteemed Browney.'

'Then I'd better ask him, and get it over,' said Tom.

'Of course, there's always a chance that he mayn't want to come.'

On that hopeful note, Tom Brown left No. 1 Study, to look for Billy Bunter.

He left the Famous Five very pleased, but considerably puzzled. That gorgeous trip over land and sea was coming off, and it was a delightful prospect. They had liked Mr. Brown, in his visit to Greyfriars: they liked Tom immensely: and undoubtedly they liked the idea of whirling over half the world in one of the air-liners of the Island Air Line. But they could not help being puzzled.

Mr. Brown had been very cordial to his son's friends at school, so it was not surprising that he gave them a welcome to Tom's home, in the holidays. But Bunter was a puzzle. The gentleman from New Zealand had spent an afternoon at Greyfriars, during which he had had several hours of their company, but Billy Bunter had not been in the least interested in walking the visitor round the school, watching a cricket-match, or any other activity of that afternoon. Bunter had been solely interested in the tea in the study, and it was only at tea that Mr. Brown had seen him at all. And really, Bunter 'wolfing' the foodstuffs at a spread was not calculated to make a very favourable impression on any visitor. Yet it seemed, from that letter, that Mr. Brown remembered him specially, and definitely expected to see him in the holiday party.

So they were puzzled. However, they were more pleased than puzzled.

Bunter or no Bunter, it was going to be great!

Tom Brown, quite as puzzled as his friends, but never even dreaming that Bunter's name had been added to the list by an artful fat hand, went down to the Rag, where he found the fat Owl. Billy Bunter was sprawling in an armchair, busy with bullseyes. But he was not too busy to give the New Zealand junior a stealthy blink as he came in. By that time, Bunter had no doubt, Tom must have found the letter that he had artfully slipped into the Virgil in his study. What he would think about it when he found it there, Billy Bunter did not know or care-so long as he did not think

of William George Bunter as the person who had surreptitiously handled it.

He felt a twinge of uneasiness as Tom came over to him.

But he was relieved the next moment. 'Oh, here you are!' said Tom.

'Here I am,' agreed Bunter. 'I say, have a bullseye!' There were several bulls eyes remaining, in a sticky fat hand. They did not look enticing.

'Thanks, no,' said Tom. 'I say, I've heard from my pater now, and the trip home is coming off. He says that I can take half-a-dozen fellows if I like, and he mentions you. Like to come?'

Billy Bunter assumed a thoughtful air. This was exactly what he had hoped, and expected, to hear. Evidently, that wily trick on Quelch's typewriter had worked the oracle. But the fatuous fat Owl was not going to jump at it-now that he was sure of it.

'Well,' he said, as if considering the matter carefully. 'I'd like to come, Browney, but it's a jolly long trip, and I should have to wash out a lot of other things. That chap D'Arcy at St. Jim's is rather keen for me to give him a week or two in the hols, and there's a chap at Carcroft, too, that I should have to let down. Still, I think I could fix it up.' He nodded a fat head. 'Yes, I'll come, Browney. It's a go.'

'Okay, then,' said Tom.

He left Billy Bunter grinning as he munched bullseyes.

It was the happiest landing the fat Owl had ever made for the hols.

Though if Billy Bunter could possibly have foreseen all that was to happen on that trip across the globe, it was highly probable that he would have wished, from the bottom of his fat heart, that he had left Quelch's typewriter alone, and headed for Bunter Villa instead of New Zealand when Greyfriars broke up for the holidays.

CHAPTER 8

A SPOT OF VENTRILOQUISM

TAP! Tap! Tap! Tap!

'He, he, he!'

Billy Bunter chuckled.

Four taps, on Mr. Quelch's typewriter, produced a word of four letters, which had never been tapped out on Quelch's machine before. The word was 'RATS'!

It was not, of course, Quelch who was typing. It was breaking-up day at Greyfriars, and Quelch was far too busy even to remember his 'History of Greyfriars'. It was Billy Bunter's fat finger that tapped.

Where Quelch was, and how he was occupied, Bunter did not know. He knew that he was not in his study, and that was enough for Bunter. Other fellows were thinking chiefly of packing, saying good-byes, catching trains, and prospects for the holidays. Billy Bunter found time to think of something else: that very unusual and impertinent valediction before he left. And there he was, standing at Quelch's typewriter, tapping it out for Quelch to see when everybody was gone. He had put a fresh sheet on the roller, pressed down the shift-key, and tapped it out in capital letters, 'RATS'! It amused Bunter highly to think of the look that would come over Quelch's face, when he found it there. He chuckled.

But his fat chuckle suddenly died away, as there was a step at the door, and a hand touched the door-handle from without.

He jumped.

If it was Quelch-!

He had no time to think. He had barely time to duck under the table before the door opened. Was it Quelch? Alas, it was! He heard the well-known voice:

'Who is here? Bless my soul, there is no one here!' Quelch, standing just inside the doorway, was staring blankly round the study. 'This is extraordinary! I am certain-I was certain-that I heard the typewriter. Yet no one is here.'

Billy Bunter fairly cringed with apprehension, under the table. It had not occurred to his fat brain that the clicking of the machine could be heard outside the room, and that Quelch, if he was anywhere in the offing, would hear it-in which case he would undoubtedly look in to discover who was using his machine without leave. Gladly, very gladly, would Bunter have obliterated that impertinent valediction, had it been possible. Quelch was going to see it, now-with Bunter hardly a yard from him, huddled under the table. It was an awful moment!

Mr. Quelch came across to the table. He stared at the typewriter. He was certain, or as good as certain, that he had heard it click. Obviously it couldn't have clicked of its own volition. Yet the study was-or seemed-vacant. Had his ears, which were as keen as his gimlet-eyes, for once deceived him?

The next moment he knew that they hadn't. He had left the cover on the machine. The cover was off now. He had left the roller bare: now there was a sheet of paper on it. And on that paper was typed a single word in capital letters that leaped to his eye.

'Rats!' breathed Mr. Quelch. 'Upon my word!

Some impertinent boy-but where is he? He was here-he must have been here-a moment ago!'

'Oh, crikey!' breathed Billy Bunter, inaudibly. He dared not make a sound. But he had to realise that the game was up. If Quelch guessed-and how could he fail to guess-that that impertinent boy was still in the

study, he would look for him-and one glance under the table would reveal a fat Owl huddled there!

Then Billy Bunter had a sudden brain-wave. His fat brain did not often function quickly: but imminent peril spurred him now. He remembered his ventriloquism. If he could divert Quelch's attention long enough in another direction, to give him a chance of creeping to the door and dodging out of the study- Could he?

'Bless my soul!' He heard Quelch's voice again. 'The boy is here-he must be here-keeping out of sight! Where-'

Quelch was looking round the room again. Evidently, there was no time for the Greyfriars ventriloquist to lose.

'Elp!'

Mr. Quelch gave a sudden start. That word came distinctly to his ears, and-unless those keen ears deceived him-it came from the direction of the fireplace. He turned from the table and stared at the fireplace.

'Elp!' came faintly again.

'Bless my soul!' gasped Mr. Quelch. He strode across to the fireplace. He bent his head and stared up the wide chimney.

'Elp!' came again, apparently from the chimney. Aspirates were a difficulty in ventriloquism. Bunter had to make it 'Elp!' But it was plainly-to Quelch's, ears-a call for help from the interior of the chimney. It was a wide, old-fashioned chimney, with plenty of room for a climber, if any fellow had been disposed to clamber up and disturb ancient soot. Was that where the intruder in the study had taken cover? Quelch could conclude nothing else. An intruder in the study had dodged out of sight-and a voice was heard from the chimney! Quelch jumped to the conclusion to which the artful fat Owl hoped that he would jump.

Bending under the chimney, he twisted his head to stare up into its murky interior. The call for help indicated-to Quelch-that the delinquent had jammed himself in his sooty refuge, where it narrowed further up, and was in need of assistance. Quelch was prepared to render that assistance, and to deal with that delinquent faithfully when he had hauled him down.

A pair of little round eyes, through a pair of big round spectacles, watched him from under the table. His back was turned. It was Bunter's chance.

Silently, but swiftly, the fat Owl crept out from under the table, in the direction of the door.

He needed hardly a minute to reach the doorway. If Quelch did not look round, in that brief space of time-

Unluckily, Quelch did!

Staring up the chimney revealed nothing there but sooty brickwork. It was amazing. But there it was: there was nobody up the chimney! The gimlet-eyes stared up for almost a minute-but not quite! A few more seconds would have saved Bunter. But those few seconds were not granted him. Quelch, quite perplexed, rose to his feet, and looked round the study again. He gave a startled jump, as his eyes fell upon a fat figure, on its hands and knees, crawling to the door.

'BUNTER!'

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter.

'Bunter! Stop! Stand up at once! What are you doing here, Bunter?'

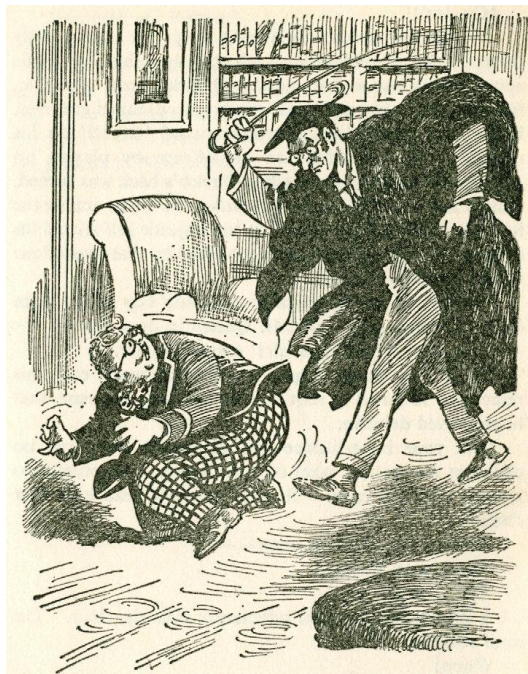
'Oh! Nothing, sir!' gasped Bunter. He scrambled up, blinking at his form-master in terrified dismay. 'It wasn't me, sir-I-I-I never touched the tripe-writer-I mean the typewriter-I-I-I only came in to say good-bye. sir-j-j-just to say good-bye, sir- C-can I go now, sir?'

'You may not, Bunter.'

'Oh,lor!'

Mr. Quelch picked up a cane from his table. Billy Bunter watched that action with dire apprehension. His apprehension was well-founded.

Quelch's brow was grim. Rhadamanthus himself could scarcely have looked grimmer. Bunter had typed that impertinent word 'RATS' on his machine. He had added to his offence by playing an impertinent trick to escape while Quelch's back was turned. Quelch had heard of Bunter's ventriloquial tricks among the juniors. Such a trick played on his majestic self stirred his deepest ire. He was no longer mystified by that mysterious voice from the chimney.



'OH, CRIKEY!' GASPED BUNTER

'Bunter! I am reluctant to cane any boy of my form on breaking-up day,' said Mr. Quelch in deep tones.

'Yes, sir! Thank you, sir!' gasped Bunter.

But if Billy Bunter hoped that Quelch would carry his reluctance so far as to refrain from handling the cane, that hope proved delusive.

'But your impertinence and disrespect leave me no choice in the matter,' went on Mr. Quelch. He pointed to a chair with the cane. 'Bunter, you will bend over that chair.'

'I-I-I say, sir, I-I never-'

'Bend over, Bunter.'

'Oh, crikey!'

A dismal fat Owl bent reluctantly over the chair. The cane swished.

Whop!

'Wow!'

Whop!

'Ow! wow! wow!'

Whop!

'Yaroooooh!'

Mr. Quelch laid down the cane. 'You may go, Bunter.'

'Ow! wow! wow! wow! wow!'

Sounds of woe floated back as Billy Bunter wriggled down the corridor—a sadder if not a wiser Bunter! He was still wriggling as he sat in the school bus on his way to the station—uncomforted even by the glorious prospect of the holiday in New Zealand.

CHAPTER 9

SPOT BARRED

'I SAY, you fellows!'

'Hallo! hallo! hallo! Enjoying life, old fat man?' Grunt, from Billy Bunter. Apparently he was not wholly enjoying life. His fat brow was wrinkled in a frown over his spectacles.

The other fellows certainly were enjoying every minute of it. There were sixty or so passengers on the air-liner. Six of them looked as bright as the summer sunshine that gleamed down on the plane. Tom Brown was looking forward to home for the holidays. Harry Wharton and Co. were looking forward to seeing the wonderful sights of the Twin Islands, and in the meantime getting glimpses of strange land after strange land, as the air-liner soared on its long journey half round the world, by sunny days and starry nights. Life seemed very good indeed to the chums of the Remove. They had quite pleasant recollections of a former trip to the South Seas. On that occasion an air-liner had taken them as far as Singapore, and they had gone on by sea to Lolulo. They liked to remember the coral beaches, the nodding palm trees, the cheerful brown faces of the Kanakas, and the queer 'pidgin-English' in which they spoke. There had been spots of bother on that trip, no doubt, which lingered in Billy Bunter's fat memory. But this time the whole journey was to be made by plane, landing finally at Auckland in the North Island of New Zealand: so this time the fat Owl was comforted by the assurance that there could be no peril to his fat and important person. A trip from airport to airport had no alarms even for Bunter. And as the food on the liner was both ample and good, there really seemed no reason for the fat Owl's plump brow to be corrugated in a frown.

Something, however, had evidently come between the wind and his nobility, so to speak. Bunter was peeved.

'Anything the matter, Bunter?' asked Harry Wharton. 'Why not take a bird's eye view of Arabia? That's Arabia underneath us now.'

'Blow Arabia!' was Billy Bunter's reply to that. Mountains and plains, cities and deserts, did not seem to interest Bunter. They passed him by, unheeded by either his eyes or his spectacles.

'Well what's the trouble?' asked Bob Cherry. 'Packed in too much at lunch? You always do over-do it, you know.'

'Wasn't that eleventh helping a mistake?' asked Frank Nugent.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'That steward's cheeky!' said Bunter.

'Eh!'

'What?'

'I heard him say that he wondered where I packed it all!' At which six faces expanded in a general grin. It was really not very surprising that such a remark had been made. Billy Bunter's exploits at mealtimes could scarcely fad to attract notice anywhere. But that remark evidently had offended the fat Owl. Billy Bunter's inquisitive fat ears often caught remarks not intended for them. This time he had caught one that did not please him at all.

'It's not much I eat, as you fellows know-' went on Bunter.

'Oh, crumbs!'

'Help!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You can cackle,' yapped Bunter. 'But I can tell you I'm going to make that cheeky waiter sorry for himself. You just wait till he comes along with his tray.'

'Don't be an ass, Bunter,' said Harry. 'The man can't have meant you to hear him! Besides, everybody wonders where you pack it all.'

'The wonderfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bunter,' remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'You just wait!' snapped Bunter. 'I'll make him hop!'

'But what's the big idea?' asked Bob. 'Are you going to kai-kai him, like a cannibal islander, or strew the churchyard with his hungry bones?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Wait till he comes along with his tray full of glasses,' said Bunter, darkly. 'Perhaps he'll jump, when he hears a dog growl under his feet, and let the lot go crash! He, he, he!'

'There isn't a dog on the plane, that I know of,' said Johnny Bull, staring at the fat junior.

'He, he, he! I know there isn't! Perhaps you fellows have forgotten that I'm a ventriloquist. Perhaps you've forgotten how you jumped when I made a dog growl under your feet at Greyfriars, Browney.'

'You fat ass!' said Tom Brown. 'I haven't-and I haven't forgotten that I gave you an ink-ball on your silly nose for it.'

'Well, you can't give me an ink-ball here,' jeered Bunter. 'You just wait, and see that waiter jump and drop his tray. He, he, he!'

Billy Bunter chuckled a fat chuckle. That steward had, in Bunter's opinion, been cheeky. Certainly, he couldn't have been the only person on the air-liner who wondered where Bunter packed it all. But he had made the cheeky remark: and Bunter was going to make him sorry for himself. It was quite amusing-to Bunter-to contemplate a startled steward jumping, and letting go a tray loaded with glasses. He could have the task of collecting up the ruins afterwards, and serve him jolly well right! And Bunter's fat head would be in no danger of the smack it deserved, for how was the man to guess that there was a ventriloquist on board the air-liner? But if Billy Bunter was amused at the prospect, the other fellows were not.

'Look here, Bunter, don't play the goat!' said Harry. 'Keep your potty ventriloquism to yourself.'

'I'll watch it!' said Bunter. 'You just wait, and see him jump! Just wait till I give him a spot of ventriloquism.'

'Spots of ventriloquism are barred!' said Bob Cherry. 'You can't play your monkey-tricks here, Bunter.'

'Can't I?' jeered Bunter. He seemed to think that he could!

'You fat chump-!' said Tom Brown.

'Is that what you call manners, to a fellow you've asked on this trip?' queried Bunter. 'That isn't the way we speak to guests at Bunter Court, I can tell you.' Perhaps it had escaped Billy Bunter's memory by what very peculiar methods he had been 'asked' on that trip!

Tom Brown breathed rather hard: but he made no rejoinder. He only wondered, as he had wondered a good many times, what could have made Mr. Brown include William George Bunter in his list of the Greyfriars fellows he was looking forward to meeting again. He was not likely to guess how it had come about!

Billy Bunter blinked round through his big spectacles.

At any moment that steward might appear, with his tray of light refreshments for the passengers. The Greyfriars' ventriloquist was ready for him when he appeared. There was going to be a spot of ventriloquism, a startled steward jumping at a sudden growl under his feet, and a terrific crash of tray and glasses.

The Famous Five exchanged glances.

Billy Bunter was anticipating that crash with glee. The chums of the Remove were not. Bob Cherry winked at his chums, and moved to get behind Bunter's seat. Billy Bunter was sporting a Panama hat. The other fellows

grinned. They realised that it was not the steward's tray that would be in danger when the man came along. It was Bunter's hat that was in danger.

'I say, you fellows, what are you grinning at?' inquired Bunter. 'If you think I'm not going to make that cheeky sweep jump, you're jolly well mistaken. You just wait till he comes along.'

'Here he comes!' said Nugent.

The steward appeared with his tray. Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles fixed on him. He gave a fat little cough-his usual preliminary to a spot of ventriloquism. That spot was scheduled to follow.

But it did not follow. Smack!

A heavy hand descended on Bunter's hat. Bob Cherry put plenty of beef into that smack. It smashed Bunter's hat down over his fat ears and over his big spectacles and his fat features. What was heard next was not the ventriloquial growl of a dog. It was a wild and frantic yell from Billy Bunter.

'Yarooooooh!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Ow! Oooogh! Oh, crikey! What's that? Something's fallen on my head!

Yaroooooh! Is the plane breaking up? Oh, crikey! Help!' roared Bunter, as he struggled with his hat! 'Help! Gimme a parachute! Ooooooh.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The steward, quite unaware of a narrow escape, stared.

Everybody else stared. Bunter, so to speak, had the house!

He got the hat off, and blinked round like a scared Owl.

Laughing faces met his view. He realised that it was not a case of the plane breaking up in mid-air, and that there was no need of a parachute.

'I-I say, you fellows, what was that?' gasped Bunter.

'Something hit me on the head-'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'What was it?' howled Bunter.

'Only my fist!' explained Bob Cherry. 'Didn't I tell you that spots of ventriloquism were barred. Look out for another of the same next time you feel like ventriloquising. More where that came from.'

'Beast!' howled Bunter.

It was an infuriated and indignant Owl. But there were no more spots of ventriloquism.

CHAPTER 10

FORCED LANDING

'Is that New Zealand?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Is it New Zealand or isn't it?' yapped Billy Bunter.

'Not quite, old fat man,' said Bob Cherry. 'We're still about six or seven hundred miles from N.Z. You'll have time to finish that cake before we hit Auckland.'

Only Billy Bunter could have fancied that the spot of land visible from the plane was New Zealand. But Billy Bunter's geographical knowledge was somewhat vague. Certainly the air-liner was heading for Auckland, in the North Island, non-stop from Sydney. But even non-stop flights sometimes experience unexpected stoppages, and apparently one was now about to occur.

Harry Wharton and Co. were far from Greyfriars now. An air-flight across half the globe-Europe, North Africa, India, the East Indian Islands, Australia-was tremendously exciting to the Famous Five, and hardly less so to Tom Brown, though he had made the trip before. Billy Bunter was not so much impressed.

Billy Bunter's chief concern had been about the food supply. He had found it good and ample, so all was well. It was a maxim with Bunter that if the grub was all right, everything was all right. So, the grub being all right, and Bunter being at a safe distance from Quelch and lessons, it was a satisfied Owl. Ample meals, and a few extra meals between meals, and slumbers undisturbed by a rising-bell, interested William George Bunter much more than strange lands and rolling seas. On this particular day, breakfast at Sydney had not impaired his appetite for lunch on the liner, and he had lunched, as usual, not wisely but too well. After which he had, naturally, gone to sleep in his seat, and the snore that had been wont to wake the echoes of the Remove dormitory at Greyfriars mingled, more or less harmoniously, with the hum of the engines. From a happy dream of a spread in Lord Mauleverer's study, he woke to find his fellow-travellers intent at the windows, and a blink from his spectacles discerned a cluster of palms waving in the breeze in an illimitable sea. The loud-speaker, unheard by the slumbering Owl, had announced that the plane was touching down for a brief stop, and that there was no cause for alarm. Nobody was alarmed: but everybody was more or less interested in the little island that lay ahead: more or less half-way on the run from Sydney to Auckland. Some were aware that the plane had turned off its course to head for that island. Obviously there was a spot of trouble somewhere, but not of a serious nature.

There was half a cake, unfinished by the fat Owl when his eyes closed behind his spectacles, on Bunter's fat knee. He now proceeded to finish it. Having done so, to the last crumb and the last plum, he gave another blink at the cluster of palms, now nearer and clearer. The plane was losing height.

'I say, you fellows, sure that ain't New Zealand?' inquired Bunter.

'It isn't New Zealand, or New Guinea, or New York, or New Anything,' assured Bob Cherry. 'It's just a Pacific island. There's about a million of them, more or less, sprinkled about the Pacific. That's just one.'

'Looks to me as if the pilot is heading for it,' said Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Everyone on board the liner, excepting Billy Bunter, was aware that the pilot was heading for that island. Bunter was just becoming aware of it.'

'You can cackle!' snorted Bunter. 'But if it isn't New Zealand, what are we stopping there for?'

'Spot of engine trouble,' said Harry Wharton.

'Oh, crikey!' Billy Bunter jumped up, with quite unusual activity. 'I say, is it an accident? What's up? I say, the sea's ever so much nearer. We're going down! We're falling! I say, you fellows, I wish I hadn't come! I say-'

'Fathead!' 'Ass!'

'Pack it up!'

'Put a sock in it.'

Billy Bunter's alarm met with absolutely no sympathy from his fellow-voyagers. Other passengers stared at him as he squeaked, and grinned.

Johnny Bull grasped a fat shoulder, and plumped him back into his seat.

'Shut up!' growled Johnny. 'There's no danger, you dithering ass: and if there was, what would be the good of squeaking?'

'Beast!'

'It's all right, Bunter,' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'There's a hitch somewhere, and they have to land the plane to put it right. If you hadn't been snoring like a grampus, you'd have heard the loud-speaker telling us so.'

'Oh! Sure it's all right?'

'Quite, fathead.'

'The all-rightfulness is terrific, my esteemed funky Bunter.' Billy Bunter, not wholly reassured, gave another anxious blink outward.

'We're going down!' he declared. 'The sea looks as if it's coming up! That jolly well means that we're going down.'

'What a brain!' said Bob Cherry, admiringly. 'Bunter knows how to put two and two together. That's better than the arithmetic you hand out to Quelch, Bunter.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Look here, you beast, if we're falling-'

'You see, we have to go down, to land on that island,' explained Bob. 'It won't come up to us. It's a fixture.'

'Beast!'

Even Billy Bunter's fat brain could assimilate the fact that a plane had to go down to make a landing. But a forced landing had no attraction for him whatever. His fat face was uneasy. There had been no forced landings all the way from London to Sydney. Every landing on that long trip had been according to schedule, at the scheduled air-ports. Obviously there was no air-port on that little island with its waving palms. There were wide stretches of glistening beach, and the pilot was now circling, evidently with a keen eye open for a favourable spot. Billy Bunter preferred a normal landing on the tarmac. He blinked at that island very uneasily.

'I wish we hadn't changed planes at Sydney!' he grunted. 'This is one of your pater's planes, isn't it, Browney?'

'Yes! The pater runs the Island Air Line, between Sydney and Auckland,' answered Tom Brown. 'Well, I don't think much of it,' said Bunter.

'Thanks!' said Tom, drily.

'Isn't Bunter a nice chap to take on a holiday trip, you fellows?' said Bob. 'How they must love him at home. And how nice it would be if they had him there now.'

'Yah!' was Bunter's elegant rejoinder to that.

'It's a bit of luck, really,' said Bob. 'If there's a spot of delay, we've got a chance for a ramble on a South-Sea island, and seeing the Kanakas on their native heath. Might get a swim, if we have to stop long, or a run in a canoe.' Bob, as usual, looked on the cheerful side of things.

'I say, you fellows, I don't like the look of this!' mumbled Bunter.

'We're getting lower and lower, and I can't see any landing-place.'

'That's because there isn't one!' explained Bob. 'Even with your specs, old fat man, you can't expect to see what isn't there.'

'It's all right, Bunter,' said Tom Brown, reassuringly. 'The pilot knows his job, and a forced landing is all in the day's work.'

Which did not comfort the uneasy Owl. Forced landings were associated in his fat mind with crashes of which he had read in the newspapers. It was true that they happened only once or twice in a blue moon. But that did not console a fat Owl who was apprehensive of one happening now! He sat down again, and shut his eyes behind his spectacles.

But a few minutes later he bounded to his feet with a yell.

Bump!

It was the lightest of bumps, as the plane landed on a level stretch of golden sand, as lightly, almost, as a bird. But to Billy Bunter it was the dreaded crash.

'Yaroooooh! Oh, crikey! I say, you fellows-help!' yelled Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You dithering ass, what's the matter with you now?' hooted Johnny Bull.

'Oh!' Billy Bunter blinked round him, realising that he was still alive, after all. 'I-I say, wasn't that a crash?'

'Fathead! We've landed,' said Frank Nugent.

'Oh!' gasped Bunter. 'I-I say, you fellows, I-I wasn't scared, you know. I say-'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo, there goes the loud-speaker!' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'Shut up a minute, Bunter, and let's hear the latest news.'

The announcement was brief. It stated that there would be a delay of several hours at Tomoo, which was apparently the name of the island: and that, in the meantime, passengers could keep their seats, or alight from the plane, as they preferred. Most of them preferred the latter course—even Billy Bunter being prepared to stretch his little fat legs after hours of sitting down.

'Now for a jolly old trot,' said Bob Cherry. 'You coming, Bunter?'

'I jolly well am!' yapped Bunter. 'Think I'm going to stick on that plane for hours and hours and hours while they tinker with the engines? I say, you fellows, we can get coconuts here.'

'Trust Bunter to think of something to eat!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Does he ever think of anything else?' said Bob.

'Here, Browney, aren't you coming for a trot?'

Tom Brown shook his head. He was more interested in what had happened to his father's plane, than in a ramble on the beach of Tomoo. Rambles on South-Sea beaches were not so novel to the New Zealand junior as they were to his friends.

'I'd rather watch what they're doing here,' he answered. 'You fellows cut off-see you again later.'

'Right-ho!'

The Famous Five tramped off cheerily along the golden beach, Billy Bunter rolling after them, with an eye open for coconuts. Tom Brown had said that he would see them later, nothing doubting that that would be a matter of two or three hours. Not for a moment could any member of the Greyfriars party surmise how very much later it was destined to be.

CHAPTER 11

A CRUISE IN A CANOE

'HALLO, hallo, hallo! That's a jolly old canoe.'

'And a jolly old native! '

'Come on!'

'I say, you fellows, hold on!' squeaked Billy Bunter. 'I say, how do you know he ain't a cannibal?'

'Fathead!' replied five voices in unison, to that.

The Famous Five did not hold on. They did not share Billy Bunter's uneasy doubt about the brown man stretched lazily on the sand, by the side of a beached canoe. Cannibals, perhaps, survived, on very remote isles of the Pacific, far from the track of ships and planes. But they certainly did not expect to encounter one on the island on which the air-liner had touched down for repairs.

They had covered a mile or so from the spot where they had left the plane: about half the circuit of the little island. So far, they had seen no sign of natives, and it was apparent that Tomoo was uninhabited. So they were interested in the brown man and his canoe. It revived recollections of canoeing at Lolulo. From the man's colour they could see that he was a Polynesian: not a native of one of the 'black' islands. And Bob's idea of a trip in a canoe, while they waited for the plane to re-start after the interval, was quite attractive. So the lolling Kanaka and his canoe were a welcome sight.

Billy Bunter lagged behind as they walked on. He was not quite sure about that native, who looked just like the Kanakas he remembered on Lolulo: and a tramp of a mile had told on his little fat legs. Also, he was busy with a coconut. Coconuts, blown down by the wind, were to be had for the picking-up on Tomoo, and Bunter was busy on his sixth nut. He rolled slowly after the Famous Five, chewing coconut, and blinking suspiciously at the brown man.

That brown man certainly looked quite harmless. He sprawled on the sand, basking in the sun, beside the canoe that had been drawn up from the lapping water. No doubt he was a native of some other island, perhaps a distant one, and had stopped on Tomoo for a rest on a long trip.

He sat up, at the sound of crunching sand, and jumped to his feet at the sight of the Greyfriars juniors. He gave them a friendly grin, with a display of flashing white teeth, and ducked a mop of thick black hair.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' greeted Bob Cherry, 'speak English?'

'Yessar! Speakee him all samee white feller!' answered the brown man. He eyed the schoolboys curiously, 'You feller belong ship stop along sky?'

It was long since Harry Wharton and Co. had heard the 'pidgin-English' of the South-Sea Islands. But they had not forgotten it: and it came very pleasantly to their ears. It was easy for them to reply in the same tongue.

'You saw our plane come down?' asked Bob. Then, with a grin, he translated. 'You see feller ship stop along sky belong us feller?'

'Me see um, eye belong me, sar.' The brown man, from his resting-place on the beach, had seen the air-liner descending, on the other side of the island.

'You belong this feller island Tomoo?' asked Harry.

'No, sar! Me belong Osako. Name belong me Pompolongo, sar.'

'What a jolly name!' said Bob. He glanced round at his comrades. 'Look here, we've got time to fill up-what about a run round in that jolly old canoe if Mr. Pompolongo is willing to oblige?'

'Topping idea!' agreed Nugent.

'The topfulness is terrific.'

'We'd all like a run in the canoe, Bob,' said Harry Wharton. 'But we've got to be careful not to be late back for the plane.'

'Jolly careful!' said Johnny Bull.

'I say, you fellows.' Billy Bunter came rolling up, still chewing coconut. 'I say, if you're sure he ain't a cannibal-? '

'Shut up, ass!' roared Bob.

'Well, I'd like to sit down, if you're sure-'

'You generally would, fatty. If we can fix it up with Mr. Pompolongo, he can run us round the island, and land us at the plane. Then you won't have to walk back, Bunter,' added Bob, sarcastically. 'Think of that.'

'Oh!' said Bunter. 'All right, then.'

That consideration, evidently, appealed to the fat Owl.

Having walked one mile, Billy Bunter certainly did not want to walk another. To return to the plane sitting down was quite an attractive idea. He had gathered five or six coconuts, packed under a fat arm, and the prospect of sprawling in a canoe while he devoured them seemed to banish his misgivings.

'I say, you fellows, that's a jolly good idea,' said Bunter. 'I've had enough of slogging through that beastly sand. Let's!'

'We've a couple of hours,' said Nugent. 'Time for a run, and then back to the island, where we left the plane.'

'But-!' said Johnny Bull.

All the party were keen on a run on the blue water, Bunter probably keenest of all, at the happy prospect of sitting down instead of walking back. But Johnny Bull seemed dubious.

'But what, Johnny?' asked Bob.

'What is the butfulness, my esteemed Johnny?' inquired Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'We can't risk being late for the plane,' said Johnny, shaking his head.

'If anything happened to delay us getting back-'

'They wouldn't take off without us, and leave us stranded like a bunch of Robinson Crusoes,' said Bob. 'Besides, what could delay us getting back?'

'You never know,' said Johnny, shaking his head again. 'Lots of things might happen-such as a blow coming on-'

Bob glanced up at the sky. It was a dome of sunny blue. Only a light breeze waved the fronds of the palm trees. He grinned.

'Looks like a blow, doesn't it?' he said.

'No, it doesn't, but-'

'Don't you be funky, Bull!' advised Billy Bunter.

'Who's funky?' roared Johnny.

'You jolly well are,' retorted Bunter. 'The sea's as calm as a pond, and there's hardly a breath of wind. Look here, you fellows, I'm jolly well not going to do any more foot-slogging, if we can hire that canoe to go back. I'll pay, if you like-one of you fellows can lend me the money-'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at,' yapped Bunter. 'Bull can walk back, if he likes-I'm not going to.'

'I'm on, if you fellows are,' said Johnny. 'But if we have to keep the plane waiting, with a crowd of passengers feeling like scalping us, when the pilot's ready to take off, you can jolly well remember that I told you so.'

'We'll remember-if it happens!' chuckled Bob. 'You put it to this chap, Wharton, and see what he says.'

Harry Wharton proceeded to put it in pidgin-English.

You feller Pompolongo, us feller likee go along sea in feller canoe belong you,' he said. 'Spose you likee, payee piecee silver money.'

'You likee go along big water, along canoe belong me?' said Pompolongo.

'Me likee too much, sar, spose you payee five-five piecee silver money.'

'It's a go, then,' said Bob.

And a 'go' it was.

By dint of signs, and the pidgin-English, Pompolongo was made to understand that the white masters wanted a run out to sea in the canoe, returning later to the other side of the island, where the 'ship along sky' had landed. That having been made quite clear, Pompolongo held out a large brown hand, evidently for payment of the 'piecee silver money' in advance. These he packed in his thick mop of hair-a Kanaka's accustomed place for valuables, there being no pockets in his scanty attire, which consisted of little more than a rag of tapa. All being settled to the general satisfaction-excepting perhaps Johnny Bull's-the brown man dragged the canoe into the water, and the juniors embarked. Billy Bunter plumped down with a grunt of relief, and immediately proceeded to crack another coconut.

It was a roomy canoe, with plenty of space for Pompolongo and his passengers. Pompolongo wielded a double-bladed paddle, with a swiftness and skill that the juniors could not help admiring. The canoe, well-laden as it was, fairly shot away from the shore.

'Jolly!' said Bob Cherry.

'The jolliffulness is terrific!' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The sea was, as Bunter had said, as calm as a pond. The sky was of cloudless blue. Harry Wharton and Co. had enjoyed every hour of the long trip in the air-liner: but this undoubtedly was a very pleasant change. Pompolongo, kneeling to the paddle, made the canoe almost fly. The tall palms of Tomoo sank into the blue sea astern.

Billy Bunter, having finished his coconuts, sat up and took note of his surroundings. He blinked at sea and sky. Nothing else met his little round eyes or his big round spectacles. He blinked and blinked in search of Tomoo, which was now no more than a cluster of palm tops in the distance: a mere spot on the blue horizon.

'I say, you fellows, where's that island?' asked Bunter. 'A good many miles behind us,' answered Bob Cherry. 'But don't you worry, old fat man: we're not going to lose sight of it. We're only going round it a good distance off.'

'Well, I can't see it!' grunted Bunter.

At which the juniors grinned. Billy Bunter's vision was limited, even with the assistance of his big spectacles: so the circumstance that he could not see the palm-tops on Tomoo was not very alarming. The juniors had no intention of going out of sight of Tomoo: the canoe was only making a wide sweep on the Pacific, to arrive ultimately at the beach where the air-liner had landed. Billy Bunter blinked round at sea and sky uneasily. But his uneasiness was soon relieved. An albatross, winging in the blue, dipped to the sea, just within range of the fat Owl's spectacles.

'Oh! There it is!' said Bunter. 'I can see it all right now.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Nothing to cackle at, that I can see!' yapped Bunter. 'A fellow can't open his mouth without you fellows cackling. Yah!'

And, happily satisfied that that albatross was the island of Tomoo, Billy Bunter settled down again, to chew the last fragment of his last coconut, in a state of fat contentment.

CHAPTER 12

A 'BLOW' ON THE PACIFIC

'WHAT'S up?'

Frank Nugent asked that question. No one replied.

All eyes in the canoe were fixed on Pompolongo.

The Famous Five had been thoroughly enjoying that cruise on the sunny Pacific. Even Billy Bunter, for once, found nothing to grouse about. Any idea of danger, on that calm and sunny sea, seemed very remote.

Pompolongo had paddled, and paddled, industriously and tirelessly.

But now he had ceased to paddle. He was standing up in the canoe, a wrinkle in his brown forehead, his black eyes fixed on the horizon in the direction of Tomoo. Miles of sea lay between the canoe and those distant palm-tops. But what was the cause of the Kanaka's uneasiness, no one could guess. Only, as they could see, Pompolongo was uneasy.

'What's up?' repeated Nugent. Squeak, from Billy Bunter.

'I say, you fellows, what's the matter? I say, I can't see the island now. Don't you jolly well go out of sight of it.'

'We're not out of sight of it, fathead,' answered Bob Cherry. 'But Pompo seems worried about something, goodness knows what.'

Harry Wharton tapped the Kanaka on a bare, brown arm. 'What name you look along sky, eye belong you?' he asked.

'Tinkee big-feller wind comey!' answered Pompolongo.

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Bob. 'Does that mean that a blow's coming on?' Evidently, it could mean nothing else.

The juniors scanned the sky now, as anxiously as Pompolongo. So far as they could see, there was no sign of a break in the calm and sunny weather. But they remembered now, what they had heard, and read, of the suddenness of tropical storms, in the somewhat misnamed 'Pacific' Ocean. Something, plainly, was visible to the keen eyes of the Kanaka, accustomed to reading weather signs, which they could not discern.

'Blessed if I see anything to worry about,' said Bob. 'The jolly old Pacific looks as pacific as ever, to me.'

'Same here,' said Nugent. 'But-'

'Pompo knows more about it than we do,' said Harry Wharton, quietly. 'If he thinks a blow's coming on, the sooner we get back the better. I can't see a sign of it, but-Pompo can.'

Johnny Bull opened his lips: but closed them again.

For once Johnny refrained from remarking 'I told you so.'

Billy Bunter's eyes and spectacles scanned the sky even more anxiously than the others. But what those eyes and spectacles revealed seemed to satisfy Bunter. Neither eyes nor spectacles spotted the slightest sign of a break in the calm. Bunter grunted, and settled down again.

'It's all right, you fellows,' he said. 'Don't you get funky. Nothing to get funky about.'

Nobody heeded Bunter. If, as Pompolongo believed, a 'big-feller' wind was coming, the matter was serious. 'Better get back!' said Nugent.

'The betterfulness is terrific,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'The stitchfulness in time saves ninepence, as the English proverb remarks.'

Pompolongo was clearly of the same opinion: for he resumed paddling, heading direct for Tomoo. And active as he had been before, he was doubly active now. The paddle flashed and flashed, and the canoe almost whizzed. The Kanaka's brown face was set, and grim. It was only too clear that what Pompolongo had read in the sky alarmed him.

'We'll be back in plenty of time for the plane, at this rate, anyhow,' said Bob, cheerfully. 'By gum, though, is that a mist coming down, or what!'

He stared at distant Tomoo. Not for a moment had the juniors intended to lose sight of the tall palm-tops. But now, with a strange suddenness, they lost sight of them. A dim haze was blotting them from view. It was from beyond Tomoo that the 'big-feller' wind was coming, and with it came a blanket of cloud, spreading from the north.

All faces were grave now-excepting Billy Bunter's.

Bunter, lolling at his fat ease, had noticed nothing so far. 'The sea's getting up!' said Nugent, in a low voice. The Pacific was no longer as calm as a pond. There was a swell on the water, rocking the canoe. It was a warning of what was coming. That sudden wind had not yet reached the canoe. But if it struck before they reached Tomoo, all the Famous Five knew what it might mean. There was danger in the air: and Pompolongo's almost frantic activity with his paddle told how real that danger was. Bob gave a low whistle.

'Looks as if we're for it!' he said. 'Dash it all, things happen too suddenly here. Five minutes ago it was as right as rain.'

'Lots of things can happen in five minutes on the Pacific,' said Johnny Bull, sententiously. 'We were rather asses to leave the island at all.' 'Now tell us you told us so!' suggested Bob. 'Well, I did tell you so,' said Johnny.

'Oh, gum! Look at that cloud!' breathed Bob. 'Where's all that jolly old sunshine gone?'

Sunshine had vanished. Masses of thick black clouds rolled over the sky, coming with the wind, and blotting out the sun. A dim twilight enveloped the sea.

'I say, you fellows!' Billy Bunter sat up and took notice. 'I say, it's getting dark.'

'Just a bit!' agreed Bob.

'Look here, we've jolly well got to get in before dark,' exclaimed Bunter. 'Why, we might miss the island, in the dark.'

'The mightfulness is terrific, my esteemed idiotic Bunter,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Look here, you jolly well tell that nigger to get straight back, and to put it on, too,' yapped Bunter. 'And tell him to keep the canoe steady, too! Look how we're rocking.'

'You fat ass,' said Johnny Bull. 'There's a blow coming on-'

'Rubbish!' said Bunter.

'And if we get nothing worse than rocking, we shall be jolly lucky!' added Johnny. 'So now keep quiet.'

'Beast! I say, what's that row?' asked Bunter. A strange murmuring rumble had become audible. All but Bunter knew what it was.

'It's the wind, Bunter,' said Harry.

'Rot! There ain't any wind,' snapped Bunter.

'There will be, in about a minute,' said Johnny. 'And if it hits us before we hit Tomoo, you'll have plenty to yowl about, so save your breath.'

Billy Bunter blinked from one grave face to another, and his fat lip curled.

'You fellows getting funky?' he inquired. 'Think there's a storm coming on, just because it's getting dark? Have a spot of pluck. You wouldn't see me showing the white feather, I can jolly well tell you, and-Yaroooh!' added Bunter, in a sudden yell of terror, as the wind struck the canoe.

It came suddenly, with breath-taking suddenness. It came like a blow from a giant's hammer, striking with such terrific force that the canoe almost capsized, and a swamp of water surged aboard.

'Hold on,' roared Bob Cherry.

'Yaroooooh! Help! I say, you fellows-oh, crikey!' Billy Bunter rolled over in the bottom of the canoe, yelling. The spot of pluck he had recommended to the other fellows did not seem conspicuous in the hapless fat Owl. Pompolongo was no longer attempting to paddle: it was futile, in a sea swelling now into mountainous billows. On those surging billows the canoe danced like a cork.

Where Tomoo was, and how near or how far it might be, no one knew. But all knew that they were not going to reach Tomoo now. Their one hope was that the canoe might remain afloat, in a raging sea and a roaring wind. They held on to whatever they could find to hold on to, drenched with spray, beaten by the wind, tossing like a cork on the wild waters, driven before the wind at dizzy speed, in what direction they could not even guess: except that every moment drove them further and further from the island where Tom Brown waited for them at the grounded plane.

CHAPTER 13

ADRIFT!

'WE'RE still here!'

That was the best that Bob Cherry could say. Even the cheery Bob could not pronounce, for once, that it was 'jolly'.

Night—the longest and blackest night the juniors had ever experienced—had passed. It had seemed endless. Tossing on a wild sea, holding on for their lives, half-expecting every moment to be engulfed by the waves, hardly daring to hope ever to see the sun again, the interminable hours had dragged by. But the canoe had lived through the storm, flying like a sea-bird before the driving wind, and it was still afloat, when a dim gleam in the blackness told that a new day was coming.

With dawn, the tropical storm had spent its fury. The wind was still strong, and the Pacific rolling in heavy swells, but the worst was over. And when, at long last, the sun came through the clouds, they were able to look about them once more. What they could see was not cheering—an endless succession of rollers, as far as the eye could reach. Every eye searched the horizon, in a faint hope of land. But there was no sign of land. Like the Ancient Mariner, they were 'alone, alone, all, all alone: alone on a wide, wide sea'. For a long time, they were silent: till Bob broke the silence with as cheerful a remark as he could think up.

'Yes, we're still here!' said Nugent. 'But where?'

'The wherefulness is terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But it is something to be still alive and kickful.'

'We've had luck,' said Johnny Bull. 'Might have gone down any minute. But it's as good as over now.'

'And there's the jolly old sun,' said Bob. 'Same old sun that used to look into the dorm at Greyfriars. I was never so glad to see him, then.'

'Warm us up, at any rate!' said Johnny.

Everyone in the canoe was soaked to the skin, and feeling the chill. It was good to see the sun again, and to feel the gathering warmth of its rays. Bob Cherry stood up, and proceeded to go through physical jerks. The outlook was unattractive enough, but Bob was not the fellow to give way to despondency.

There was a mumble from Billy Bunter, huddled in a puddle of water in the bottom of the canoe. 'I say, you fellows--'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Not asleep, Bunter?' roared Bob.

'Think I could sleep through that?' moaned Bunter.

'I say, I'm all wet.'

'We're all rather wet, Bunter,' said Harry, mildly. Grunt, from Bunter. The fact that other fellows were wet did not seem to afflict him unduly. The fat Owl was, as usual, thinking wholly and solely of William George Bunter.

'I say, where are we?' asked Bunter. 'Can you see Tomoo?'

'We're a long way from Tomoo,' answered Harry.

'Well, where are we, then?' yapped Bunter.

'Nobody knows: unless Pompolongo does,' said Harry. 'But I'm afraid he knows no more than we do. That frightful wind may have blown us anywhere. All we know is that we're in the Pacific—not even whether we're still somewhere between Australia and New Zealand. We've been blown south, so far as I can tell. But I'll ask Pompo.'

'Mean to say we're lost at sea?' gasped Bunter.

'Looks like it,' said Johnny Bull.

'Oh, crikey!'

Pompolongo was sitting with his paddle across his bare, wet knees, his

keen black eyes scanning the horizon. But there was no glimmer of hope in his brown face.

'You feller Pompolongo, you savvy what place we stop?' asked Harry.

'No savvy, sar.'

'You no savvy what place Tomoo he stop?' 'No, sar! Me no savvy.'

'You tinkee we come along land?'

'No, sar! Tinkee we no stop altogether too much.'

'What the dickens does that mean?' asked Bob. 'I don't remember that one.'

'No stop altogether means-' Wharton hesitated.

'Well, what?'

'You can guess, old chap. Pompolongo thinks that our number's up.'

'Oh, rot!' said Bob. 'While there's jolly old life, there's jolly old hope. May see the top of a palm tree any minute.'

'Thousands of islands spotted about the Pacific,' said Nugent, hopefully.

'We're quite likely to spot one, sooner or later.'

'I wonder what old Browney's thinking,' said Bob. 'Bet you the plane hasn't taken off. The pilot would never go up, with that storm coming on. And they wouldn't go without us, either. That plane's still on Tomoo.'

'Not much use to us, if it is,' said Johnny. 'We're not likely to see Tomoo again in a hurry.'

'We shall never see Tomoo again at all,' said Harry Wharton, quietly.

'The wind's still driving us south, away from it: and goodness knows how many miles we were driven in the night. Hundreds, very likely. We've got to make up our minds to it-our only chance is to spot some island where we can land, and get food and water.'

'Well, there's lots and lots of islands,' said Bob. 'If you look at a map of the Pacific, they look as thick as flies.' Harry Wharton smiled faintly.

'Not quite so thick, on the Pacific itself,' he said. 'But we've got a chance, at any rate, and we'd better keep our eyes wide open for land.'

'I say, you fellows.' Billy Bunter had crawled out of his puddle, and was busy wringing water from his clothes. 'I say, is there anything to eat in the canoe?'

'Nothing, unless you've got a coconut left, old fat man,' answered Bob.

'I say, what are we going to do about brekker, then?' asked Bunter.

'That's an easy one! There isn't going to be any brekker.'

'Oh, crikey!'

The seriousness of the situation had not yet fully dawned on Billy Bunter's fat brain. But it dawned now, at the prospect of missing a meal-and the still more awful prospect of missing successive meals. He blinked at the Famous Five in horrified dismay.

'I say, what are we going to do, then?' he gasped.

'Grin and bear it!' suggested Johnny Bull.

'Beast!' Billy Bunter did not feel like grinning, and still less did he feel like bearing it. 'I-I-I say, you fellows, haven't you got anything to eat about you? Not even a stick of toffee? I'm hungry.'

'Nothing at all.'

'Oh, jiminy!'

Billy Bunter sat blinking like a scared owl. The prospect was dismaying enough to the other fellows: but to the fat Owl it was overwhelming. As the sun rose higher in the sky, the clouds rolled away, and the wind slackened. Sunshine and warmth brought a spot of comfort to the hapless crew of the canoe, watching with eager eyes for anything that might look like a sign of land. They baled out the water that had swamped aboard, and their clothes dried as the sun grew higher and hotter. Pompolongo still sat with his paddle across his knees. Evidently he saw no use in handling the paddle: the direction in which the canoe was drifting was as

likely-or unlikely-to bring it in sight of land as any other. The wind, at last, fell to a mere breeze: but the canoe, caught in some ocean current, still drifted on to the south. And the schoolboys could only watch, and watch, in the faint hope, growing ever fainter, of seeing the tall summit of a palm rise above the illimitable waste of waters. They fell silent, as the long hours slowly passed: with only an occasional moan or mumble from Bunter. The unfortunate Owl was hungry. He was also growing very thirsty. All were hungry: but when the sun reached the meridian, and blazed down on them with tropical fervour, hunger was almost forgotten in thirst. Billy Bunter sprawled, and mumbled and moaned. But at length he sat up, blinking dolorously at clouded faces. 'I say, you fellows, can't you do something?' he mumbled. 'Sitting round like a lot of stuffed dummies!'

'What can we do, Bunter?' answered Harry, gently enough. 'We're adrift, and there's no help for it.'

'I wish I hadn't come!' moaned Bunter. 'I thought it was no end of a catch, a trip to New Zealand. Now look where we are. But it's all Quelch's fault.'

'Quelch's?' repeated Harry, blankly, while the others stared at the fat Owl. 'What on earth has Quelch to do with it?'

'Well, if he hadn't sent me to wait in his study that day, it wouldn't have happened. I wish I hadn't done it now.'

But how could a fellow know it would turn out like this?' mumbled Bunter. 'I thought it would be all right, of course, but now-look at us! I wish I hadn't touched his beastly typewriter. Oh, lor'!'

This was so much Greek to the Famous Five, and they could only stare at the mumbling Owl.

'Not that I did, you know,' added Bunter. 'I never touched his typewriter, and I hadn't got Browney's letter in my pocket, either.'

'What?'

'Besides, I only thought that his pater had forgotten to mention my name, so it was all right to put it in,' mumbled Bunter. 'How was a fellow to know it would turn out like this? I jolly well wish now that I'd chucked that letter away, instead of sticking it in Browney's Virgil.'

'You fat villain!' roared Bob Cherry.

'Eh! What are you yelling at a fellow for?' asked Bunter, blinking at him. 'I never did it, and I wish now that I hadn't, too. Nice sort of a holiday we're getting, ain't we? Oh, crikey! I wish I'd let that rotten letter alone! Look how I've got landed.'

It was not the first time that Billy Bunter had had occasion to repent him of his sins! But never, in all his fat career, had he had so much occasion as now. If only he hadn't meddled with Tom Brown's letter-! But he had, and this was the unlooked-for result. That wily trick in Quelch's study had landed him in a drifting canoe, adrift on the boundless Pacific. Not that Bunter realised that he had only himself, and his wily trickery, to thank for it. It was anybody's fault but Bunter's! 'So that's how it was!' said Bob. 'That fat villain pinched Browney's letter and shoved his name into it on Quelch's typer. I suppose we can't boot him for it now.'

'Beast!' moaned Bunter.

It was no moment for booting Bunter, much as he deserved it. The fat Owl sat and mumbled, unheeded, while all eyes watched the sea, for a sign of land, or a sail, or the smoke of a steamer. But they watched in vain, as the long, hot hours crawled by. Noon came, in a blaze of tropical heat that made the darkness and chill of the recent storm seem like a dream. The treacherous Pacific was almost calm again now, rolling bright and blue, the canoe drifting on the current. Billy Bunter sprawled, and moaned, and mumbled; Pompolongo sat like a brown image, his black eyes

watchful. Only Bunter's mumbles, and the wash of the waves, broke the weary silence.

It was late in the afternoon when the Kanaka made a sudden movement. He rose to his feet, shading his eyes with a large brown hand, staring intently across the rolling waters. There was a quick movement of excitement among the juniors. They stared in the same direction, but only sea and sky-endless sea and sky-met their view. But they had already learned that the Kanaka's eyes were keener than their own.

'Can Pompo see something?' breathed Bob. His voice came huskily from a parched throat.

'You feller Pompolongo, what you see, eye belong you?' exclaimed Wharton.

'Tinkee see feller palm tree!' said Pompolongo. 'Me plenty tinkee see top belong feller palm tree. You look, eye belong you.'

They strained their eyes to look. They could see only sky and sea, where sky and sea met on the far horizon. But the Kanaka's words brought hope to every heart, and every face brightened.



THEY STRAINED THEIR EYES TO LOOK

Pompolongo grasped his paddle. He was not inactive now. The paddle flashed in his brown hands. The schoolboys could do nothing to help: they could only wait, and watch, and hope. But at length they saw what the Kanaka had seen—a spot where sky met sea, and for which the canoe was heading as fast as Pompo's sinewy arms could drive it. It might have been, to their eyes, a spot of cloud on the horizon: but as the canoe flew on, it came clearer and clearer, and they knew that it was a feathery tuft of palms. And with thankful hearts they watched that feathery tuft grow larger and larger, into a bunch of tall palms waving their fronds in the breeze.

CHAPTER 14

LAND AT LAST

'LAND!'

'Land-at last!'

It was land! What it was, where it was, none knew: or, at that moment, cared. It was land-a spot, at least, of land, in the unending wilderness of sea. It was land: and that meant food and water-water to slake parching thirst. Taller and taller the palm-tops rose from the ocean, as the canoe flew on, till masses of bush came into view, and long lines of white surf, where the Pacific broke on a coral reef. Nearer and nearer, till they could make out individual trees, rocks above the waves, and a shining lagoon beyond the reef.

'Oh, what luck!' breathed Bob Cherry.

'The luckfulness is truly terrific!' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'How long have we been in this canoe?' muttered Nugent. 'It seems like weeks or months. Was it really only yesterday that we got out of the plane on Tomoo?'

'Only yesterday!' said Harry Wharton. 'But it's the longest ago yesterday we've ever had, I think.'

They had had a wild night, and a burning day, in the canoe. But the long minutes had seemed like hours, and the hours endless. It was hard to realise that barely twenty-four hours had elapsed since they had stepped out of the air-liner.

Mumble, from Billy Bunter.

'I say, you fellows.' It was a husky mumble. 'I say, what's up? Did you say "land"?''

'We jolly well did!' answered Bob. 'Cheer up, old fat man-you'll soon be munching coconuts again.'

Bunter sat up.

'Is it Tomoo?' he asked.

'Hardly! Goodness knows where Tomoo is, or where we are-but it's land, and that's what matters,' said Bob. 'Anybody keen to stretch his legs ashore?'

'What-ho!' said Johnny Bull.

'But I say, what land is it?' asked Bunter. 'Is it Australia or New Zealand, or what?'

'Neither, you fat chump. Hundreds of miles from both. It's a Pacific island, and if you take the trouble to get on those podgy props of yours, you can see it as well as we can.'

Billy Bunter heaved himself to his feet. He wiped his spectacles, adjusted them on his fat little nose, and blinked across the glistening sea, in the direction in which all eyes were turned.

'Oh, good!' he said. 'They look like palm trees.'

'That's because they are palm trees!' explained Bob. 'Nothing looks so much like a palm tree as a palm tree.'

The island was not so clear to the Owl of the Remove as it was to the others. He gave his spectacles another wipe, re-adjusted them on a fat nose, and blinked anxiously at the nodding palms.

'Think they're coconut palms?' he asked.

'They are!'

'I mean, can you see nuts on them?'

'We can.'

'Oh good!' said Bunter. 'I say, tell that nigger to put it on.'

'Fathead! Pompo's going all out,' said Nugent. 'Think he isn't just as hungry and thirsty as we are?' 'Well, I think he might go a bit faster,' said Bunter.

'Fat lot he cares whether I'm perishing of hunger and thirst. Fat lot you fellows care, either. Selfishness all round, as usual.'

At which there was a chuckle in the canoe. They could chuckle now, even if it came a little huskily. Every face was bright with hope and relief. The sight of land had given new life to all. Paradise could hardly have seemed more enticing to their eyes, than the graceful nodding palms, the clusters of nuts, and the calm shining lagoon.

'Didn't I say there was jolly old hope, so long as there was jolly old life?' chuckled Bob. 'My turn to say "I told you so," Johnny.'

'I say, you fellows, what's that nigger at?' exclaimed Bunter. 'He's going away from that island now. Tell him to keep straight on.'

The canoe was now very near the line of breaking surf.

Pompolongo was no longer heading direct for the land. The canoe swerved from its direct course, as if he intended to steer round the island. The reason was plain enough to all but Bunter.

'Fathead!' said Johnny Bull.

'What's he wasting time for?' hooted Bunter. 'Make him keep straight on.'

'Like the canoe to pile up on the rocks?' asked Bob. 'Think we could land in that surf? Like to swim for it?'

'We've got to land, haven't we?' howled Bunter.

'Yes, ass! But we'd rather land alive, if you don't mind. There's a break in the reef somewhere, and Pompo's looking for it.'

'Oh!' said Bunter. It dawned even upon his fat mind that if the canoe ventured into the surf, it would smash like an egg-shell on the coral rocks. And Billy Bunter certainly did not want to swim for it!

'Well, tell him to hurry up!' grunted Bunter. 'And how do you know there's any way through that beastly surf?'

'Can't you see that that island's an atoll?'

'Eh! What's an atoll?'

'If you'd listened to Quelch, in geography, instead of thinking about grub all the time, you'd know that a Pacific atoll is a sort of ring of land round a lagoon,' answered Bob. 'Some of the islands are atolls, and some aren't. This one is. And there's always a break in the reef round an atoll. Pompo's looking for the reef passage. Bound to be one.'

'I'm hungry!' wailed Bunter.

'You don't say so!'

'And thirsty--'

'Fancy that!' said Bob. 'Bunter's hungry and thirsty, you chaps. Nobody else is, of course, and it wouldn't matter if they were.'

'Beast!' moaned Bunter.

The canoe glided on, all eyes on the surf-beaten shore.

There was a sudden shout from Bob. 'Hallo, hallo, hallo! There it is.'

The canoe swerved towards the island. There was a break in the pounding surf: a gap in the long lines of white that dashed and dashed incessantly. It was the reef passage, and Pompolongo was heading for it. It was a wide gap in the coral reef on which the Pacific rollers pounded. Beyond it the lagoon glistened in the sinking sun like a sheet of silver. On either side, as Pompolongo ran the canoe in, the white foam of the breakers flew: but there was ample sea-room for a small craft. Sharp teeth of coral jutted from the water here and there, but the Kanaka threaded his way with easy skill, and the canoe glided on into the lagoon.

'Here we are, here we are, here we are again!' chanted Bob.

The lagoon seemed strangely calm, after the rolling Pacific. Standing up, the juniors looked about them with eager, curious eyes. Outside, the sea boomed on a barrier of coral rock: but within, the lagoon was circled by a dazzling shelving beach. Beyond the beach nodded innumerable palm trees, many of them with clusters of nuts: and beyond the palms was a

mass of thick bush that seemed to cover most of the island. The atoll was, as Bob had said, a ring of land surrounding the lagoon: but it was a very broad ring, miles in extent in every direction, except at the break in the reef.

'Jolly!' said Bob. He could, at last, pronounce that it was jolly!

'Nobody about!' said Johnny Bull.

'Oh!' said Bob: and he whistled. In their delight at sighting land, and their eagerness to set foot on it, it had not occurred to the juniors to surmise whether it was inhabited or not. But they thought of it now. It was quite probable that so remote a spot of land, lost in the immensity of the Pacific, had never been trodden by human foot. On the other hand, if it was inhabited, there was no telling what the inhabitants might be like. Placable Kanakas like Pompologo would have been welcome to their eyes. But a possible horde of fuzzy savages with spears and war-clubs was quite a different proposition.

'Can't see a sign of anybody,' said Nugent.

Harry Wharton called to Pompologo, paddling for the beach.

'You feller Pompologo, you savvy this feller island?'

'No savvy, sar,' answered Pompologo.

'You no savvy feller stop along this island?'

'Me no savvy, sar.'

'That's that!' said Bob. 'Pompo knows no more about it than we do. Let's hope we've got it to ourselves, or else that the natives are good sorts. We've got to chance it, anyway.'

'No doubt about that!' said Harry.

In the doubtful circumstances, it was a relief that no inhabitant was to be discerned. The canoe grounded on soft sand, and its hungry, thirsting crew scrambled eagerly ashore. Coconuts, blown by the wind, lay under the palms in profusion. There was both food and drink in a coconut. Banging and cracking of nuts echoed under the feathery fronds. Whether there might be ears to hear, in the deep shadowy bush, the castaways did not even reflect. Coconut milk trickled happily down dry throats, and nectar could not have been a greater boon. And, thirst at last satisfied, coconut meat made a meal hardly less welcome. And Pompologo, going a little further afield, came back with an armful of ripe bananas. For once, the Famous Five vied with Billy Bunter as quick workers at a feast. But Billy Bunter was still going strong, after they had filled all available space. Munch, munch, munch, crunch, crunch, crunch, came from Bunter, like an unending melody, though not very melodious, while the other fellows sat, at happy ease, and watched the lagoon reddening in the sunset. But the fat Owl gave voice at last.

'I say, you fellows!' came a squeak through a barrage of banana.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Enjoying life, old fat man?' roared Bob.

'I say, how are we going to get back on the plane?'

'Ask me another.'

'We can't stick here for ever, I suppose?' yapped Bunter.

'Not if we can help it,' agreed Bob. 'But if you know how to get back to the plane, old porpoise, don't keep it dark. Just lead the way, and we'll be after you before you can say "cream buns".'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Beast!' said Bunter. And having no more room within his extensive circumference for even one more banana, Billy Bunter curled up and went to sleep, and a resonant snore mingled with the eternal boom of the breakers on the coral reef.

CHAPTER 15

CASTAWAYS!

'LOVELY morning!' said Bob Cherry.

The sun was on the lagoon.

The night had been quiet and undisturbed. If that unknown island had any inhabitants, the Greyfriars juniors had seen and heard nothing of them, so far. They had slept soundly through the night, on beds of fallen leaves, as soundly as in the old dormitory at Greyfriars. Billy Bunter was still snoring, when the Famous Five turned out. They left him to snore, under the palms, as they walked down to the beach. Pompolongo was not to be seen: but they sighted him a few minutes later: out on the lagoon in his canoe, fishing. Pompo had thought of something more substantial than coconuts and bananas for a morning meal.

It was, as Bob said, a lovely morning. Outside the reef, the breakers boomed: but the lagoon was a calm lake of silver in the rising sun. Overhead was a sky of unclouded blue. Palm fronds nodded and waved in a light breeze. Here and there a red glow of hibiscus met the eye. It was a scene of calm and peace and beauty, cheering to the eyes of the castaways. But their glances turned, dubiously, on the dark, shadowy, tangled bush beyond the palms. What it might hide, they did not know, and could not tell.

'Looks as if there's nobody here but ourselves,' said Bob. 'We're jolly old Robinson Crusoes, and Pompo's our Man Friday.'

'We'd better hope so,' said Harry. 'But-'

'The butfulness is terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'After all, if there's natives here, very likely they'll be quite nice and friendly,' said Bob. It was Bob's way to look on the bright side of things. 'Might help us get off, and get back to civilization. This is a jolly spot, but we don't want to stay here for ever.'

'We'd better have a look round, after brekker, and make sure,' said Johnny Bull. 'Goodness knows what the natives may be like, on a lonely island like this. We may have to run for it, in the canoe.'

'It may come to that,' said Harry Wharton, quietly. 'And our best guess is to stack the canoe with coconuts, in case we have to run out to sea.'

'Good egg!' said Bob. 'Nothing like being ready for what may happen, even if it doesn't! Hallo, hallo, hallo, here comes Pompo, and he looks as if he's made a good catch.'

Pompolongo was paddling back to the beach. Evidently he had made a good catch, for there was a shining heap in the canoe. He grounded the canoe, tied up with a tapa cord to a point of coral, and splashed ashore with his brown arms full of fish. He grinned at the juniors, with a flash of white teeth.

'Plenty feller fish stop along lagoon,' he said. 'Me cookee along fire plenty too quick. Us feller plenty eatee.'

'Good old Man Friday!' said Bob.

They walked back to the camp under the palms with the Kanaka. How Pompo was going to light a fire for his cookery puzzled them, for there was not a match-box among the whole party. But it was no puzzle to a South-Sea Islander. Pompo gathered twigs and sticks for his fire, and by a patient process of rubbing two dry sticks together, produced a spark, and then a flame: and at length a wood-fire was sending up a column of smoke among the palm fronds. And then at last came a pleasant scent of broiling fish on hot embers.

Billy Bunter was still snoring: but his snore ceased as Bob Cherry lunged at fat ribs with his foot.

'Urrrrgh!' The snore changed into a grunt.

'Wake up!' roared Bob.

'Beast! Lemme alone! Tain't rising-bell!' mumbled Bunter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You won't hear rising-bell again yet awhile, old fat man,' chuckled Bob.

'Turn out, you fat slacker! Brekker.'

'Oh!' That magic word roused Bunter. He sat up, rubbed his eyes, jammed his spectacles on his fat little nose, and blinked at five grinning faces. Then he sniffed! The scent of broiling fish was grateful and comforting to that little fat nose. 'Oh! I say, that smells good. I'm hungry.'

And the fat Owl rolled quite promptly off his bed of leaves.

It was a welcome, if rough-and-ready, meal. Palm-leaves served as plates, pocket-knives and fingers for cutlery. The Greyfriars party had landed on that lonely isle with only what they stood up in: and they had to come down to primitive conditions. Billy Bunter, at any rate, had no objection to using his fingers, neither had Pompolongo. No doubt the others had, but there was no help for it: and all were hungry, and glad of the breakfast Pompo had provided, and glad to wash it down with the milk of young drinking-nuts gathered by the Kanaka.

After which, the Famous Five were equally glad of a wash in the lagoon: a trifling superfluity about which William George Bunter did not bother.

Then came the provisioning of the canoe: obviously a needed precaution, in case of hostile natives and the necessity of sudden flight. Pompolongo lent a willing brown hand, while Billy Bunter reposed his fat person in soft sand after his gastronomic exertions. Coconuts, bananas, plantains, and wild yams, were stacked in the canoe in an extensive heap.

'That lot'll see us through for a long while, if we have to run for it; said Bob. 'But-'

'We've got to find out whether the island's inhabited; said Harry. 'If there's no natives, or if they're friendly, we can build a fire on the reef, and send up a smoke signal. There's a good chance that it would be seen, sooner or later, from some ship. Putting to sea again in the canoe is a last resource, if we're in danger here.'

'Well, we'd better explore, and see!' said Nugent.

'And the soonerfulness the betterfulness; said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'White master go walkee?' asked Pompolongo. 'Me go fishee, along canoe along lagoon. Plenty fish he stop.'

The juniors were more than willing to leave that fishy task to the Kanaka. Pompolongo pushed off in the canoe, to cast his net well away from the shore. His brown face was quite cheerful and contented. If he was thinking of his native island of Osako, and the doubtful prospect of ever seeing it again, it did not seem to worry him. Probably he was not thinking at all, except of the fish in the lagoon.

'Coming along, Bunter?' called out Bob Cherry. Grunt, from Bunter.

'I'm not sticking here alone,' he answered. And the fat Owl reluctantly heaved his weight up from the sand. Lolling on the beach appealed to Billy Bunter much more than exercising his little fat legs, but he did not want to be left on his own. He rolled after the Co. as they started along the beach.

All eyes were watchful as they went: all ears on the alert. For some distance; it was easy going, tramping on shelving sand and powdered coral. Further on, the high dark bush encroached on the beach, thick and tangled and thorny almost to the water's edge. There they paused, looking about them: and then there was a sudden exclamation from Bob.

'Look! Doesn't that look like a path?'

He pointed to an opening in the thick bush. It looked rather like a shady green tunnel under outspread leafy branches.

'It's a run-way!' said Harry Wharton, quietly.
Squeak from Bunter.

'What's a run-way?'

'A run-way, old fat man, is a path cut through the bush by jolly old natives,' said Bob Cherry. 'And that means that we haven't got this atoll to ourselves.'

'That settles that!' said Frank Nugent.

'It does-it do!' said Bob.

It was only too clear. That tunnel-like path through the almost impenetrable bush had been cut by human hands. There could be no doubt about that. It could only mean that the island was inhabited: whether by peaceful Kanakas or hostile savages it was impossible to tell. They stared into the run-way with uneasy eyes.

'Going on?' asked Bob, after a long pause.

'We'd better, I think,' answered Harry. 'We've got to find out what sort of a place we're in, and whether we'd better take to the canoe and chance it at sea again.'

They tramped into the run-way, more watchful and alert than ever. Overhead, intermingling branches shut out the sun and it was almost twilight. On either side trunks interlaced with wild vines formed a green wall. But after some distance had been covered, a gleam of sunlight ahead indicated the end of the run-way.

They stopped on the edge of a wide glade, open to the blue sky and the blazing sun, circled by shadowy bush. And all eyes fixed, startled, on a strange figure in the centre of the glade.

It was a figure, hewn roughly in massive rock, of gigantic size. To a height of ten or twelve feet, it was almost shapeless. But it was surmounted by a head hewn with some skill, with half-human features, painted black, and eyes of green glass that glittered in the sunlight and gave it a strange uncanny look of life. Sharks' teeth glimmered from a huge mouth.

'Oh, crikey! What's that?' squeaked Billy Bunter. 'What could it be, fathead?' answered Bob Cherry. 'It's a native idol, of course. Like those things we've seen pictures of on Easter Island, only a good deal uglier. And there's a hut.'

At a short distance from the rock image stood a hut, built of palm-poles, thatched with palm-leaves. Evidently it was a habitation: the only one to be seen, though the juniors could not doubt that there were others not far away. But there was no sign of life to be seen.

'Nobody about!' said Bob. 'Come on.'

They pushed on into the glade. A glance into the hut showed that it was unoccupied. They noted now that several run-ways opened into the glade from the surrounding bush. It was deserted, silent and still: but they could guess that it was a meeting-place for heathen ceremonies. And they could guess, too, that at any moment some native might appear on the scene, whether peaceful or hostile there was no telling. Every face was grave and anxious but Billy Bunter's. In the absence of danger, Billy Bunter was as bold as a lion, and there was nothing to be scared of, so far as Bunter could see, in a rock image with glass eyes.

Billy Bunter plumped down in the shade of the towering rock idol, and fanned a fat perspiring face with his hat. Bunter was hot, and his little fat legs were fatigued, and what Bunter chiefly wanted was a rest. Having thoughtfully packed a bunch of ripe bananas under a fat arm before starting, he proceeded to peel them, and munch them one after another: while the others stood in anxious consultation, undecided whether to push on further, or to return to the beach.

'I say, you fellows, what are you looking like a lot of moulting owls about?' inquired Bunter.

'Fathead!' was Bob Cherry's reply to that.
'Beast!' retorted Bunter.
And he resumed munching bananas.

CHAPTER 16

BUMPS FOR BUNTER

BILLY BUNTER grinned.

Then he gave a little fat cough.

Nobody heeded Bunter. Had the Famous Five heeded him, they might have remembered that that little fat cough was a preliminary to a spot of Bunter's ventriloquism. He was, as it were, clearing for action.

But the castaways were thinking of anything but the fatuous fat Owl's ventriloquial antics. They had a problem on their minds which was difficult of solution. They knew now that that solitary atoll was inhabited: but what the inhabitants were like, was a matter of conjecture. Amicable Kanakas like Pompo, perhaps: but quite possibly untamed savages—perhaps even cannibals. If the former, all was well: if the latter, danger lurked in every shadow of the shadowy bush, and their last resource was to put out to sea in the canoe, and take their chance of sighting a sail or a steamer. Following one or other of the run-ways from the glade was likely to lead them to a native village. But what was their reception likely to be? They could not tell.

Billy Bunter was not thinking out that problem. Thinking was never much in Billy Bunter's line, at any time. Bunter was content to loll and munch bananas. Had a black or brown face peered from the bush, or a spear gleamed among the foliage, Bunter undoubtedly would have scuttled off like a fat rabbit. But all was, or seemed, calm and peaceful, and he was quite at his ease. Having finished his bananas, he lolled against the base of the huge idol, blinking at the anxious faces of the group. Then he grinned, and gave that little fat preparatory cough. He was going to make them jump!

And he certainly did!

Suddenly, the silence was broken by a long, low, wailing sound.

That sound came, or seemed to come, from the rock idol's huge mouth, grinning with sharks' teeth.

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

They stared up, in amazement not unmingled with alarm, at the hideous painted face of the idol.

'What-what-what was that?' stuttered Bob Cherry.

'It came from-from that-that thing!' breathed Nugent. 'You fellows all heard it—'

'The hearfulness was terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But—'

'Listen!' muttered Harry.

The sound was repeated: a long wailing howl. Unless it came from the rock idol, whence did it come? There was no one but themselves in sight, and the fat Owl grinning at the base of the statue.

'Is this place haunted?' muttered Bob.

'Hark!'

'It's speaking.'

'It's impossible—!'

'Listen!'

Now it was a voice that came, or at least appeared to come, from the huge grinning mouth hewn in rock. It did not sound in the least like Bunter's. The fat Owl's ventriloquial voice was quite different from his natural fat squeak. And the voice came in pidgin-English.

'You feller too much fright altogether.'

Five fellows stared up blankly at the idol.

Harry Wharton compressed his lips. He had been amazed, startled, and a little shaken. But he very soon collected himself.

'It's a trick of some sort,' he said. 'There's somebody about—'

'Nobody that I can see,' muttered Bob.

'It's a trick, unless it's black magic-and we're not fools enough to believe in magic,' exclaimed Wharton. 'A native, from the lingo he speaks. But who-where-?'

'He, he, he!'

That fat cachinnation came from Billy Bunter. He could contain his merriment no longer, as the Famous Five stared about them, in every direction but his. Then there was a sudden roar from Johnny Bull. He had guessed it.

'BUNTER!'

'Eh! What-?' began Bob.

'Bunter!' roared Johnny. 'It's Bunter playing tricks.'

'He, he, he!' chortled Bunter. 'I say, you fellows, weren't you scared? He, he, he.'

'Bunter!' gasped Bob. 'That fat chump with his fatheaded ventriloquism.'

'Bunter, you dithering nitwit-'

'Bunter, you blithering owl-'

'He, he, he! Didn't I make you jump!' chuckled Bunter. 'He, he, he! You feller too much fright altogether! He, he, he!'

Billy Bunter chortled, loud and long. He was tremendously amused by the success of his ventriloquial trickery. But a moment or two later he ceased to be amused, as the Famous Five rushed at him, and collared him on all sides. It was no time or place for the fat ventriloquist's tricks, and they proceeded to make that clear even to the fat Owl's limited intellect.

'Bump him!' hooted Johnny Bull. 'Bump him terrifically.'

'Leggo!' yelled Bunter. 'I say, you fellows-yaroooh! Can't you take a joke? Oh, crikey! Leggo.'

Bump!

'Yaroooooooh!'

Bump!

'Beasts! Stoppit! Oh, jiminy.'

Bump!

'Yow-ow-ow-ow-wow! '

'There, you fat ditherer!' panted Bob. 'That's a tip to pack up your ventriloquism, and keep it packed up.'

'Ow! Beast! Wow!'

'Give him another!' growled Johnny.

'Wow! Stoppit! Will you leggo?' howled Bunter. 'Hold on!' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'Somebody's coming.'

That final bump was not administered. A figure had appeared at the opening of one of the run-ways in the bush. Letting Billy Bunter drop like a hot potato, the Famous Five gave it all their attention. The fat Owl sat and spluttered, while they stared at the newcomer. Evidently, it was a native of the island at last: probably the inhabitant of the hut near the rock idol. He was a small man, black as the ace of spades, with an old, wizened, wrinkled face, a mop of fuzzy hair, and little black beady eyes that glittered like a rat's. He was clad only in a dingy tapa loin-cloth, the rest of him half-hidden by necklaces and anklets of bones, that rattled as he moved. The juniors gazed at that grotesque figure in chilled silence, as it emerged into the sunlight. From the colour of the skin, where it glistened through the strings of bones, they knew now that they were on a 'black' island, inhabited by natives of Melanesian race.

'Oh, my hat!' breathed Bob. 'If that's a sample of them-'

'Some sort of a witch-doctor, on his looks!' said Harry, in a low voice.

'I expect that's his hut, by the idol. He looks a savage brute, but- We've got to make friends with them, if we can.'

He waved his hand to the strange man, in sign of amity. The black man made no gesture in response. He had come to a dead stop, only a few yards from the run-way from which he had emerged, staring at them blankly, his beady eyes wide open, startled. Evidently, he was taken by surprise, by the sight of white faces on the island. He stood motionless, the beady eyes on them in a fixed stare.

Harry Wharton made a step towards him.

Then he stirred: whirling round, with a rattle of bones, and skipped back into the run-way with the activity of a goat. A patter of running feet, a rattling of bones, and he was gone: vanishing into the bush like a ghost at cock-crow.

CHAPTER 17

IN DIRE PERIL

'I-I-I SAY, you fellows!' Billy Bunter's fat squeak came through chattering teeth. 'I-I say, let's get out of this.'

Billy Bunter was not at his fat ease now. Only in the absence of peril was it a bold Bunter. One glimpse of a black savage, tattooed and decorated with bones, was more than enough for the fat Owl. He forgot that his fat little legs were fatigued. He forgot the bumping that he had asked for and duly received. Only one thought was in Hunter's fat mind: to put the greatest possible distance, in the shortest possible time, between himself and that black man.

'Better get back,' said Bob. Harry Wharton nodded.

'We've found out what we came to look for,' he said. 'We know now that there are savages on the island. That specimen we've seen may come back with a crowd of them.'

'Oh, crikey!' from Bunter.

'Better keep out of their way, if we can,' said Nugent.

'If!' muttered Johnny Bull.

'We don't even know whether they speak the pidgin-English of the Islands,' went on Wharton. 'But Pompo may be able to speak to them in their language. Might be a chance of making friends.'

'Slim chance, on that fellow's looks!' said Johnny Bull. 'Keep clear of them, if we can: and cut in the canoe, if we can't! Looks to me as if we shall have to run out to sea, and chance it. Let's get back, anyhow.'

'I say, you fellows--'

'Oh, dry up, Bunter.'

'Beast!' howled Bunter. 'I'm jolly well going.'

And the fat Owl started. For once, Billy Bunter led the way. He led it at a run, and the others put on speed. The possibility that the witch-doctor, if witch-doctor he was, might return with a swarm of savages armed with spears and war-clubs, was in all minds. They left the glade, and the towering rock idol, behind them, and hurried back along the run-way by which they had come. And it was a relief to all, when they came out on the beach, and the shining lagoon was under their eyes again.

'Oh, crikey! It's hot!' mumbled Bunter, mopping streams of perspiration from a fat face.

'Only half-a-mile back to camp, now,' said Bob, encouragingly.

'Oh, lor!'' moaned Bunter. He dragged on weary fat legs. Gladly he would have plumped down in the sand for a rest. There was no run left in those little fat legs. But he plugged on, mopping and panting. The Famous Five scanned the lagoon for Pompolongo in his canoe, as they followed the curving shore back to the camp under the palms. But as far as their eyes could reach across the shining water, there was no canoe to be seen.

'I expect Pompo's made his catch, and he's waiting for us at the camp,' said Harry. 'Yes--there's the canoe.'

They were still some distance from the camp. Pompolongo was not to be seen. But now they could see the canoe, tied up to a point of coral by a tapa cord. Evidently Pompo had finished his fishing, and they had no doubt that he was in the camp under the cluster of palms, broiling fish over his wood-fire. They tramped on, Billy Bunter toiling, and almost broiling, in the rear, under the blaze of the tropic sun.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' exclaimed Bob, suddenly. He shaded his eyes from the sun-glare, staring ahead. 'Look! There's Pompo--but what's the matter with him?'

The cluster of palms, where the castaways had located their camp, was a good hundred yards from the water's edge. Between it and the lagoon was a

wide stretch of dazzling sand. The juniors could not yet see the camp, screened by the palm-trunks. But suddenly they saw Pompolongo. He came out from under the palms running, or rather, bounding. They could read terror in his brown face, as he crossed their line of vision. He did not look in their direction and did not see them. His eyes were on the canoe, as he crossed the beach with desperate bounds like a hunted deer, racing towards the lagoon.

Harry Wharton caught his breath.

'What on earth's happened?' he breathed.

'Look!' muttered Bob.

A moment more, and they knew, as a second running figure appeared from the palms, evidently in pursuit of the Kanaka.

'The savages!' breathed Frank Nugent.

It was the second native of the island they had seen: utterly unlike the first in looks. He was as black as the little man with the strings of bones: but brawny and muscular: a tall and powerful savage. There were coloured feathers sticking in his thick black hair, rings in his ears and his broad nose, and, strangest of all, a polished tin kettle that gleamed like silver, strung on a necklace of coral beads round his neck. Such an adornment, at any other time or place, might have made the schoolboys smile. But they did not feel like smiling now. For the islander's hand was half-raised, and in it was grasped a spear, as he rushed in pursuit of Pompolongo. It was only too clear to what use that weapon was to be put if he overtook the fleeing Kanaka.

They came to a horrified halt, staring at the startling scene, hardly a hundred yards distant. It lasted only seconds.

Pompolongo, with frantic bounds, reached the tied-up canoe. He had no time to cast off the painter. The pursuing savage was too close behind him. With a last desperate bound, he crashed into the canoe. The impetus of his leap drove it out from the shore, and snapped the tapa cord that had secured it. The canoe rocked out on the lagoon, the breathless Kanaka sprawling and panting in it as it rocked, only yards out of reach of the thrusting spear.

But Pompolongo was up again in a moment. He seized his paddle, and it flashed in his brown hands. The canoe shot away on the lagoon, leaving the savage islander brandishing his spear on the shore.

'He's got clear!' breathed Bob.

'Look-that brute's after him!' muttered Nugent, his face white.

There was a splash in the lagoon, as the black islander plunged in, evidently in the hope of reaching the Kanaka before he could escape. He swam with powerful strokes, the spear held in his teeth, and the juniors watched the black mop of hair as it bobbed on the shining water.

'He won't get him!' muttered Johnny Bull.

'No!' said Harry, in a low voice. 'But-Pompo's making for the reef passage. He's getting away-from the island.'

Bob gave a whistle .

'That means-!' he said, and paused.

'It means that we're left here-without the canoe. I daresay he's forgotten all about us-he's only thinking of getting away alive. But we're fairly stranded now.'

They watched, with beating hearts. They were glad to see, at all events, that the bobbing black head was dropping further and further astern of the fleeting canoe. But it was only too clear that Pompolongo's only thought was to flee from the island. Probably, as Wharton said, he had forgotten all about the white masters, in his own imminent peril. As they watched, the canoe disappeared into the reef passage, and was lost to sight among the coral rocks. Pompolongo was gone, with the wide Pacific before him: little likely to be seen again on that isle of deadly peril.

And the last hope of the castaways, of escaping from the island in the canoe, was gone with him.

'I say, you fellows-' It was a dismal croak from Billy Bunter. The fat Owl was shaking like a jelly, 'I-I-I say, if-if that nigger had seen us- Oh, crikey!'

'He never looked this way,' said Bob. 'Too busy getting after Pompo. But we'd better not let him see us when he gets back after his swim, blow him.'

'I say, we can't go back to the camp now!' mumbled Bunter. 'I say, we shall have to hide somewhere. Oh, lor' ! I wish I hadn't come on that plane.'

Snort, from Johnny Bull.

'You wouldn't have, but for your own monkey-tricks,' he snapped. 'Now you're in a jam with the rest of us, and mumbling and moaning won't get you anywhere.'

'Beast!' moaned Bunter. 'Look here, we've got to hide somewhere-where those brutes can't find us.'

'Bunter's talking something like sense for once,' said Rob. 'Goodness knows what we're going to do, but our best guess is to keep out of sight of those blighters if we can, and as long as we can. Better take cover before some more of them come along and spot us.'

'That's all we can do!' said Nugent.

Obviously, it was the only thing to be done, even if it only postponed the inevitable. With grim faces, they turned their backs on the lagoon, and tramped up the beach.

In the thick, shadowy bush there was ample cover: though whether, or for how long, they could elude discovery by the savage islanders, were questions to which none could guess the answers.

CHAPTER 18

PRISONERS!

'HARK!'

Bob Cherry breathed that word in a whisper.

Hours had passed.

It was hot in the bush. But the interlaced branches overhead at least kept off the blaze of the tropical sun. From time to time the Famous Five exchanged words in low voices. But they were at a loss to form any plan of action. To keep out of sight of the natives as long as they could was only prudent. Further than that, they could do nothing. The departure of Pompolongo in the canoe had left them utterly and hopelessly stranded. There was no escape from the island now.

Billy Bunter sat, with his little fat legs stretched out, leaning back against a massive kauri trunk. He was silent, save for an occasional dismal mumble. The hopeless situation was too much for the unfortunate Owl. With every blink through his spectacles, he dreaded to see a savage black face peering from the bush. The Famous Five were made of sterner stuff, and they had not lost their courage. But hope was down to zero. Their presence on the island was known: the brawny savage who had pursued Pompolongo had not seen them, but they had been seen by the wizened little witch-doctor in the glade of the rock idol, and the news must have spread. As likely as not, more likely than not, search was already being made for them. At any moment, they might hear the footstep of a seeking savage: and when Bob suddenly whispered 'Hark!' they knew that that moment had come.

There was a rustle in the bush. A mass of wild vines stirred.

All eyes fixed upon the spot. Someone was coming, pushing a way through the tangled undergrowth. The vines swayed, and parted. There was a faint moan of terror from Billy Bunter: but the Famous Five were silent, as a black face came into view, and sharp watchful eyes peered at them. For a long moment, the islander was silent, staring. Then, to their mingled surprise and relief, a wide grin overspread the black face, extending almost from one black ear to the other. There was no sign of the ferocity they had seen in the savage who had chased Pompolongo. But a spear, pointed with a razor-edged shark's tooth, was in the black hand, as the savage emerged from the clinging vines, and approached the silent group under the kauri branches. Every heart beat hard. There was no defence, if the savage chose to handle that deadly weapon. But his grinning face seemed to indicate rather amusement than hostility. Probably he was elated by his success in tracking out the white castaways.

'White feller go hide along bush!' he said: and it was a relief to the juniors to hear the pidgin-English. Communication was possible. Of the black man's native dialect they could not have hoped to understand a syllable. 'White feller stop along bush, tinkee black feller no see.' His teeth flashed as he grinned at them. 'Me findee plenty too quick. Me Papeeto findee, sponsee you feller run along bush all samee wild pig. Big Chief he say findee white feller, along Tokoloo sing out that white feller stop along this place. Me Papeeto findee all samee Big Chief Kafoo he say.'

From which, the juniors could guess that Tokoloo was the repulsive little man with the strings of bones who had seen them in the glade of the rock idol. Evidently Tokoloo had reported their presence, and Big Chief Kafoo, whoever he was, had ordered search to be made for them. With what intention, they could not know: but they drew hope from the grinning good-humour of the savage who had found them. Their last chance was to

make friends with the natives, and that seemed at least a possibility now.

'Us feller plenty glad see you feller Papeeto, eye belong us,' said Harry Wharton. 'Us feller good feller along you, along Big Chief Kafoo, along all black feller stop along this place. You tinkee Big Chief Kafoo he likee white feller stop along this feller island?'

Again Papeeto's grin widened from ear to ear.

'Tinkee likee plenty too much,' he answered. 'He likee altogether too much see white feller, eye belong him. You comey along me Papeeto.'

He made a gesture with his spear, pointing the way he had come. Then he drew a hollow shell from his mop of hair, placed it to his lips, and blew a note on it that echoed through the forest.

'That's a signal to his pals,' muttered Johnny Bull. 'I expect the bush is alive with them, looking for us.'

That it was a signal to other natives was soon clear, for there came a sound of rustling in the bush from several directions. Then again Papeeto pointed with his spear. 'You white feller comey,' he said. 'You comey plenty quick.'

The juniors exchanged anxious, troubled glances. They hesitated: but they knew that there was no help for it. They were, in fact, prisoners. To resist an armed savage, with bare hands, was hardly to be thought of: and it was plain, too, that others of Papeeto's tribe were not far away. And there was still a glimmer of hope that matters might be put on an amicable footing.

'We've got to chance it,' muttered Bob.

'Can't be helped, that I can see!' said Johnny Bull.

'What cannot be cured must go longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But while there is life there is hopefulness.'

'I say, you fellows.' It was a faint, dismal squeak from Billy Bunter. 'I say, I ain't going with that nigger. How do you know they ain't cannibals?'

'We know nothing about them, fathead,' said Frank Nugent. 'But we've got to dance to their tune, so get a move on.'

'Shan't!' moaned Bunter, feebly.

'You comey!' Papeeto's grin faded out, and a menacing look took its place. 'What name you no comey, when me Papeeto say comey?'

'Us feller likee comey too much,' said Harry, with an effort. 'Come on, you chaps. Get up, Bunter.'

'Beast!' moaned Bunter.

They had to make up their minds to it, and the five moved off in the direction pointed by Papeeto's spear. Billy Bunter did not stir. Papeeto stared at him.

'Little fat feller along glass-eyes, you comey!' he rapped. 'Oh, crikey! I-I-I'm tired-I-I-I'd rather not come!' mumbled Bunter.

'Tinkee you comey plenty quick!' said Papeeto. 'Likee no likee you comey.'

He lowered his spear, and pricked a fat shoulder with the sharp point. It was little more than a pin-prick: but it was enough for Billy Bunter. He bounded to his feet with a yell. 'Yaroooooh!'

Papeeto chuckled.

'Me tinkee you comey!' he grinned.

'Come on, you fat chump,' growled Johnny Bull. 'Can't you see we're prisoners, and there's no help for it.'

'Oh, crikey! Oh, lor!'

mumbled Bunter.

He rolled dismally after the Famous Five.

As they moved off into the bush, five or six black tribesmen joined Papeeto. All of them were armed with spears or clubs. They stared and

grinned at the schoolboys: and there was a gabble among them in a strange tongue that sounded like strings of vowels hardly interrupted by consonants, of which the prisoners understood nothing. But it was plain that they were in high feather over their capture: and for the present, at least, good-humour reigned. The juniors could only hope that it would last.

The name of 'Kafoo' was repeated many times in the incomprehensible gabble. Clearly, Big Chief Kafoo was a person of tremendous importance among the island tribesmen, and the juniors wondered uneasily what he might be like. It was only too probable that their fate might depend on the Big Chief's whim.

The Famous Five kept their chins up, as they were marched off in the midst of the little crowd of islanders. Billy Bunter's fat chin sagged: in fact he sagged all over, as he mumbled and stumbled his way through the bush. After some distance had been covered in bush which seemed to the juniors trackless, they found themselves in a run-way, where the going was easier. They could guess that it led to the dwelling-place of the islanders, and that they would arrive ultimately at a native village. How many miles they traversed, they did not know.

The run-way, intersected here and there by other run-ways, seemed endless. More and more black islanders appeared, and joined in what had become a procession. There were fifty of them, at least, round the Greyfriars party, grinning and cackling, by the time they came out of the interminable bush into open country. There, in the blaze of sunlight, their eyes fell upon a scene that, in other circumstances, would have been pleasant enough.

In the distance, far ahead, were hills, forest-clad against the blue sky. Nearer at hand, their eyes caught the gleam of water—a wide stream flowing between green banks. It was the first fresh water they had seen on the island, and they had indeed wondered whether it was waterless. No doubt the natives had selected that spot for their dwellings, for the supply of water. The stream flowed down from the distant hills, and found its way somewhere into the lagoon. On the placid surface several canoes were to be seen:

On the near bank, was a large building of coral slabs, roofed with palm-poles and pandanus leaves. Scattered about were clusters of huts, among which scores of black faces and fuzzy heads were visible. As the procession neared the village, a crowd of natives poured out and joined it. They were now following a broad path through cultivated fields of Indian corn, in which women were at work under the hot sun. Some of them raised their heads to stare at the procession as it passed on into the village.

In an open space in the midst of the irregular clusters of huts, there was a halt at last, in front of a hut larger than the rest. They could guess that it was the chief's house, and that they were going to see the great Kafoo at last. From that house, a native emerged. Papeeto greeted him in the incomprehensible island dialect, but they caught the name of Malulo. So this, evidently, was not the Big Chief.

Papeeto, after an exchange of words with him, turned to the juniors. 'Kafoo no stop!' he said. 'Kafoo along bush. You go along canoe-house, along you wait along Kafoo he comey, likee Malulo he say.'

'Oh, crikey!' moaned Bunter. The hapless fat Owl could hardly drag one weary leg after the other. Only his terror of the spears had kept him in motion.

'Brace up, old fat man,' said Bob, with an attempt at cheerfulness.

'You'll be sitting down soon. That must be the canoe-house, on the bank yonder.'

That surmise proved to be correct. Surrounded by a mob of natives, the prisoners were marched on to the large building by the stream. It was open at both ends, one towards the stream, the other towards the village. The interior was dusky, but the juniors could make out the shapes of several canoes with towering carved prows which they could guess were war-canoes.

Papeeto waved them in.

'You feller stop along this place, along Kafoo he comey!' he said.

They tramped wearily into the canoe-house. Billy Bunter plumped down on a floor of coral slabs, with a gurgling gasp of relief. For once the other fellows were glad to follow his example.

Papeeto grinned in at them.

'Big Chief Kafoo plenty too glad see white feller, along he comey!' he said. 'You look-see, eye belong you, you see um along he comey.'

With that, Papeeto lounged away, leaving the prisoners to themselves. But they were not left wholly to themselves. Black face after black face stared in at them, generally grinning.

'We're a sort of peep-show here, I suppose!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Let's hope that it will be nothing worse than that!' said Bob. 'They seem a good-tempered lot, so far. Hallo, hallo, hallo, here comes our pal Papeeto again.'

Papeeto stepped into the canoe-house, grinning as usual. He carried a large gourd in his black hand. It was full of water.

'Likee drinkee?' he asked.

'Oh, good!' gasped Billy Bunter.

The fresh water came like nectar to dry throats. The gourd passed from hand to hand, and was returned to Papeeto empty to the last drop. He walked off with it, still grinning.

The juniors sat and rested their weary limbs, and waited.

The curious sightseers cleared off, at last, but the babble of voices reached them from among the huts. They could only wait, and an anxious hour dragged by. Then the grinning face of Papeeto reappeared.

'Big Chief Kafoo he comey!' he said.

Harry Wharton and Co. jumped to their feet. The Big Chief was coming, and upon him all depended. They stared out of the dusky canoe-house into the sunlight. Papeeto raised a black hand to point, and their eyes fixed on a tall muscular figure striding among the huts: on a tattooed face, a feathered mop of hair, and a polished tin kettle slung on a coral necklace.

'Oh!' breathed Bob.

It was the Big Chief Kafoo. The Big Chief was no stranger to their eyes. They had seen him once before—only once, but on an occasion they were not likely to forget. The Big Chief was the brawny savage they had seen chasing Pompolongo. And once more hope was down to zero.

CHAPTER 19

THE BIG CHIEF

'HIM!' breathed Harry Wharton.

'That savage brute!' muttered Nugent.

'He doesn't look so savage now!' said Bob, hopefully. That was true, for what it was worth. The juniors remembered only too well the savage ferocity in the black tattooed face when they had seen it on the shore of the lagoon, and they knew that Pompolongo had barely escaped with his life. But the Big Chief's mood was changed now, to judge by his looks. Malulo had come out of the royal hut, and was speaking to him. The juniors could not hear what was said, neither could they have understood if they had heard. But whatever it was, it brought a grin of satisfaction to the Big Chief's black tattooed face.

They watched anxiously. There was a crowd of black faces round the Big Chief, but at a respectful distance. Only Malulo approached nearer, and Malulo's manner was not only respectful, but almost cringing. Clearly, Kafoo was monarch of all he surveyed, on the island, and feared by all the tribesmen—lord of life and death in his tribe. The arrogance of his bearing showed that he was well aware of his own greatness. While Malulo spoke, the Big Chief glanced several times towards the canoe-house. No doubt Malulo was telling him of the capture of the white castaways and it was satisfactory news to the Big Chief. His grin indicated as much.

Papeeto was not grinning now. Like the rest, he was regarding the Big Chief from a distance with awe tinged with fear. Wharton tapped him on a black arm, and he looked round at the prisoners.

'Big Chief Kafoo good feller along us feller?' asked Harry. That question brought back the ghost of a grin to Papeeto's black face.

'Him plenty good feller along you feller,' he answered. 'Him plenty too glad see white feller along this place, eye belong him.'

'Can he speak English?' asked Harry. 'I mean, him speakee along us feller tongue belong him?'

'Him speakee along beche-de-mer,' answered Papeeto. 'Plenty feller along this island speakee along beche-de-mer.'

'What the thump's beche-de-mer?' asked Bob.

'It's what they call the pidgin-English,' said Harry. 'We shall be able to speak to Kafoo, at least. Everything depends on him. You can see that he's boss of this show.'

'Him too much Big Chief altogether,' said Papeeto.

'That feller Malulo top feller along Kafoo.'

'Sort of Prime Minister, I suppose,' said Bob.

'No savvy prime minister,' said Papeeto. 'Him top feller along Kafoo. Kafoo likee. Sposee he no likee, head belong Malulo go chop.'

'Oh, my hat!' murmured Bob.

'Him comey,' added Papeeto. 'He speakee along you feller.'

The Big Chief came striding, or rather swaggering, towards the canoe-house, followed, a few paces behind, by Malulo. Papeeto backed away to a respectful distance, as the swaggering savage approached: majestic, in the eyes of the islanders, and in his own, with his plumes of feathers, the ring gleaming in his nose, and the added touch of magnificence of the polished tin kettle dangling on his broad black chest. He stopped, and fixed scrutinizing black eyes on the group of white faces.

'What name you white feller comey along island belong me?' he demanded.

'Us feller comey along island belong you, no can help,' explained Harry.

'Big feller storm makee comey.'

'What place ship belong you he stop?'

'No savvy what place he stop. Big storm makee comey long way too much, along canoe, along Kanaka.'

'Me savvy. Me see that feller, eye belong me. Sposee me catchee, me killy,' said Kafoo, his brow darkening. The escape of the Kanaka was evidently an irritating recollection. But his brow cleared again. 'That feller Kanaka go along big water. White feller stop along island. Me plenty glad see white feller stop along this place.' He grinned, with a flash of teeth. Then his glance passed the group, to Billy Bunter, still sprawling his weary, fat limbs on the coral floor. 'What name fat feller along glass-eyes no stand along foot belong him?'

'Get up, Bunter,' said Harry, hastily.

'Oh, crikey!' moaned Bunter.

Bob Cherry grasped a fat shoulder, and helped Bunter to his feet. The hapless fat Owl stood unsteadily, his eyes almost popping through his spectacles at the Big Chief, in helpless terror. To the surprise of the rest, the Big Chief eyed him with evident satisfaction. For some reason, unknown to them, the sight of the fattest member of the Greyfriars Remove was pleasing to his eyes. Even the terrified Owl was able to draw a little comfort from that. Apparently he was in no danger from the spear that Pompologo had so narrowly escaped.

'Plenty fat feller too much!' said Kafoo. 'Me likee altogether. Likee see you stop along island belong me.' The fat Owl seemed to have made a favourable impression.

'Plenty fat feller,' said Kafoo. 'Me likee too much.'

Me plenty glad you fat feller along glass-eyes comey along this place.'

'Oh!' gasped Bunter.

It was unexpected, but it was a great relief. The fat Owl pulled himself together a little.

Kafoo stepped back. His examination of the prisoners seemed to be over. He made a sign to Malulo, who approached, cringing. The Big Chief rapped out what the juniors guessed was an order, though they understood no word of the native dialect in which he spoke. Then Kafoo swaggered away, and disappeared into the royal hut.

'Seems that he's done with us!' muttered Bob. 'What next, I wonder!' said Harry.

What next was soon made clear. Malulo looked in at them.

'You white feller go along Papeeto,' he said.

'We're not to stop here, then,' said Nugent.

'No stop! You go along Papeeto, Kafoo he say.'

'I-I say, you fellows! They seem friendly enough,' mumbled Bunter. 'I say, think they might let us have something to eat?' Evidently, the fat Owl was recovering his courage. He remembered that he was hungry.

Malulo chuckled.

'Plenty eatee along place you stop,' he said. 'Plenty meat, plenty yam, taro, plenty eatee too much. You go along Papeeto.'

Malulo left them, with that. Papeeto looked in. 'You white feller comey,' he said.

'What place you takee us feller?' asked Harry.

'You see, eye belong you,' answered Papeeto. 'You comey too quick, along Big Chief he say.'

Clearly, the castaways were still prisoners. What the change of quarters might imply, they did not know. Kafoo had given the order, and the Big Chief's word was law. There was nothing for them to do but to obey, and they stepped out of the canoe-house as cheerfully as they could.

Even Billy Bunter was able to brace himself for another march, with the gladsome prospect of food ahead.

Papeeto led the way, and the castaways followed.

Crowds of black faces stared at them as they went, till they were outside the village. If any desperate thought of a dash for liberty entered their minds, they had to dismiss it: for half-a-dozen natives, armed with spears, followed on behind. Wherever they were being taken, and for whatever reason, they were still prisoners, and under guard.

The open country was left behind, as they were led into a run-way in the bush. Again the thick branches overhead gave a welcome screen from the blaze of the sun. The runway, they noted, was wider than any they had previously traversed, the earth trodden hard by the passage of many feet. Plainly, it was a path often used by the natives, and they wondered to what it led.

'Oh!' exclaimed Bob, suddenly.

They had reached the end of the run-way, and the sun blazed down on them again: and before their eyes rose a gigantic object they had seen before. They knew now to what the run-way led. It led to the glade of the rock idol, and evidently it was the path by which the little man with the strings of bones had come, and back into which he had fled at the sight of them.

'I say, you fellows, that's that beastly idol!' squeaked Billy Bunter. 'I say, what have they brought us here for?' No one could answer that question.

'There's that horrid little blighter that Papeeto called Tokoloo!' said Nugent, in a low voice. 'Looks as if he was expecting us.'

From the palm-pole hut near the rock statue emerged the little man with the strings of bones. His wizened face wrinkled in a grin, with a display of stumps of discoloured teeth. He showed no surprise at seeing them: no doubt he had already heard of the capture.

'You feller comey along Tokoloo!' said Papeeto. 'Tokoloo him wise feller too much. He makee rain comey, spose he likee: he makee catchee plenty fish-he makee all thing he likee.'

'I don't think!' murmured Bob.

The Greyfriars fellows were not likely to believe in the magical powers of the native witch-doctor. But evidently the cunning rascal was able to impose on the simple-minded islanders. Papeeto marched them on towards the rock idol.

They stopped at the wide-open doorway of the hut.

Papeeto exchanged a few words with Tokoloo, in the incomprehensible island dialect. Then he turned to the prisoners.

'You stop along Tokoloo,' he said. 'He makee plenty eatee along you feller-plenty-plenty.' He grinned as he spoke, and Tokoloo uttered an unmelodious falsetto cackle, as if they both found something amusing in what Papeeto had said: why, the juniors could not guess. 'Plenty-plenty eatee. You likee plenty eatee altogether.'

'Yes, rather!' gasped Bunter. Papeeto waved them into the hut.

'You no tinkee run along bush,' he added. He made a gesture towards the half-dozen natives with the spears. 'Sposee you tinkee run along bush, you dead feller too quick.'

They marched into the hut in silence. Papeeto and the others squatted in a half-circle round the doorway. There was little chance to attempt to 'run along bush'. Escape was a hopeless thought: and they could only wonder what their ultimate fate was to be—a fate which depended wholly on the whim of the Big Chief.

CHAPTER 20

HOPELESS DAWN

BILLY BUNTER gave an appreciative sniff.

There was a scent of cooking in Tokoloo's hut: a scent always welcome to his fat little nose.

Bunter was hungry. When Bunter was hungry, lesser matters naturally faded from his fat mind. The scent of cooking gave him new life.

It was a roomy hut. The floor was covered with mats, woven in curious designs, and similar mats hung from the palm-pole walls. Several palm-wood stools stood about, and Bunter plumped down on the nearest, with a gasp of relief. Tokoloo motioned to the others to do the same: a direction they were not sorry to obey, for they were weary to the bone. Then, from a huge cooking-pot in a corner, Tokoloo ladled out food, the scent of which was pleasant enough to fellows who had eaten little since early morning. Bunter sniffed and sniffed.

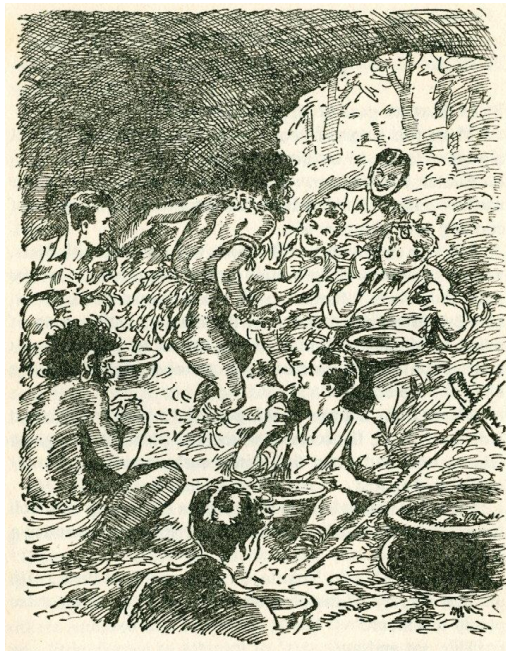
Six wooden bowls were filled with a thick soup in which lumps of meat floated. Each of the prisoners was handed a bowl.

'You eatee!' said Tokoloo. He grinned at them, with another display of discoloured stumps. 'You feller eatee plenty too much.'

They sat and ate.

Harry Wharton and Co. were glad enough of the meal.

Billy Bunter was more than glad. His fat face beamed over his bowl as he gobbled.



'YOU FELLER EATEE PLENTY TOO MUCH'

'I say, you fellows, this is all right,' said Bunter, with his mouth full. 'They're not going to starve us, at any rate. The grub's all right.'

'So everything's all right!' said Johnny Bull, sarcastically.

'Well, they're treating us well,' said Bunter. 'They seem friendly enough, too. If they keep this up, we're all right. This is the first decent food we've had since we got off the plane. Don't you fellows get into a flap.'

Ample food comforted the fat Owl: and the general grinning good-humour of the natives relieved his terrors. He was almost at his fat ease.

Bunter's bowl was emptied first. He blinked at Tokoloo. The witch-doctor immediately refilled it. Bunter re-started after a very brief interval. He gobbled and gobbled with great satisfaction.

Tokoloo watched him, with his little beady eyes, grinning as if the sight gave him satisfaction too. It seemed to the Famous Five that they could read, in that wizened, wrinkled face, wickedness and malice, and cruelty and derision. Bunter, happily, concentrated on the food.

All the bowls were empty, at last. The Famous Five were feeling the better for the meal, and even Bunter felt that he had had almost enough. Tokoloo gathered the bowls, refilled them, and handed them round again.

'You eatee!' he said.

'Thank you,' said Harry. 'We've had enough.'

'Well, I could do with some more!' remarked Billy Bunter, and he started cheerfully on his third bowl.

'All you feller eatee!' said Tokoloo.

'No wantee eatee any more,' said Harry.

'Me say you eatee.'

'No can!' said Harry.

The derisive grin widened on Tokoloo's repulsive face.

There was something chilling, in that hideous grin.

'You eatee all same me say!' he rapped.

'Look here, what's this game?' grunted Johnny Bull. 'We're not going to be stuffed like turkeys for Christmas.'

Harry Wharton gave a start. Johnny did not seem aware of the import of his own words. But they brought a dreadful, suspicion into Wharton's mind. Why was this mocking little wretch forcing food on them?

Tokoloo picked up a thick lawyer-cane from a corner of the hut. The juniors stared at him, as he swished it in the air: oddly reminding them of Mr. Quelch, at Greyfriars-now so far away!

'You no eatee, me beatee!' he snapped.

'Look here-!' growled Johnny.

'You no eatee, me beatee back belong you, plenty too much.' Tokoloo was snarling now, instead of grinning. Evidently, he meant what he said.

Any of the Famous Five could have knocked the little wretch spinning. But seven brawny savages were squatting round the doorway. There was no help for it: and slowly they obeyed.

Even Billy Bunter was slowing down. He had barely finished his third bowl by the time the others were through their second ample helpings.

Fortunately, Tokoloo seemed satisfied with that. The derisive grin returned to his evil face, and he left the hut. The castaways heard his shrill cackling voice in talk with the other natives, and sounds of laughter.

The sun was setting. The great rock idol, in full view from the doorway of the hut, was growing dim. They sat in silence, looking out into the sunset. Then Frank Nugent whispered, with a shiver in his voice.

'Harry! What are they stuffing us like this for?' Harry Wharton made no answer. But none was needed.

The same dreadful thought was in every mind now, but Bunter's. Billy Bunter sat breathing hard after his ample meal, and not thinking at all, unless of going to sleep. He curled up on the matted floor, and closed his eyes behind his spectacles.

The others were not likely to sleep.

They could guess now, with shuddering certainty, why they had been brought to the witch-doctor's hut, at the foot of the grim rock idol: the scene, they could not doubt, of heathen rites and cannibal feasts.

'So that's it!' muttered Johnny Bull, after a long silence. 'That's it!' said Bob. 'We're on a cannibal island.'

'But they seem such a jolly good-tempered lot!' muttered Nugent.

'So they are-in their own way!' said Harry. 'Kafoo's a bullying brute, and that little beast Tokoloo is an evil gnome: but the rest are good-tempered enough-though that won't stop them having a feast of what they call long-pig.'

'Our number's up.'

'Looks like it.'

Snore!

'Bunter can sleep,' muttered Nugent, with a glance at the fat figure curled up on the mats.

'It hasn't dawned on him yet,' said Harry. 'No need to tell him-he will know soon enough.'

There was another silence.

'How long, do you think?' asked Nugent, at last.

'Who knows? I believe they have their regular feast days. Might be days to wait, or-or-'

'Or to-morrow!' muttered Nugent, with a shudder.

'Perhaps.'

In the last glimmer of the sun, sinking on the Pacific, Tokoloo came back into the hut. He picked up a sleeping-mat, laid it down in the doorway, and stretched his skinny limbs on it. If he slept, it was like a weasel, for several times they caught the glitter of beady, black eyes. Outside, in a half-circle round the doorway, the half-dozen savages sat or sprawled.

Darkness fell.

Billy Bunter's snore came through the silence and the darkness. Sleep, to the captives who knew now what impended, seemed impossible. But at length, from sheer weariness, they stretched themselves on the matted floor, and closed their eyes.

Sleep, mercifully, came at last.

It was a stirring outside the hut, and a cackle of voices, that awakened them. Bob Cherry sat up, and rubbed his eyes, blinking in unexpected sunlight. He was surprised to find that he had slept through the night. It was sunrise on the glade. Bright rays gleamed in at the doorway of the witch-doctor's hut. Bob jumped up shook himself, and stepped to the doorway and looked out.

The great rock idol soared against the sky, the green-glass eyes and the shark's teeth glistening in the sun. At its base of coral rock, two or three dozen natives had gathered, most of them carrying baskets. From the baskets they were taking various edibles: yams, bread-fruit, bunches of bananas and plantains, drinking-nuts, fowls, and dried fish. These they laid, in obvious fear and reverence, at the shapeless feet of the idol.

'What the dickens are they up to?' muttered Johnny Bull, at Bob's elbow.

'Looks as if they're making that horrible thing gifts,' said Bob. 'We can guess who gets the benefit of it-that old villain Tokoloo.' He called to Papeeto, who stood near at hand, looking on. 'You feller Papeeto, what name plenty food stop along big rock feller?'

'Big feller Komamaloo likee plenty eatee,' answered Papeeto.

Komamaloo, apparently, was the name of the rock idol.

'You tinkee him eatee?' asked Bob.

'Tinkee too much him eatee.'

'You see um eatee, eye belong you?'

'No see um, eye belong me. Tokoloo see um eatee, eye belong him,' answered Papeeto. 'Tokoloo savvy him eatee.'

Evidently Tokoloo had the superstitious islanders well under his thumb. It was easy for the Greyfriars juniors to guess what became of the food offerings to Komamaloo. The cunning witch-doctor was well supplied. Tokoloo was already at his cooking-pot. The savoury odour that rose from it gave the castaways no pleasure now-now they knew. Tokoloo filled the eating-bowls. Then he looked at Bunter, still sleeping and snoring on the mats.

'Fat feller along glass-eyes sleepee too much!' he said.

He picked up the lawyer-cane, and brought it down sharply on the sleeping Owl. Billy Bunter came out of his slumbers with a startled yell.

'Ow! Owl What's that? Who's that? Beast!'

'You eatee!' said Tokoloo.

'Brekker, Bunter,' said Harry.

Billy Bunter gave Tokoloo a devastating blink. However, there was comfort in breakfast, for Bunter at least. The others had little appetite. They ate slowly, but they had to eat. Only Bunter enjoyed the meal.

Outside the hut, some of the natives had gone: others were chattering with Papeeto and his companions. The sun rose higher, gleaming down into the green glade, and the notes of innumerable wild birds came musically from the surrounding bush. A bright and sunny day was dawning on the lonely island. To the hapless castaways, it was a hopeless dawn.

CHAPTER 21

THE LAST SHOT IN THE LOCKER

BOB CHERRY caught his breath.

Sitting facing the wide open doorway of the Witch-doctor's hut, the rock idol was full in his view. And a strange, startling thought had come into his mind. The superstitious reverence with which the natives regarded the hideous idol was apparent in their looks. Komamaloo was to them a mighty god, Tokoloo his priest and minister. Back into Bob's mind came the recollection of the trick the fat Owl had played the previous day.

Suppose-!

'Oh!' breathed Bob.

Billy Bunter was deep in his second bowl. He did not look up or heed. But the others glanced at Bob. His face was excited.

'By gum! Might there be a chance yet?' Bob spoke in a whisper. 'You fellows, I've thought of something-'

'Give it a name,' said Johnny Bull.

They looked at Bob, inquiringly: but without hope.

There was, so far as they could see, no room for hope. Even if they could have escaped from the glade, they had no means of leaving that island of peril and horror. And there was no chance whatever of escape, from more than a score of the savages, all of them on the alert. What Bob had in his mind was a mystery to his friends.

Bob made a gesture towards the rock idol.

'Look at that brute of a thing,' he breathed. 'You can see that they dread it-it's got them all grovelling. Even that rat Tokoloo is a bit scared of it. Suppose-suppose-'

'Suppose what?' asked Harry, blankly.

'Suppose it should speak-!'

'What?'

'You remember how Bunter made us all jump yesterday, with his rotten ventriloquism, making us almost believe for a minute that the horrible thing was speaking-'

'What about that?'

'Can't you see?' Bob's whisper was husky with excitement. 'What that fat chump did yesterday, he could do again to-day. Didn't he take us in, making us fancy for a minute that a voice came from the idol, though we knew that it couldn't and didn't? What would be the effect, do you think, on those benighted savages? It would scare them out of their wits-such wits as they've got.'

'Oh!' breathed Harry.

'By gum!' muttered Johnny Bull.

'If-if they believed that the idol spoke-' breathed Nugent.

'Didn't we, yesterday, for a moment or two?' said Bob. 'And we know better-those superstitious natives don't! You heard what Papeeto said-they believe that Komamaloo eats their food offerings. That lying rascal Tokoloo tells them so, and they believe him. Think they've ever heard of ventriloquism in this island? They'd take it down like milk.'

Five faces were excited, now. Was it a hope?

It was a strange and startling idea. It seemed the wildest of hopes. And yet-and yet-if the idol was heard to speak, what would be the effect on the savages, slaves to superstition? They could never guess, never dream, that the voice of Komamaloo came from a ventriloquist. That was impossible. They had never heard the idol speak-but they had certainly never seen him eat, yet they believed that he devoured their offerings of yams and fowls and bread-fruit. They would believe that Komamaloo was

speaking. And Komamaloo could be made to say whatever Billy Bunter chose to make him say!

'By gum!' repeated Johnny Bull. 'It might work.'

'It might!' muttered Nugent.

'The mightfulness is terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But at leastfully it is a chance.'

'Try it on!' said Bob. 'It's the last shot in the locker.

If it works we may get out of this jam. If it doesn't, our number's up. Try it on.'

'Not much doubt about that, at any rate,' said Harry. 'We'll try it on.' Billy Bunter blinked up from an empty bowl.

'I say, you fellows, what are you whispering about?' he inquired. 'I say, this is jolly good grub. It tastes like chicken. I say, we shall be all right, if it goes on like this.'

Evidently, no hint of the dreadful truth had yet dawned on Bunter's fat mind. He was feeling, at the moment, rather like a pig in clover. In their excitement at that startling idea, the Famous Five had ceased to eat. Bunter has ceased because his bowl was empty, and he was ready for refilling.

Tokoloo's black, beady eyes glittered round from his cooking-pot in the corner.

'You feller eatee!' he snapped.

Billy Bunter held out his empty bowl. It was refilled at once. Bunter settled down to further enjoyment. The Famous Five resumed their meal. Their faces were brighter now. There was at least a glimmer of hope. The more they thought over it, the more feasible it seemed. It was, at any rate, as Bob had said, the last shot in the locker.

And it all depended on Billy Bunter!

Only Bunter, the fat, obtuse Owl of the Remove, could pull the Greyfriars party through-if Bunter could! For the first time since they had boarded the air-liner for New Zealand, the chums of the Remove had reason to be glad that the fat Owl was on the spot. For once, if for once only, William George Bunter was the right man in the right place!

The ample-too ample-meal was finished at last.

Even Billy Bunter was more than satisfied. Tokoloo, grinning, left the hut, and sat down to his own meal with the islanders outside. Every now and then he, and the others, glanced in at the doorway, and there was a cackle of laughter. They chattered incessantly, in their own strange tongue, and several times the juniors caught the word 'kai-kai'-a word of grim omen to prisoners on a cannibal island.

Billy Bunter proceeded to stretch his fat limbs on the mats, with the intention of resuming the slumbers interrupted by Tokoloo's lawyer-cane. But there was no more slumber for the fat Owl. The word 'kai-kai' floating in at the doorway might mean, and very likely did mean, that the feast of 'long pig' was scheduled for the near future: and there was no time to be lost.

'Bunter!' said Harry Wharton, quietly.

"Eh! What?" mumbled Bunter.

'Sit up, old fat man,' said Bob. 'You're wanted.'

'The wantfulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I'm going to sleep. That beast woke me up, and-'

'Kick him!' growled Johnny Bull.

'Beast!'

'Listen to me, Bunter,' said Harry. 'We're in danger here-our lives are in danger-'

'Rot!' said Bunter. 'Those niggers are friendly enough. Never saw such a jolly good-tempered lot. And look how they're feeding us! Why, we're

living on the fat of the land now. They're giving us all we want-more than we want, really. Over-doing it! But it's jolly good. I'm sure that was chicken we had for brekker. Don't you fellows think it was chicken?' 'Never mind that,' said Harry, patiently. 'Our lives are in danger, Bunter. We've thought of a last chance-or rather, Bob has. You remember that trick you played on us here yesterday-'

'He, he, he! Weren't you jolly well scared!' chuckled Bunter.

'Never mind that, either. You could do it again,' said Harry.

'Of course I could,' answered the fat Owl, complacently. 'You jolly well know what a wonderful ventriloquist I am. But what about it?'

'That's what we want you to do now,' said Harry. 'It may work, or it may not-but it's a chance. You could make Komamaloo speak-that's the name of their idol-and give them orders. See? '

'Oh!' said Bunter. He wrinkled his fat brow thoughtfully. 'I could do it, of course. Only, I can't speak their lingo.'

'You can speak the pidgin-English which most of them understand. That would do the trick.'

Billy Bunter chuckled a fat chuckle again.

'I'll bet it would scare them, if that chunk of rock started talking!' he said. 'Just like it scared you fellows. He, he, he!'

'You fat chump!' growled Johnny Bull.

'Well, it jolly well did scare you!' said Bunter. 'And I'll bet it would scare those niggers. But-'

'Well, we want you to try it on,' said Harry.

Billy Bunter shook a fat head.

'Suppose they spotted me-'

'They couldn't.'

'Well, I'm not chancing it,' said Bunter. 'We're all right so far, and there's no need for you fellows to get into a flap. Look how they're feeding us.'

'Better tell him,' said Nugent.

'Better tell me what?' demanded Bunter.

'You howling ass!' growled Johnny Bull. 'Can't you guess why they're stuffing us like geese? They're cannibals.'

'Wha-a-a-a-at! '

'We're on a cannibal island, Bunter,' said Harry. 'We guessed it yesterday, when that little beast forced food on us. Now you know!'

'Oh, crikey!'

Billy Bunter was not thinking of going to sleep now! He sat petrified, his eyes bulging behind his spectacles. Every vestige of colour faded out of his fat face. He was overwhelmed, now that he understood, at last, the fearful peril that impended over the castaways. His teeth chattered in his head.

'Oh, crikey!' he repeated, faintly. 'Cannibals! Oh, crikey!'

He sagged on the mats. When there was, or he fancied there was, no danger, Billy Bunter was full of beans. When danger accrued, he was a limp rag. And now he was the limpest of rags: and the castaways could only wait for him to recover.

CHAPTER 22

THE VOICE OF KOMAMALOO

HARRY WHARTON and Co. sat in silence.

It was a gloomy silence.

Bob Cherry's idea, strange and startling as it was, was practicable. It was, at least, a chance: and it was their last chance. But it was a plan that only Billy Bunter could carry out. Had one of the Co. possessed his weird gift of ventriloquism, all would have been plain sailing. But the only member of the party who was capable of playing on the superstitious fears of the natives, was Billy Bunter—and Bunter, sagging on his mat, was shaking like a leaf.

Johnny Bull broke the silence.

'No go!' he grunted. 'That fat chump hasn't the nerve even to try it on.'
'Give him time!' murmured Bob. 'He's had a bit of a shock. If he can pull himself together, I believe it will work.'

'If!' grunted Johnny.

They sat in silence again, looking out at the sunlight and the chattering natives. Billy Bunter did not look, at the moment, like pulling himself together. But there came, at length, a mumbling squeak from him.

'I say, you fellows.'

'Well?' said Harry, curtly.

'I-I-I'll try it on, if you like. Oh, crikey! I wish I hadn't come on that plane!' groaned Hunter. 'I-I say, think I could get away with it?'

'You could, if you had the nerve of a bunny rabbit!' growled Johnny.

'Beast!' moaned Bunter, feebly.

'Try it on, old fat man,' said Bob Cherry, encouragingly. 'If it works, it may get us all out of this jam. I'll bet that whole crew will be scared stiff, if they hear a voice from Komamaloo.'

'Think so?' mumbled Bunter.

'Sure of it,' answered Bob. 'And you can make him say anything you jolly well like. Might even make them let us have a canoe to get away from the island.'

'Oh!' said Bunter.

'Anyhow, it can't make matters worse,' said Nugent. 'They couldn't guess that it came from you.'

'No, they couldn't!' agreed Bunter. 'You fellows couldn't have, yesterday, if you hadn't known about my ventriloquism.'

The fat Owl was recovering a little. The danger of the castaways, now that he understood it, was appalling. But there was no immediate peril in trying on a spot of ventriloquism. Whatever the natives thought of a voice from Komamaloo, they could not think of him in connection with it. Slowly, he pulled himself together. 'I-I-I'll try it on!' he mumbled. He heaved his weight up from the mat.

'Go it!' said Bob.

Billy Bunter blinked out of the doorway, at the chattering islanders, and at the towering rock idol close at hand, with its hideous painted face and grinning jaws glistening with shark's teeth. After all, what he had done before, he could do again. And if it worked—

He gave his little fat cough.

The Famous Five gathered round him, waiting. It was a situation of which they could never have dreamed: themselves powerless, and everything, to their very lives, depending on Billy Bunter.

Something of his fat self-confidence revived in Bunter.

He realised that he was, at the moment, the most important person in the party. It was, in fact, Bunter first, and the rest nowhere.

'I say, you fellows—'

'Get on with it, if you're going to,' grunted Johnny Bull.

'You shut up, Bull,' said Bunter.

'What?'

'I said shut up, and I mean shut up. Leave this to me,' said Bunter.

Johnny Bull breathed very hard. But he said no more. 'We've got to make them believe that it's that beastly idol speaking,' went on Bunter. 'And they seem to have forgotten it's there, with their chattering. Make them look at it somehow, before I start.'

Billy Bunter was 'wise' to all the tricks of ventriloquism.

And the most obvious trick was to fix the attention of his audience upon the spot whence the ventriloquist's voice was to appear to proceed.

'That's easy!' said Bob. 'I'll remind them of jolly old Komamaloo.'

He stepped out of the hut, and made as if to walk away.

Up jumped Papeeto, spear in hand. A shark's-tooth point gleamed at Bob's chest, Papeeto grinning over the spear.

'You feller stop along hut,' said Papeeto.

'Komamaloo no wantee us feller stop along hut,' said Bob. 'Komamaloo plenty too mad along you feller, sponsee you makee stop.'

'No tinkee!' said Papeeto. But he gave an uneasy glance over a black shoulder at the rock idol. The bare thought of invoking the wrath of Komamaloo evidently alarmed him.

'You savvy plenty, sponsee Komamaloo speakee, mouth belong him,' said Bob.

'Him no speakee!' said Papeeto.

'Tinkee you hear, ear belong you, plenty quick!' said Bob: and he turned back and rejoined his companions.

Papeeto stood staring up at the rock idol. Many of the natives evidently understood the pidgin-English, for they stared in the same direction, and there was a gabble of voices in the native dialect. Even Tokooloo seemed impressed, for his black beady eyes fixed on the idol like the others. Billy Bunter gave another little fat cough. He had his audience where he wanted them now, and he delayed no longer.

Suddenly, a long, low, wailing sound was heard. It was familiar to the Famous Five: it was the sound that had made them jump, twenty-four hours ago, on that very spot. Familiar as it was, and though they knew that it was a ventriloquial trick, it startled them.

Its effect on the crowd of islanders was much more startling. Black faces stared up at Komamaloo in wonder and alarm. The long wail was repeated, and to every black ear it seemed that it came from the grinning jaws of Komamaloo.

'Great pip! Look!' breathed Bob Cherry.

The whole crowd of natives, twenty or more of them, flung themselves on their faces, at the foot of the rock idol. Even Tokooloo, impostor and cheat as he was, shared in the superstitious terror that had seized the rest. From the hut, the Greyfriars fellows stared at a crowd of black backs glistening in the sun. They had hoped, and believed, that a voice from Komamaloo would terrify the fuzzy-brained savages. But they could never have hoped for so complete a panic.

'Oh, crikey!' breathed Billy Bunter. His eyes almost popped through his spectacles at the sprawling savages. 'I say, you fellows- Oh, crikey!'

'Its worked!' murmured Bob. 'Just a howl from Komamaloo, and they're scared out of their wits.'

'The scarefulness is terrific!' muttered Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'Carry onfully, my esteemed idiotic Bunter.' Billy Bunter grinned.

He could grin now!

The previous day, his ventriloquial trickery with the rock idol had earned him a bumping. Now it was the last shot in the locker-all that stood between the castaways and the cooking-pots. Fat self-satisfaction beamed in Billy Bunter's plump visage. Bunter was the goods!

'I say, you fellows, are they scared?' grinned Bunter.

'They jolly well are!' said Bob. 'Get on with the good work, old fat man. Make him speak in the pidgin lingo.' Bunter blinked at him.

'I don't need you to tell me what to do, Cherry,' he answered. 'I'm handling this.'

'You fat ass-'

'You can shut up!' said Bunter.

'Look here, Bunter-' began Harry Wharton.

'You shut up too, Wharton.'

At that moment, Billy Bunter came very near another bumping. But it was no moment for giving the fat Owl that for which he asked! Five fellows breathed very hard- but in silence.

The fat Owl, full of confidence now, gave them a vaunting blink.

'Just leave it to me,' he said. 'All you fellows have got to do is to keep quiet. See?'

There was no reply to that. Billy Bunter blinked out again at the swarm of prostrate savages. Only Tokoloo raised his head, to stare up at Komamaloo with mingled wonder and doubt and fear. The cunning witch-doctor, accustomed to impose upon his fellow-tribesmen with his trickeries, suspected trickery, after the first moment of panic. But he bowed his head again, as a voice came, or at least appeared to come, from the grinning jaws of Komamaloo.

'You black feller, you hear me speakee, ear belong you. Me Komamaloo speakee along you feller.'

Harry Wharton and Co. looked on, and listened, breathlessly. Komamaloo, if he spoke at all, might have been expected to speak in the native dialect, of which the Greyfriars ventriloquist knew not a syllable. But the pidgin-English evidently passed muster with the unthinking islanders. To their ears, it was the voice of Komamaloo, in whatever dialect that mighty being chose to speak.

There was a pause. But it was brief. Billy Bunter was warming to his work, as it were. He was full of beans, once more. Again the voice of Komamaloo came to trembling ears.

'You hear me speakee, ear belong you. Me say you good feller along white feller stop along hut. You no good feller along white feller, you all go dead along feller shark stop along sea. Me likee white feller too much. Plenty too much me likee white feller. You savvy me say makee good friend along white feller.'

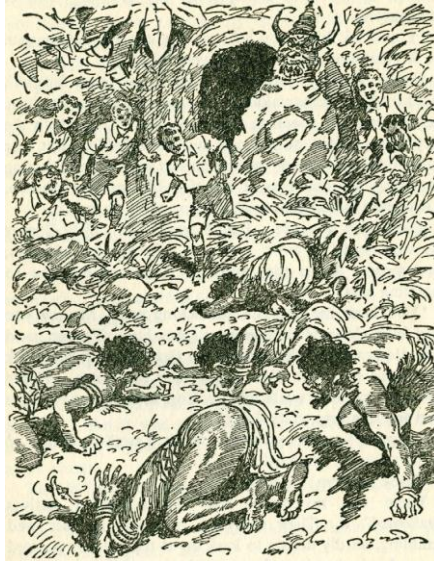
'By gum!' murmured Bob. 'If they swallow that-'

Billy Bunter chuckled.

'Look at them!' he said.

There was no doubt that the benighted natives 'swallowed' it. They sprawled prostrate in fear and trembling, hardly daring to look up at the hideous painted face and grinning jaws from which they believed that the voice of Komamaloo came.

'We shall soon see how it works out!' muttered Nugent. But it was long minutes before any of the prostrate savages stirred, after Komamaloo had ceased to speak.



'BY GUM!' MURMURED BOB. 'IF THEY SWALLOW THAT-'

Papeeto was the first on his feet. He gave a scared look up at the idol, then looked round at the castaways in the doorway of the hut. Then he came towards them, his black face as near pallor as a black face could be.

'You feller hear, ear belong you?' he asked.

'We feller hear, ear belong us!' answered Harry.

'Me good feller along you, all samee Komamaloo he say!' mumbled Papeeto.

'All black feller good feller along you, along Komamaloo he say. No makee long-pig along you feller. Komamaloo likee white feller. No makee long-pig. Good feller along you feller.'

He left bright faces in the witch-doctor's hut, as he moved away.

'Did it work?' murmured Bob.

'Did it?' said Nugent. 'Like a charm.'

Harry Wharton drew a deep, deep breath.

'Looks as if Bunter may pull us through;' he said. 'Thank goodness you thought of it, Bob. It was a brainwave.'

'We're not out of the wood yet,' said Johnny Bull.

'We're out of the cooking-pots, at any rate,' answered Bob. 'And jolly old Komamaloo is going to keep us out.'

Sniff, from Billy Bunter.

'You mean, I'm going to keep you out,' he said. 'You fellows fancy yourselves, don't you? Well, where would you be without me?'

There was no shaking or shivering about the fat Owl now. The overwhelming success of his ventriloquial trickery not only reassured him, it inflated him almost to bursting point! He rebounded, as it were, from the depths of funk to the heights of self-confidence and self-satisfaction. He was hardly recognizable as the Bunter who had shivered and mumbled on the mat. He swelled almost visibly!

'Don't, you fellows get into a flap again,' he went on, with a patronizing blink at the Famous Five. 'I'll see you through. Fat lot of use any of you would be, wouldn't you? You can thank your lucky stars that I'm here to look after you.'

To which the Famous Five made no rejoinder. They did not even feel like booting the bumptious Owl, at the moment. The fearful vision of the feast of 'long-pig' was fading out: and if it faded out entirely, it was William George Bunter who worked the oracle! and they were willing, if it so pleased him, to let him swell like the frog in the fable. Billy

Bunter, for once, was welcome to throw his extensive weight about, with never a boot applied to his fat person.

CHAPTER 23

THE IMPORTANCE OF BILLY BUNTER

'WHAT next?'

Bob Cherry asked that question. It was a difficult one to answer. The chums of Greyfriars were hopeful, and cheerful, now. They were strolling about the green glade, glad to get out into the fresh air, and not a hand was raised to stop them. The change in the state of affairs was a tremendous relief. They could not be sure that it would last: but there was, at least, ample room for hope. Komamaloo had spoken: and if needed, could speak again.

There was now a numerous crowd of natives in the glade. Scores of the black islanders came and went. The news that Komamaloo had spoken had spread, and crowds of wondering and awe-stricken savages came to stare at the rock idol, and there was an incessant babble of voices in the native dialect. It was a spot of excitement such as the island had never known before. And among them all, there was no sign of hostility towards the 'white fellers'. The looks cast on them were either friendly or indifferent. Only Tokooloo gave them sidelong evil glances.

It was, in fact, clear, that if they chose to leave the glade, and make their way back to the lagoon, not a hand or a spear would bar the way. They were, for the time at least, free to do what they pleased. But they did not think of leaving the glade. The voice of Komamaloo was their only protection. They had not forgotten Kafoo, and his ferocious pursuit of Pompologo. They had no defence except under the shadow of the rock idol.

'What next?' repeated Bob. 'We're all right so far. They've taken in Bunter's gammon like milk. But-'

'The butfulness is terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, shaking his dusky head. 'What can we do nextfully?'

'We've got to get off this island somehow, while they're so jolly friendly,' said Johnny Bull. 'But-'

'If we could get hold of a canoe!' said Harry. 'We saw some at their village. But-'

'How?' said Nugent.

'Komamaloo might fix it, with Bunter's help!' said Bob. 'Better chance it at sea, than stick here among a crowd of cannibals, if-if it could be worked.'

'I say, you fellows.'

The Famous Five had enjoyed their freedom to stroll about in the glade, after the long weary hours in the witch-doctor's hut. But Billy Bunter had not been so disposed. The tropical day was hot, and Billy Bunter felt the heat all over his extensive circumference. Bunter preferred reposing his fat limbs on a mat in the shadow of the rock idol. However, he had now got a move on, and he joined the chums of the Remove, blinking at them with a very superior blink. Bunter was quite at his ease, if they were not. The success of his trickery had got into Bunter's fat head. At Greyfriars School, Bunter was the most inconsiderable member of the Remove, liable to be booted for snooping other fellows' tuck. But Greyfriars School was far away now-almost like a dream of the past to the castaways on a cannibal island. Here Billy Bunter was the goods! Bunter, and Bunter only, stood between the whole party and the cooking-pots. And Bunter was the fellow to rub it in!

'I say, what are you pow-wowing about?' he inquired. 'Getting into a funk again? Nothing to be funky about, while I'm here to look after you.'

'You fat chump-!' began Johnny Bull.

'That will do!' said Bunter, with a wave of a fat hand.

'What?'

'Pack all that up,' said Bunter. 'I don't want any cheek from you, Bull, or any of you. I'm going to look after you, and protect you. I don't expect gratitude. But you'd better be civil.'

'If you're asking to have your fat head smacked-'

'Try it on,' said Bunter, coolly. 'Like me to make Komamaloo speak again, and order those niggers to give you a dozen with a lawyer-cane?'

Johnny stared at him. Never had he felt more disposed to smack a fat head. Probably he would have done so, had not Bob pushed him back.

Johnny, with deep feelings, tramped away, leaving Bunter grinning.

The other four remained, looking at the vaunting Owl, also with deep feelings. This was a new Bunter, whom it was not easy to tolerate. Yet they had to realise that the power of which he boasted was in his hands- and Bunter, with power in his fat hands, was the fellow to use it. They had already learned that the fuzzy-brained savages would tremble and obey at the voice of Komamaloo. Billy Bunter, if he chose, could do exactly as he had said. Even that arrogant savage, Kafoo the Big Chief, did not possess such power as reposed in the fat paws of the Owl of the Remove!

'He, he, he! That's shut Bull up!' remarked Bunter, complacently. 'And while we're about it, I may as well warn you fellows to mind your p's and q's. I don't want any cheek from any of you. I'm going to protect you and look after you. But-'

'Look here, Bunter-' said Harry.

'Don't interrupt me, please!' said Bunter. 'I'm talking. When we're at Greyfriars, Wharton, you're captain of the Remove, and fancy yourself no end of a big gun. Well, we're not at Greyfriars now. We're on a cannibal island and goodness only knows whether we shall ever get off it. But for me, where would you be? I ask you!'

Only too plainly and unpleasantly, the fat Owl's success had got into his head! There was a strong desire, on all sides, to boot him round the rock idol and back again. But Billy Bunter was not a fellow to be booted now. Far from it.

'That's that!' said Bunter, as they stood silent. 'Keep in mind that I'm the only fellow here that matters, and we shall get on. No more cheek Now, if you've got anything to say, Wharton, you can say it.'

The captain of the Greyfriars Remove breathed very hard.

But he answered quietly.

'We've been discussing what we can do next,' he said. 'It's possible that Komamaloo might make them give us a canoe and leave the island, taking our chance at sea.'

'You could wangle it, Bunter,' said Bob. 'At least you could try it on.'

'I'll think it over,' said Bunter.

'No time to lose,' said Nugent. 'If we're going to try it on, the sooner the better.'

'That's for me to decide,' answered Bunter, coolly. 'I'll think it over, and let you know what I decide.'

'My esteemed idiotic Bunter-'

'You can shut up, Inky. I don't want any argument,' said Bunter. 'I don't think much of chancing it at sea in a canoe, after what we went through in Pompologo's canoe. Still, I'll think it over.'

With that, the fat Owl walked, or rather strutted, away.

It was getting near time for another meal, and he headed for the witch-doctor's hut. Harry Wharton and Co. stood looking at one another.

'Isn't he nice?' murmured Bob Cherry. 'The niceness is terrific.'

'We shall have to give the fat chump his head,' said Harry. 'We've got no choice about that. After all, he can't help being a born idiot.'

Johnny Bull rejoined them, now that Bunter had relieved them of his attractive society, and they resumed their stroll. All faces were very

thoughtful. Nothing, obviously, could be done without Bunter: and between obtuseness and self-conceit, Bunter presented difficulties. Bunter had said that he would 'think it over', and it had to be left at that. It was a new, and far from pleasant experience for the Famous Five, to have to wait on Billy Bunter's will and pleasure, and defer decision till he had made up his lordly mind. It would have been ever so much more agreeable to kick the fatuous fat Owl. But they had to get it down.

'Tiffin!' said Bob Cherry, at last, and they walked back to the witch-doctor's hut. Billy Bunter had already started on an ample meal. Tokoloo was at his cooking-pot. His wizened wicked face expressed sheer evil, as he filled the bowls for the castaways. It was probable that, now that the first effect of Komamaloo's voice had worn off, there was doubt in his cunning mind, though he was still under the influence of fear.

'That little beast would like to make long-pig of us, if he dared!' muttered Nugent. 'I believe he's still got it in mind.'

Chuckle, from Billy Bunter.

'Leave him to me!' he said. 'I fancy I know how to keep him in order. Why, those silly niggers would chuck him into his own cooking-pot, if Komamaloo told them to.'

'By gum,' said Bob. 'I believe they would! Komamaloo's got them scared stiff. You could make him cough up that canoe for us, Bunter.'

'I may, or I may not,' said Bunter. 'I'll think it over. But don't you fellows get the wind up. You're all right so long as I'm here to protect you. No need for you to be funky. I'll look after you.'

And Billy Bunter resumed gobbling from his bowl, gobbling and gobbling with great satisfaction. And the Famous Five, exercising considerable self-restraint, refrained from jamming his fat face down into the bowl.

CHAPTER 24

BUNTER KNOWS HOW

'BUNTER-!'

'Don't bother!'

'Look here-'

'Shut up!'

Tokoloo had left the hut. He had not ventured to cram the castaways with food, as before, under threat of the lawyer-cane. The fear of Komamaloo kept him in check. But he gave them an evil look, as he went, and they noted that he left the glade by the run-way that led to the village. They could not help wondering, uneasily, what turn affairs might take, if Kafoo came on the scene. The Big Chief might not prove so slavishly submissive to Komamaloo as the rest of the islanders. So far, the fat Owl's trickery had seen them through. There was not a glance of hostility among the crowds of natives in the glade. But they could not tell what might be the Big Chief's reaction to the voice of Komamaloo. It was only too likely that their present safety hung by a thread.

Billy Bunter seemed to have no such doubts.

He was sitting in the doorway, his eyes and spectacles fixed on the towering rock idol. His fat brow was corrugated. Thinking was quite an unusual exercise for Billy Bunter. But now he was concentrating his fat intellect, such as it was.

What his fat reflections might be, the other fellows did not know. But he did not want them interrupted. He snapped over a fat shoulder at Harry Wharton.

'Will you listen to me, Bunter?' said Harry, as patiently as he could.

'No! I'm thinking it out,' said Bunter.

'What are you doing that with?' inquired Bob Cherry.

Bunter gave him a look!

'I've told you I don't want any cheek, Cherry. Bear that in mind,' he snapped.

'I'm going to boot him!' muttered Johnny Bull. 'Shut up, all of you!' said Bunter.

'You've got to listen,' said Harry. 'That little beast Tokoloo has gone to the village. As likely as not Kafoo may come back with him.'

'Who cares?' jeered Bunter.

The previous day, in the canoe-house, the fat Owl had shivered like a fat jelly under the eyes of the Big Chief. Now, it seemed, he couldn't have cared less. It was an amazing change in Bunter.

'Well, if you don't care, we do,' said Harry. 'We're here among a horde of cannibals, and they may turn on us at a word from Kafoo.'

'Not with me here to protect you.'

'That may not last,' said Harry. 'Our best guess is to get away while we've got a chance-if we've got a chance.'

'Leave that to me,' said Bunter.

'I tell you-'

'You needn't tell me anything. I know best.'

There was really no reply to be made to that. Kicking the fatuous fat Owl through the doorway would have been satisfactory, but not useful, in the peculiar circumstances. They could only give him expressive looks.

Heedless of expressive looks, Billy Bunter resumed his meditations, whatever they were, the Famous Five watching him in silence.

Finally, the fat Owl condescended to take note of their existence. He favoured them with a fat grin. Nobody else in the witch-doctor's hut felt like grinning. They were only too uneasy about what might happen if the Big Chief came on the scene. Only Bunter was full of beans. His supply of

beans, indeed, seemed unlimited. It was quite a new Bunter. Only too clearly, the success of his trickery had gone to his head.

'I fancy I can work it!' he said, complacently.

'If you could get us a canoe-!' said Bob.

'You can forget that!' said Bunter. 'I had enough of that in Pompolongo's canoe. Wash that out.'

'There must be other islands, not far away,' said Harry. 'We saw war-canoes at the village. And the fact that most of them speak the pidgin-English shows that this island isn't so isolated as it seemed to us when we landed. We might get to some island that ships touch at.'

'Might!' said Bunter. 'Not good enough for me, I can tell you.'

'What else?' asked Nugent.

Evidently, something had been working in Bunter's fat mind. His fat self-confidence was unbounded. The Famous Five did not feel like sharing it. But William George Bunter was master of the situation, irksome as it was. Bunter had to be given his head!

'I've thought it all out, and I've got it cut and dried,' the fat Owl condescended to explain. 'You fellows may be scared of Kafoo: but I don't care a bean if he shows his ugly mug here. He's only a silly nigger like the rest, and I can handle him all right. At least, Komamaloo can!

He, he, he.'

'Perhaps!' said Harry.

'No perhaps about it,' said Bunter. 'I'll jolly well have the whole crew of them feeding from my hand, before long.'

'Some hope!' said Bob.

'You'll see!' said Bunter, cheerfully.

'Didn't you see them all flop down on their silly faces when Komamaloo spoke this morning? He, he, he! Haven't there been swarms of them around, since then, and aren't they all terrified of that silly chunk of stone? I can jolly well make Komamaloo say what I jolly well like, and you can bet that they'll jump to his orders'. I'm going to make them sack that ruffian Kafoo.'

'What?'

'Oh, my hat!'

'Draw it mild, Bunter.'

'Think I couldn't!' said Bunter, disdainfully. 'I'll jolly well show you, when he pokes his ugly mug in. Why, they'd chop his head off if Komamaloo gave the word.'

'And that's not all!' went on Bunter. 'Komamaloo's going to tell them that I'm boss here-cock of the walk instead of Kafoo.'

'Oh, crumbs.'

'You'll see!' said Bunter. 'I'm going to be boss of this show.'

They gazed at him.

Great thoughts, evidently, had been germinating in that fat brain. Billy Bunter had thought it out, and this was the result! He had realised to the full the power that lay in his fat hands: and he was going to use it. And amazing as it was, and though it rather took their breath away, there was little doubt that he could do precisely what he had mapped out to do. He no longer had any fear of Kafoo. It was for Kafoo to fear!

'You just wait!' trilled Bunter. 'I've got it all cut and dried, as I said. I'm going to kick Tokoloo out, and keep this hut for us. I've got to keep in touch with Komamaloo, of course. He, he, he! That cheeky little beast Tokoloo whopped me with his lawyer-cane this morning! I'll give him lawyer-cane! You just wait and see!'

That was all that the Famous Five could do-wait and see! But, as it happened, they had not long to wait. Papeeto's black face looked into the hut.

'Big Chief Kafoo comey!' said Papeeto.

'You tinkee him good feller along us feller?' asked Harry.

'No savvy,' answered Papeeto. 'Him plenty flaid along Komamaloo, but him likee long-pig too much altogether. Me no savvy.'

In grim silence, the castaways gathered in the doorway to watch the arrival of the Big Chief. The peril was by no means past.

What Kafoo's arrival might portend, they could not tell.

The Big Chief, accustomed to exercise unquestioned sway, savage and arrogant, lord of life and death in his tribe might prove a quite different proposition from the other natives. They could only hope that Bunter's fat self-confidence was well-founded, as Kafoo came stalking out of the run-way from the bush into the glade.

The Big Chief's aspect was not encouraging. His brows were knitted in a dark frown. Malulo and Tokoloo who followed him, were evidently in cringing dread of his wrath. Papeeto and the rest eyed him with fear.

When the Big Chief was angry, heads were in danger in his tribe. And he looked in a savage sullen temper now. No doubt the news that Komamaloo had spoken had perturbed him, and perhaps alarmed him with a misgiving that his own authority might be trembling in the balance.

He came to a halt in front of the rock idol, staring up at the glittering green eyes and grinning jaws. The castaways could read mingled fear and doubt in his sullen face. There was a deathly silence round him. Then Kafoo spoke to Tokoloo, in rasping tones, in the native dialect.

Harry Wharton touched Papeeto on a black arm.

'What is he saying, you feller Papeeto?' he asked, in a low voice.

'Him no tinkee Komamaloo speakee!' breathed Papeeto. 'His say sposee Komamaloo speakee, what name he no speakee now Big Chief listen, ear belong him.' Evidently, the Big Chief had his doubts!

Billy Bunter gave his fat little cough.

It was time for Komamaloo to speak!

CHAPTER 25

THE FALL OF THE MIGHTY

KAFOO stood staring up at the rock idol. All eyes were fixed in the same direction. There was, for some moments, a dead silence. Then the Big Chief gave a sudden, violent start, as a low howling sound became audible. His black eyes distended as he stared. If that wailing howl did not come from the grinning jaws of Komamaloo, not a single savage in the staring crowd doubted that it did. Even Harry Wharton and Co. could hardly have doubted, had they not known that the Greyfriars ventriloquist was at their elbow.

The effect on the natives was as electrical as before.

Many threw themselves on their faces on the earth, others on their knees. Kafoo did neither. His arrogant pride upheld him, and he stood erect: but there was no longer doubt in his savage face, only fear. And his black knees knocked together, as the howl was followed by the voice of Komamaloo.

'All you feller, hear, ear belong you!' came the voice. 'Me Komamaloo speakee along you feller. You do all thing me say. You no do all thing me say, me plenty angry along you.'

Dead silence again.

Then the voice of Komamaloo went on:

'Along you no do all thing me say, you go dead along shark stop along sea. All feller along this island go dead altogether too much. Me Komamaloo speakee.'

Most of the natives seemed to understand the pidgin-English. To those who did not understand the words, it was still the voice of Komamaloo. They listened in fear and trembling. There was no doubt in any mind that Komamaloo could, and would, carry out his threat. Neither was there any doubt that when Komamaloo gave his commands, those commands would be carried out unhesitatingly.

Another pause: while all ears strained to listen. Then the voice went on:

'Me Komamaloo no likee that feller Kafoo. Me no likee him altogether too much. Him bad feller along all you feller. Him bad feller along me Komamaloo. No likee him Big Chief. Along him stop Big Chief, me plenty angry along all you feller. Me makee you all go dead, along him stop Big Chief. You hear me speakee, ear belong you.'

Harry Wharton and Co. listened breathlessly.

Billy Bunter had said that he had it cut and dried.

Evidently, he had! Now he was putting it across.

And he was putting it across with full effect. If the castaways had doubted whether the natives' dread of Kafoo, or of Komamaloo, was the greater, they were soon reassured on that point. It was very probable that the savage chief was as much hated as dreaded in his tribe. Already dark looks were being cast at him. Malulo was no longer cringing. The power of the Big Chief was already breaking in his hands like a reed. Kafoo cast a fierce, but very uneasy, glance round. There was no longer respect or fear in the crowd of black faces. The all-powerful deity of the benighted islanders had spoken: and it was the voice of Fate for the Big Chief. All ears hung on the next words from Komamaloo. They came: 'You hear me, ear belong you. Me Komamaloo speakee. You takee that feller Kafoo, makee him stop along canoe, makee him go along sea. Him no stop along this island any more altogether.'

Kafoo trembled.

'Oh, suffering cats!' breathed Bob Cherry. 'If Bunter gets away with that-!'

Billy Bunter grinned. 'Just look!' he said.

The castaways could not believe that even their superstitious dread of Komamaloo could influence the islanders to such an extent. They could not help feeling that the fat and fatuous Owl was over-playing his hand. But the next few moments showed that there was no doubt about it. The black islanders had feared Kafoo, and trembled at his frown. But compared with Komamaloo he was, so to speak, merely an also ran. Every black hand there was ready to be lifted against him now. There was a long silence, while the awe-stricken crowd of savages listened for the voice of the idol. But nothing further came from Komamaloo. The Greyfriars ventriloquist was leaving it at that. But Komamaloo had said enough. The silence was broken, at last, by a murmur among the savages, growing to a loud and excited gabble in the island dialect. A crowd closed round Kafoo.

Black hands grasped him on all sides. He made no resistance. His arrogance had dropped from him like a cloak. The fear of Komamaloo was as strong upon him as upon the rest. Well he knew that had Komamaloo ordered him to be thrown to the sharks, the order would have been obeyed without hesitation. Malulo's was the first hand to be laid on him. Malulo, hitherto his slavish attendant, tore the tin kettle away, and slung it round his own neck. That adornment, so absurd in the eyes of the castaways, was doubtless an emblem of authority among the islanders. Then Malulo's voice was heard, amid the gabble of the savages. What he said was incomprehensible to the castaways, but he was evidently directing them to carry out the command of Komamaloo.

Six or seven of the blacks grasped the fallen chief. They hustled and dragged him into the run-way that led to the village. Harry Wharton and Co. watched breathlessly-Billy Bunter with a complacent grin. They noted that, as he was dragged into the run-way, Kafoo seemed to resist for a moment. Black hands struck him down, and he was dragged on-on his way, evidently, to the canoe which was to carry him out to sea. Like Lucifer, Son of the Morning, the Big Chief had fallen from his high estate, and great was the fall thereof. He disappeared from view: leaving a swarm of savages jabbering excitedly in the glade.

'Well!' said Bob Cherry, with a deep breath. 'That's that!'
'The thatfulness is terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'The esteemed Kafoo is a back number.'
'No doubt about that,' said Harry. 'We're done with him, at least.'
'Thank goodness for that!' said Nugent.
Sniff, from Billy Bunter!
'Thank me, you mean!' he snapped.
'The thankfulness is terrific, my esteemed and idiotic Bunter!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, solemnly. 'They'll get another chief in his place!' said Johnny Bull.
'They jolly well will!' grinned Bunter. 'And I can jolly well tell you who it's going to be. I'm running this show.'
'Draw it mild, old fat man,' said Bob, shaking his head.
'You've got away with this, which is more than we could have dreamed of. Don't overdo it.'

Billy Bunter's fat lip curled. Bunter was in high feather. Perhaps it was no wonder that his success had gone, like wine, to his head. It had to be admitted that, while the other fellows had doubted, Bunter had had no doubts: and Bunter had been right! He had had it cut and dried, and it had gone like clockwork. Bunter was ready to go further-much further. It was only a day since a glimpse of Tokoloo with his strings of bones had scared the fat Owl almost out of his fat wits.

But it was a changed Bunter now—a Bunter, in fact, that the Famous Five hardly knew.

'Didn't I tell you I could make them sack that brute Kafoo?' demanded Bunter. 'Haven't they sacked him? Did I or did I not?'

'You did!' agreed Bob.

'Couldn't I jolly well make them chop his head off, if I liked?' trilled Bunter. 'You jolly well know I could.'

'I suppose you could!' said Harry. 'But you'd better remember that you're a Greyfriars' man, not a cannibal islander.'

'Well, of course, I wouldn't go so far as that,' admitted Bunter. 'So long as they kick him off the island, that's enough. But I don't want any advice from you, Wharton. Where would you all be without me, I'd like to know. Now shut up, all of you—Komamaloo's going to speak again. He, he, he!'

'Look here, Bunter—'

'I said shut up!' snapped Bunter.

The Famous Five looked at him. Their looks were very expressive. But they were silent. For the time at least, there was no doubt that Billy Bunter was, as he elegantly put it, 'boss of the show'. And once more they could only wait and see!

CHAPTER 26

BIG CHIEF BUNTER

'KOMAMALOO speakee!'

The voice from the rock idol hushed the excited jabbering in the swarm of savages. Silence fell.

There was awe, and fear, in every black face. Again many of the natives threw themselves on their faces. Others, perhaps more used to the voice of Komamaloo by this time, stood staring up at the idol.

There was a pause, during which not a sound was heard.

Then the voice that seemed to come from the grinning jaws went on:

'All you feller hear, ear belong you. You do all thing me say, sponsee you no likee go dead altogetther. Me say makee new chief, along that feller Kafoo no stop.

Harry Wharton and Co. listened, as silent as the crowd of awe-stricken natives. The Greyfriars ventriloquist was going ahead. He had succeeded in banishing Kafoo from the island. They could only wonder whether he would succeed in this also-and hope that he could!

Bunter, at any rate, had no doubts. The ventriloquial voice went on:

'Me say you makee new chief! Him name Bunter. Me say you makee that feller Bunter Big Chief. You no makee that feller Big Chief, me Komamaloo plenty too much angry along you.'

The silence was broken by a murmur among some of the natives. The name of 'Bunter' was repeated from lip to lip. It was new to the islanders. The awe in every face showed that they were ready to obey the commands of the speaking idol. If Komamaloo appointed a new chief in the place of Kafoo, Komamaloo's word was law to them. But Komamaloo had to make it clear who the new chief was to be!

However, Komamaloo proceeded to make that clear. 'Him white feller along hut,' went on Komamaloo. 'Him white feller along glass-eyes.'

Billy Bunter did not, perhaps, quite relish describing himself with that phrase of Papeeto's. But he had to identify himself somehow. Billy Bunter had been heard to remark, in the Remove, that it was his spectacles that gave him his distinguished look! Certainly they distinguished him now.

All eyes in the swarming crowd shot round at once to the witch-doctor's hut, and fixed on the fat figure in the doorway. Billy Bunter's spectacles, gleaming in the sunshine, left no doubt on the subject.

During the whole strange scene in the glade of the idol, not a glance had been cast at the Greyfriars juniors. The natives seemed to have forgotten their existence. But all eyes were on them now-or rather, on Bunter. The Famous Five were not even also rans! Billy Bunter was the cynosure of all eyes!

The voice of Komamaloo went on:

'You makee that feller Bunter, along glass-eyes, Big Chief! You do all thing he say. Me Komamaloo likee that feller too much. Him good feller along me Komamaloo. You do all thing he say, all samee me Komamaloo speakee.'

Then the voice was silent.

There was a stirring among the natives, and an outbreak of jabbering voices. Then the whole swarm came towards the witch-doctor's hut. Black faces crowded round the juniors in the doorway. Probably many of the natives were surprised that Komamaloo had chosen a 'white feller' for their chief. But that made no difference. Komamaloo had spoken: and that was that! Harry Wharton and Co. looked on, almost like fellows in a

dream. Billy Bunter, the fat and fatuous Owl of the Remove, had got away with it! It seemed too amazing to be true: but there it was! Billy Bunter was going to be the Big Chief! Billy Bunter was going to give orders to a tribe of savage islanders, and those orders were going to be obeyed. It was hard to believe: but there was no doubt about it. Billy Bunter, undoubtedly, was the goods.

Fuzzy heads bowed before Bunter. Malulo came forward.

It was possible that Malulo, having been 'top feller along Kafoo,' had had a hope of succeeding to the vacant chief-ship. He had at all events secured that emblem of majesty, the tin kettle.

But if Malulo had any such hope, he had to dismiss it now that Komamaloo had spoken. His manner, as he bowed before Bunter, was as cringing as it had been under the fierce eyes of Kafoo.

The Greyfriars fellows could see, and Malulo knew only too well, that the thronging savages were ready to obey any command from the new chief chosen by Komamaloo. Heads had fallen at the whim of Kafoo: and probably Malulo had never felt his own fuzzy head quite safe on his shoulders. Clearly he was eager to insinuate himself into the good graces of the new chief.

'You feller along glass-eyes, you hear Komamaloo speakee, ear belong you,' said Malulo.

'Me hear, ear belong me!' answered Bunter, cheerfully.

'Me likee too much you Big Chief along us feller,' said Malulo: which was probably quite unveracious. 'Me likee too much altogether. All feller along this island likee too much.'

A murmur of approval from the throng of savages followed that speech. It was perhaps doubtful whether they did 'likee too much' the choice made by Komamaloo. But not one fuzzy brain entertained the remotest idea of disputing the command of the island deity. Slavish superstition held them in thrall.

Billy Bunter cast a vaunting blink at the Famous Five, looking on in silence. Then he answered Malulo.

'Me likee too much me Big Chief along you feller,' he said, graciously.

'You do all thing me say, me good feller along you.'

'Us feller do all thing Big Chief say!' said Malulo, humbly. He unslung the tin kettle from his own black neck, and with deep respect slung it on the coral chain round Bunter's. Again there was an approving jabber from the islanders.

'Oh, my hat!' murmured Bob Cherry.

'Big Chief likee come along house belong Kafoo, along Kafoo no stop!' went on Malulo.

'Oh!' said Bunter.

Bunter was Big Chief! There was no doubt about that.

The power of Kafoo had passed to him, along with the tin kettle.

Evidently the islanders expected him to take possession of the royal hut, in the village, formerly occupied by the deposed Kafoo.

But Billy Bunter had his own ideas about that. The natives were ready to march him off and see him take possession. It was likely to surprise them if he declined. But he had to decline. The Greyfriars ventriloquist was not going out of range of the voice of Komamaloo. That voice might be needed again. For the present, at least, the new chief intended to stay put.

He shook a fat head.

'No comey!' said Bunter. 'No likee go along house belong Kafoo. Me likee stop along this place.'

'Big Chief do all thing he likee!' said Malulo.

'You top feller along Kafoo. You top feller along me, all samee along Kafoo!' added Bunter, graciously.

Malulo's black face brightened.

'Me plenty likee!' he said. 'Me do all thing Big Chief he say. Feller you no likee, head belong him no stop.'

Harry Wharton and Co. exchanged startled glances. It was really not easy to believe their ears. The power of life and death on that savage island was in the fat hands of Billy Bunter, as it had been in the black paws of Kafoo. It was no wonder that Malulo cringed before him. However, the fat Owl, inflated as he was, in fact almost intoxicated by the success of his trickery, wielding the power that Kafoo had wielded, was not likely to adopt the manners and customs of that savage chief. No heads were going to fall under the rule of Big Chief Bunter! The Famous Five could at least feel sure of that.

'Big Chief sing out all thing he wantee!' said Malulo. Billy Bunter gave the chums of the Remove another vaunting blink. His fat little nose was in the air. Bunter had swelled before-now he really seemed on the point of swelling over!

'I say, you fellows, who's boss of this show?' demanded Bunter.

There was no reply to that. But no reply was needed.

Billy Bunter was boss of the show. On that point there was no shadow of doubt: no possible doubt whatever!

Billy Bunter blinked through his big spectacles over the crowd. Even the evil face of Tokoloo was as submissive as the rest. The Owl of the Remove was monarch of all he surveyed.

He was keen to exercise his new and amazing authority.

He debated in his fat mind what command he should give.

Then he remembered that another meal was due. That was not a detail that Billy Bunter was likely to forget for long! The sun was sinking to the Pacific, and shadows lengthening in the glade. Bunter was getting hungry!

'Me likee eatee!' said Bunter. 'You feller Tokoloo, you comey cookee.'

Tokoloo went obediently to his cooking-pot.

Then the Big Chief waved a fat hand in dismissal to his subjects.

'All you feller go along house belong you!' he commanded. 'No wantee any feller stop along this place.'

That command was immediately obeyed.

The mob of savages streamed out of the glade, by the run-way to the village. Billy Bunter blinked after them, grinning. Evidently, his lightest word was a law to the islanders, as Kafoo's had been.

In a few minutes the glade was deserted.

Then the fat Owl turned his fat grin on the Famous Five. 'Did I say I could make them feed from my hand?' he chuckled. 'There isn't a silly nigger in the lot who wouldn't crawl at my feet if I told him to. Is that so or isn't it?'

'Looks as if it is,' said Bob. 'But I wouldn't bank on it lasting, Bunter.'

'Okay so long as Komamaloo backs me up!' chuckled Bunter. 'Ain't they scared stiff of that ugly chunk of stone? Don't you fellows get into a flap again. You're all right, with me here to protect you.'

Billy Bunter chuckled and gobbled alternately over the ample meal served submissively by Tokoloo, his plump visage beaming with satisfaction.

After which, he curled up on the mats, and went to sleep; and as the darkness deepened, the Famous Five followed his example. And they slept soundly-under the protection of Big Chief Bunter!

CHAPTER 27

COCK OF THE WALK

SNORE!

It was a bright morning.

Harry Wharton and Co. were up soon after dawn.

They looked out of the witch-doctor's hut into bright sunshine. Several natives were to be seen, among them Papeeto. But they were keeping at a respectful distance from the hut. Tokoloo was not to be seen. They were glad enough not to see his evil malicious wizened face. There was plenty of food in the hut, and gourds of water for drinking. They made a good breakfast, while Billy Bunter continued to snore on his mat.

Nobody was disposed to disturb the fat Owl's slumbers.

His snore continued while they breakfasted. Billy Bunter's manners and customs, since he had become 'boss of the show', were hard to tolerate with patience. The yearning to boot him for his impudence was almost irresistible. But so long as he was sleeping and snoring, he was not throwing his extensive weight about. He was welcome to sleep and snore the clock round, as far as the Famous Five were concerned.

He was still happily snoring when they left the hut.

'What about a dip in the lagoon?' asked Bob Cherry.

'Jolly good idea,' said Nugent. 'If-'

'Looks as if we're free to do as we please,' said Harry. 'But-' He paused. 'Look here, you chaps-we've got to get it down. It all depends on Bunter-'

'Blow Bunter!' growled Johnny Bull.

'Blow him terrifically,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'But the esteemed and idiotic Bunter is boss of the show. What cannot be cured must go longest to the well, as the English proverb remarks.'

'We've got to get it down,' said Harry, quietly. 'Try to keep your tempers with the fat ass. We're under that fat chump's protection here, but goodness knows what might happen if we run into some savage in the bush. Our lives are worth nothing without Bunter.'

'Better stick around till his lordship pleases to wake up and give orders!' growled Johnny. 'I'd rather boot him.'

'My esteemed Johnny, the bootfulness is now a boot on the other leg,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Snort, from Johnny. Johnny was perhaps the least patient of the five, and found the fat Owl's airs and graces most irksome. Still he had, as Wharton said, to get it down. It was unpalatable! in fact a most unpleasant pill to swallow. But there was no help for it.

All the juniors would have been glad of a dip in the lagoon. But the lagoon was at a distance through the bush. And at a distance from Bunter- and Komamaloo-they could not count on safety.

However, it was pleasant to be at liberty to stroll about the sunny glade, leaving the fat Owl to snore in the hut.

One thought was uppermost in all minds-escape from the island. There was hope of that, if Bunter proved amenable. But Bunter, in his new exalted state, was not easy to manage. Indeed it was doubtful whether the fatuous fat Owl, puffed up with his own importance, could be managed at all.

'If that fat chump had the sense of a bunny rabbit,' said Bob. 'We could get hold of a canoe, pack it with grub, and get away. But-'

'But he hasn't!' said Nugent.

'The sensefulness of the absurd Bunter is not terrific,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head.

'It would be taking a chance,' said Harry. 'But better than sticking here among a horde of cannibals. Bunter's got them under control now with his trickery, but it may not last.'

'We'll put it to the Big Chief, when it pleases his Majesty to wake up and remember our existence,' said Bob. Bob, at least, was able to take the fat Owl's self-importance with a sense of humour.

It was considerably later when a fat squeak reached their ears from the witch-doctor's hut. 'I say, you fellows.'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo, his lordship's up!' said Bob.

A fat figure appeared in the doorway of the hut. A pair of big spectacles gleamed back the rays of the sun.

His lordship was up! And his lordship did not look in a good temper. His fat brow was wrinkled in a frown over his spectacles. Billy Bunter had had his sleep out. He had awakened, naturally, hungry. He wanted his breakfast.

He waved a fat hand, beckoning. He beckoned commandingly.

Had the Owl of the Remove beckoned in that lordly manner to the Famous Five in the old quadrangle at Greyfriars, they would have stared at him in astonishment, and perhaps booted him for his cheek. At Greyfriars they were, so to speak, somebodies, and Billy Bunter was absolutely nobody.

But all that was changed now. On the lonely Pacific Island they were nobodies: and Bunter was not only somebody, but practically everybody! Bob Cherry grinned, Johnny Bull frowned: Hurree Jamset Ram Singh shrugged his shoulders. All five came across to the hut to see what Bunter wanted.

'Hail to your Majesty!' greeted Bob. Bunter gave him a blink.

'If that's meant to be funny, Cherry, you can pack it up!' he snapped.

'I've told you already that I don't want any cheek.'

'We don't, either!' growled Johnny Bull. 'Don't answer me back, Bull. I don't like it.'

'You cheeky fat chump-'

'You're asking for it!' said Bunter, darkly. 'You'll get what you're asking for, if you're not jolly careful. You'd better be civil, so long as you're on my island.'

'Your island!' ejaculated Bob.

'My island,' answered Bunter, calmly. 'This is my island now, and the sooner you get that into your heads the better. How often do you want me to tell you that I'm boss of the show here?'

'Come to think of it, you've told us often enough,' said Bob. 'No need to sing it over again to us.'

'Keep it in mind,' said Bunter. 'You can bank on my protection, but I expect you to be respectful. Now, where's Tokoloo?'

'Haven't the foggiest,' answered Bob. 'He seems to have taken his ugly mug off somewhere.'

'Like his cheek,' said Bunter. 'I want my brekker. Who's going to cook my brekker?'

'Cook it yourself!' suggested Johnny Bull.

'That will do, from you!' snapped Bunter. 'Call that fellow Papeeto. I'll give him a trial as cook.'

Papeeto came up at a call from Harry Wharton. He came up with his usual grin on his black face, and ducked a mop of untidy hair to the Big Chief. It was hard to believe, looking at that grinning good-humoured face, that Papeeto, like the rest, had no objection to a feast of 'long-pig'. The juniors tried not to think about that. They had to take the benighted islanders as they found them: and Papeeto, in his own way, had been friendly.

'You feller Papeeto, you savvy cookee?' asked Bunter. 'Me savvy too much, sar. Likee plenty cookee along Big Chief,' answered Papeeto. Evidently this was an honour and a distinction in Papeeto's eyes. It was not easy

for the Famous Five to take William George Bunter as a person of tremendous importance whose lightest wish was a law. But to Papeeto he was just that!

'You fellows have had your brekker, I suppose,' said Bunter.

'Long ago,' answered Bob.

'Well, you can clear off, if you like,' said Bunter. 'Thanks!' said Nugent.

'The thankfulness is terrific, my esteemed Bunter.'

'Don't go too far away!' added Bunter. 'You won't be safe without me to look after you. Besides, I may want you.'

'And if you want us, we're to come running, I suppose?' asked Johnny Bull.

'You'd better,' answered Bunter.

'I'm going to boot him!' gasped Johnny. 'I'm jolly well going to boot the cheeky fat chump!'

'You're jolly well not!' grinned Bob, catching Johnny by the arm, and dragging him back. 'That fat Owl's cock of the walk now. Come for a trot while his Majesty feeds his face.'

'I tell you-!'

'Fathead! Come on,' said Bob.

Johnny Bull had almost to be dragged away. His Majesty was left to enjoy an ample breakfast, cooked by the obedient Papeeto. Billy Bunter enjoyed that meal: but perhaps he enjoyed even more his novel and exhilarating estate as cock of the walk!

CHAPTER 28

THE HIGH HAND!

'No!' said Billy Bunter, firmly.

'Look here, Bunter-'

'I said no!' pointed out Bunter.

Billy Bunter was seated in the doorway of the hut, basking in the sunshine. His fat face was cheerful and satisfied. It showed traces of that ample breakfast. Face and fingers; in fact, were fishy-very fishy. But trifles of that kind did not worry Bunter. At Greyfriars, Bunter had never been keen on washing. On 'his' island he seemed content to do without it altogether. The Famous Five were longing for a dip in the cool waters of the lagoon. Billy Bunter did not share that longing.

Harry Wharton and Co. had lounged about idly, while the great man breakfasted. Now four members of the Co. were trying, as Bob Cherry expressed it, to make him see sense. Johnny Bull left them to it, not feeling at all sure that he could keep his foot from contacting the fat Owl's trousers. Even Johnny had to admit that booting Bunter, much as he deserved it, would not improve matters.

'Do have a little sense, Bunter!' urged Nugent.

'That will do, Nugent.'

'My esteemed and idiotic Bunter-'

'That will do, Inky.'

'It can't last!' said Harry, patiently. 'Can't you see that, Bunter?'

'You fellows getting into a flap again?' jeered 'Bunter. 'You're all right under my protection. Haven't I got the whole crew of them feeding from my hand? I say, you fellows, Papeeto's a jolly good cook-'

'Never mind that now-'

'But I do mind,' said Bunter. 'I'm going to keep Papeeto for my personal attendant. That fish for brekker was a treat.'

'Do you want to stick on this island for ever, like Robinson Crusoe?' asked Bob Cherry. 'What about next term at Greyfriars?'

'Blow next term at Greyfriars!' retorted Bunter. 'I'm not specially anxious to be saying "Yes, sir" and "No sir" to old Quelch, I can tell you.'

'We've got to get away!' said Harry.

'We can't get away,' answered Bunter. 'If you think I'm going to risk it in a canoe, you can forget all about it.'

'Not so risky as sticking here,' said Nugent.

'Rot!' said Bunter. 'We're all right here. Ain't I Big Chief? If any of those niggers forget it, Komamaloo will remind them. He, he, he!'

The juniors exchanged glances. Making Bunter see sense seemed a hopeless task. The fat Owl was quite satisfied, and quite at his ease. His confidence in himself was unbounded. He was, for the time at least, monarch of all he surveyed, waited on hand and foot, and the food was good and ample. Billy Bunter was not going to exchange that satisfactory state of affairs for the perils of the Pacific in a canoe!

'We may be all right, at the moment,' said Harry. 'But it can't last-'

'Rot!'

'Even if it could, we want to get back to civilization.'

It's worth a spot of risk to try it on. You could make them give us a canoe, and pack it with provisions. They'd obey your orders.'

'I fancy they would!' said Bunter, complacently. 'I'm boss of the show on my island, I can jolly well tell you.'

'We should have a good chance of sighting a ship, and being picked up,' said Harry. 'Can't you see that our best guess is to go while the going's

good?'

Billy Bunter shook a fat head.

'You won't get me off my island in any old canoe,' he said, decidedly.

'Fat lot you fellows would care, if I got fearfully hungry like I did before. Selfishness all round, as usual.'

'If you won't risk it-'

'I jolly well won't!' said Bunter, emphatically.

'Well, if you want to play Robinson Crusoe for the rest of your life, we don't!' said Bob Cherry. 'We want to get away, and chance it.'

'All we want is a canoe, to get away in,' said Nugent. 'You could fix that for us, Bunter.'

'We'd rather not go without you,' said Harry. 'You're not so safe here as you fancy. But if you won't come-!'

'Haven't I said so?' demanded Bunter. 'Are you fellows getting deaf?'

'Will you let us have a canoe, and try our luck on our own, then?' asked Harry.

Billy Bunter blinked at him. It was an indignant blink. 'Think I want to be left alone here among a lot of heathen savages?' he demanded. 'I'm surprised at you, Wharton. You can put that right out of your head. Don't mention that again.'

'Look here, Bunter-'

'Don't say any more!' interrupted Bunter. 'You might make me lose my temper.'

'What?'

'You'll be sorry for it, if you do!' added Bunter, darkly. They looked at him in silence. Really, it was hard to believe that this was the Bunter whom they had booted in the Remove passage for snooping tuck in the studies! Never, probably, had they so keenly desired to boot him again.

'Papeeto!' yapped Bunter. Papeeto came with a jump. 'Likee bananas!' said Bunter.

'Yessar.'

Bananas were immediately forthcoming. Billy Bunter proceeded to munch them, hardly deigning to take notice of the existence of Harry Wharton and Co.

As they stood looking at him, with an almost irresistible desire to collar him and cram the bananas down the back of his fat neck, there was a sound of rattling bones, and Tokoloo came up to the hut. His black beady eyes gleamed sheer evil at the fat junior sitting in the doorway munching bananas.

Billy Bunter gave him a haughty stare.

His fear of the witch-doctor was a thing of the past-almost forgotten. It was for Tokoloo to fear, in the changed circumstances.

'You feller Tokoloo, what you wantee along this place?' snapped Bunter. Tokoloo eyed him, with a strange mingling of fear, doubt, suspicion, and malice, in his evil, wizened face. 'Wantee comey along house belong me,' he muttered.

'No belong you any more altogether!' snapped Bunter. 'Me Big Chief! All thing along this island belong me. Get out.'

'House belong me!' mumbled Tokoloo.

'Cherry!' yapped Bunter.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'Kick that little beast out of here.' Bob looked at him.

'Are you giving me orders, Bunter?' he inquired.

'Yes, I am. Do as I tell you.'

Billy Bunter's fat head at that moment, had its narrowest escape ever from an emphatic clout. However, Bob restrained that impulse, and turned and walked away, his friends following him. Billy Bunter blinked angrily at four departing backs.

'I say, you fellows!' he howled.

Not a head was turned.

'Do you hear me?' yelled Bunter.

If they heard, they followed the example of the ancient gladiator, and heeded not. They walked on, leaving an angry and indignant Owl blinking.

Billy Bunter breathed hard through his fat little nose.

His little round eyes gleamed through his big round spectacles. He was temporarily at least-Big Chief, boss of the show, cock of the walk, monarch of all he surveyed: and it had turned his fat head. And these fellows turned their backs on him, just as they might have done in the old quadrangle at Greyfriars, where he was nobody, or a little less than nobody! Really, this was too much for Bunter's patience. He came very near despatching Papeeto after them, with a lawyer-cane, to teach them manners!

However, even the egregious fat Owl paused at that.

He turned his angry blink on Tokoloo.

Bunter had not forgotten that lick from the lawyer-cane, which had roused him out the previous morning. And if he hesitated to deal with the Famous Five, as, in his opinion, they deserved, he had no hesitation in dealing with the gnomish little witch-doctor.

'You feller Papeeto!' he rapped. 'You takee lawyer-cane, you beatee that feller Tokoloo along back belong him, plenty too much.'

'Yessar!' said Papeeto, at once.

Papeeto was prompt to obey the Big Chief's orders, if the Greyfriars fellows were not. He grabbed up Tokoloo's own lawyer-cane from the corner of the hut. There was a wild rattle of bones as it descended on Tokoloo, and he jumped away and fled. The heavy cane lashed on his back as he went, till he vanished howling into the bush.

Billy Bunter grinned and resumed munching bananas.

Natives in the glade stared at the scene. Harry Wharton and Co. looked on from a distance, with grim faces. 'Bunter's going strong!' remarked Bob Cherry. 'Serve that little beast Tokoloo right-but-'

'But-!' murmured Nugent.

'But-!' growled Johnny Bull. 'That cheeky fat lunatic could serve us the same if he liked. They jump to his orders. Look here, we've got to get out of this somehow.'

'But how?' said Nugent.

'The howfulness is terrific!' sighed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

There was, unluckily, no solution to that problem. It was futile to talk sense to Bunter. The inflated fat Owl was deaf to it. The amazing success of his trickery had turned his head, and that was that! Bunter was not to be reasoned with. All the absurd Owl wanted was to give orders, throw his weight about, and carry matters generally with a high hand. And without Bunter, nothing could be done. And exasperating as it was, the Famous Five had to make the best of it.

CHAPTER 29

A SPECK ON THE SEA

BOB CHERRY shaded his eyes with his hand, and stared, and stared again. His heart beat faster at what he saw, or fancied he saw, far away on the blue rolling Pacific.

Another day had passed on the lonely isle. Another bright dawn gleamed on the green glade and the towering rock idol. The castaways had turned out in the fresh morning-with the exception of Big Chief Bunter. That fat and important person was still snoring on his bed of mats in Tokoloo's hut-now Bunter's! Billy Bunter was never an early riser if he could help it-and now he could! The Famous Five were glad enough to leave him snoring when they turned out. The Big Chief asleep was less exasperating than the Big Chief awake!

They breakfasted in the sunshine outside the hut.

Papeeto was busy at a cooking-fire, preparing an ample meal for his lord and master when it should please the great man to awake. A number of natives were in the glade, some of them bringing their usual gifts to lay at the shapeless feet of Komamaloo. They took little or no notice of the castaways.

Four members of the Co. were discussing the perpetual but unanswerable problem: escape from the island. Billy Bunter, apparently, was prepared to dismiss that problem wholly from his fat mind. The other fellows could not dismiss it. Bob Cherry had clambered to the summit of the tallest tree on the edge of the glade, to scan the surrounding ocean with more or less hopeful eyes.

It was barely a week since the forced landing on Tomoo, their parting with Tom Brown, and that unlucky cruise in Pompologo's canoe. But to the Greyfriars castaways it seemed almost an eternity.

With Bunter's aid, escape was practicable-so long as his trickery imposed upon the fuzzy-brained natives. But the fatuous fat Owl was not amenable to argument or persuasion. The only other hope was that some vessel might touch at the island.

But that hope was so faint as to be negligible. The mere existence of a cannibal tribe was evidence that the island was far from the track of ships and trade-an unknown spot of land in the waste of the Boundless Pacific, where the feet of white men had never trod. When Bob Cherry clambered to the tree-top to scan the unending waters neither he nor his comrades had any expectation of results.

But it is often the unexpected that happens!

From the tall tree-top, Bob had a wide view of the whole island-the endless masses of shadowy bush: the shining lagoon with its dazzling beach, the nodding palm-trees, and the circling reef on which the Pacific broke with an incessant boom of surf. But it was upon something far beyond the breaking surf that his eyes fixed-a speck on the boundless sea.

He could not be sure, at first, that it was not a winging seagull, or an albatross dipping to the water. But as he stared, and stared, it came nearer and clearer, and he could discern that it was neither of these. It was but a speck: but it was on the surface of the sea, and it was moving in the direction of the island.

It was not a ship-not a sea-going craft of any size.

But it was a craft of some kind-a boat or a canoe.

And as it grew clearer, he made out a tall prow, and caught the flash of a paddle in the sunlight. It was a canoe with a single occupant, heading for the island.

Bob hardly breathed, as he watched.

It was likely-only too likely-that that canoe belonged to the island tribe, returning from some distant trip. But it was at least possible that it came from some other island, perhaps a distant one. He knew that the South-Sea Islanders made trips of hundreds of miles in their canoes, picking up food and water where they could. That was how it had happened that they had met Pompolongo on Tomoo. If-if only this was some sea-voyaging Kanaka like Pompo-!

It was possible, at least: and if so, it was a chance of escape. He strained his eyes at that speck on the sea.

He was able, at last, to make out a fuzzy head, and a glistening brown skin. That golden-brown skin revealed that the man in the canoe was not a native of the island. He was of the Polynesian race, like Pompo, not a 'black islander'.

And then, suddenly, Bob guessed!

'Pompo!' he panted.

He could not be quite sure-the distance was too great.

But it was a brown-skinned Kanaka in the canoe, wielding a double-bladed paddle. Was it-could it be-Pompo, returning to the island after the lapse of days since his terrified flight from Kafoo and his spear? Bob was almost sure. It was, at any rate, a Kanaka in a sea-going canoe, heading for the reef passage. That meant hope of escape!

Bob clambered down from his perch, dropping in reckless haste from branch to branch. Harry Wharton and Frank Nugent, Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, stared at him, as he dropped from the tree, and came up at a breathless run. The excitement in his face startled them.

'What-?' began Harry. 'Not a sail!' exclaimed Nugent.

'No such terrific luckfulness!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shake of his dusky head.

'Give it a name!' said Johnny Bull.

Bob came to a panting halt. He gave a hurried glance in the direction of Papeeto. Papeeto, busy at his cooking-fire, was out of hearing: but Bob subdued his voice as he answered.

'There's a canoe heading for the island. Not one of the natives here-a brown man-a Polynesian, like Pompo. And-and-and--' Bob gasped with excitement. 'I believe it's Pompolongo.'

'Pompo!' breathed Harry. Every face was excited now.

'I couldn't be sure, at the distance, but I think so. After all, he might come back and look for us, when he got over his scare. Anyhow, it's a Kanaka in a canoe, heading for this island. It's a chance for us. We're going to get a lift in that canoe, whether it's Pompo's or not.'

'What-ho!' said Johnny Bull.

'Don't let Papeeto get wind of it,' added Bob, hurriedly. 'Ten to one he would chuck that cooking-pot and go for his spear. If it's Pompo, he's running a lot of risk coming back to look for us. We'll jolly well load him with all the silver money he can pack into that mop of his. Now we've got to get down to the lagoon. Pompo or not, we're getting off in that canoe.'

'Yes, rather!' said Nugent, emphatically.

'The ratherfulness is terrific,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But what about the esteemed and ridiculous Bunter?'

In their excitement, the juniors had forgotten Bunter, for the moment. The fat Owl was still asleep on his mats in the hut: The rumble of a snore was heard in the distance. There was an uncertain silence for a minute or two.

'We can't go without him, if we can help it!' said Harry, at last. 'We can't leave him here among these savages. The fat ass isn't so safe as he fancies. We can't leave him behind-if he'll come.'

To which there was a general nod of assent. Billy Bunter, with his new manners and customs, his airs and graces, his lofty self-importance; had taxed the patience of the Greyfriars party to the limit. Every foot itched to kick him for his impudence. But leaving him behind, among savages who, for all they knew, might turn on him any day or hour, was quite another matter. Bunter had to come-if he would!

'Better wake him, and put it to him!' said Nugent. 'Not much use talking sense to him, but we'd better try.'

'I'd rather boot him all the way down to the lagoon!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Same here,' agreed Bob. 'But-'

'The samefulness is preposterous,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But-!'

'If he won't come, he won't!' said Harry. 'But we just can't leave him here on his own if we can help it. I'll tell him we've got a chance of getting away, and persuade him to come-if he will! We can't make him.'

'Mind you go down on your knees!' snorted Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton left them, and went to the hut. A rumbling snore greeted him. Curled up on his pile of mats, with a fat head resting on a fat arm, Billy Bunter slept and snored. Wharton bent over him, and shook a fat shoulder. The snore changed to a grunt. Another vigorous shake, and Billy Bunter's eyes opened. He blinked at Harry Wharton with an angry blink.

'Wharrer you waking me up for?' he demanded. 'Haven't I told you I don't want to be woke up? Do you want me to keep on telling you that I'm boss of the show here, and that you fellows have got to do as you're told?'

'Listen to me, Bunter,' said Harry, quietly.

'Shan't! Shut up!'

With that, the fat Owl pillowed his head on a fat arm again, and closed his eyes. But he was not permitted to slide back into happy slumber. Shake! shake! shake!

CHAPTER 30

STAY PUT!

SHAKE! Shake!

Billy Bunter's eyes reopened. This time he did not merely blink at Harry Wharton. He glared.

'Will you leave a fellow alone?' he hooted. 'You shake me again, and I'll have you whopped, like I did that little beast Tokoloo. Go away!'

'There's a canoe heading for the island-!'

'I don't care whether there is or not. Get out.'

'We're going to get away in it, if we can. That's what I've woke you up to tell you,' said Harry, patiently. 'Will you come with us, Bunter?'

'No, I won't!'

'We don't want to leave you behind. But we've got to get away. We can't lose this chance-our last chance, very likely. Do come with us, Bunter.'

Billy Bunter sat up on his mats. He fumbled for his spectacles, jammed them on his fat little nose, and gave the captain of the Greyfriars Remove a devastating blink.

'You're asking for it!' he said. 'For two pins I'd call Papeeto and tell him to give you six with the lawyer-cane. I've warned you fellows to mind your p's and q's. Don't keep on asking for it.'

Billy Bunter's fat head had had several narrow escapes, lately, of getting a sound smack. Now it had another. But Wharton contrived to keep his temper. Irsome as it was, it was necessary to be patient with the inflated Owl.

'I've told you,' went on Bunter, 'that I don't choose to be left alone among these niggers. That settles it. Now shut up.'

'Come with us-'

'I'm not coming, and you're not going!' interrupted Bunter. 'Catch me chancing it in a canoe! If you sight a ship you can come and report to me. But don't talk to me about a canoe. What have you got to grumble at, I'd like to know? Here you are, under my protection, living on the fat of the land. You're an ungrateful lot.'

'You won't come?'

'Haven't I said so? Getting deaf?'

'Then we shall have to go without you,' said Harry. 'We're going down to the lagoon now-'

'You're going to do nothing of the kind!' retorted Bunter. 'You're going to stay where you are. That's an order!'

'What?'

'The sooner you learn to jump to orders, the better it will be for you. I'm boss here. Can't you get that into your head?' yapped Bunter. 'Think you're back in the Remove passage, or what? Shut up.'

Harry Wharton breathed very hard. 'Look here, Bunter-!'

'I said shut up!' interrupted Bunter.

'You fancy you're safe here,' went on Harry, 'and that it will last. But nobody's life is safe among these savages.'

'Getting into a flap again?' jeered Bunter. 'For goodness sake, have a spot of pluck. I'm protecting you, ain't I? What more do you want?'

'Anyhow we've got to get away, if we can,' said Harry.

'We're not going to lose this chance, Bunter. We are going.'

'You're going to do just what I tell you!' snapped Bunter 'and if you can't get it into your head that I give orders here, look out for the lawyer-cane.'

'You fat cheeky Owl!' exclaimed Wharton, his patience breaking down. 'Stick here if you like. We're going. You can go to sleep again, you fat ass!'

He turned back to the doorway of the hut.

But Billy Bunter did not settle down to go to sleep again.

He heaved his weight up from the mats. It was a wrathful and indignant Bunter. The Big Chief had issued his orders. Wharton, apparently, was going to pass them by like the idle wind which he regarded not. That was not good enough for Big Chief Bunter. Bunter was going to instruct those cheeky fellows who was who, and what was what.

He rolled out of the hut after Wharton, as he rejoined his chums outside.

'I say, you fellows!' squeaked Bunter.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

'You're not to leave this place!' said Bunter. 'You jolly well know that you wouldn't be safe without my protection.'

'We'll chance that,' said Bob.

'You won't! Papeeto!' rapped Bunter.

'Yessar!' The obedient Papeeto came over at once from his cooking-fire. The juniors exchanged glances, wondering what was coming next. They had not long to wait, to learn.

'You feller Papeeto, you see those feller stop along this place, eye belong you!' rapped Bunter. 'Sposee they no stop, you tie um along tapa cord.'

'Yessar!' said Papeeto, cheerfully.

'Bunter, you cheeky ass-!'

'Bunter, you born idiot-!'

'Bunter, you fat lunatic-!' .

'That will do!' said Bunter, waving a commanding fat hand. 'You try to clear off, and see what will happen to you. I'm boss here. Now shut up, all of you, and don't let me hear any more from you.'

With that the lordly Owl turned back into the hut.

Johnny Bull made a step after him, but Bob caught him by the arm and pulled him back. Papeeto grinned at five clouded faces.

'Big Chief no likee you feller go away,' he said. 'You stop along this place, all samee Big Chief he say.'

'By gum!' breathed Johnny Bull. 'If we had that cheeky fat idiot back in the Remove passage-!'

'But we haven't,' said Bob. 'We've got to toe the line. There's a dozen of the brutes within call if Papeeto wants them. They'd tie us up at a word. We've got to stay put.'

'And lose this last chance!' muttered Nugent.

Harry Wharton shook his head.

'We're not going to lose this chance,' he said. 'We can't get away now, with so many eyes on us. But later on-we shall see.'

That was all that the castaways could decide upon. Billy Bunter was quite determined not to take risks in a canoe. He was equally determined that he was not going to be left on his own among the islanders. And Bunter, undoubtedly, was boss! The castaways, as the lordly Owl ordered, had to stay put. Watchful eyes were on them, and there was no hope of leaving the glade without immediate pursuit and recapture. But the poet has remarked that desperate diseases require desperate remedies-and it was upon a desperate remedy that the castaways decided, as the long tropical day wore away, and the sun sank to the Pacific.

CHAPTER 31

DESPERATE MEASURES

HARRY WHARTON rose quietly from his sleeping-mat, in the dimness of the witch-doctor's hut. The hour was late. Darkness had long fallen upon the lonely island. But there was a glimmer of moonlight at the open doorway. He stepped to the doorway, without a sound, and looked out. All was silent and still.

During the long, anxious day, there had been constant comings and goings of natives from the village. But at nightfall, all had gone back to their dwellings by the stream. Only Papeeto remained, stretched on his sleeping-mat outside the doorway. Harry Wharton looked out at the deserted glade, tenanted only by the towering rock idol, the green-glass eyes and grinning shark's-tooth jaws glimmering in the moonlight. Snore!

Harry Wharton smiled faintly, at that familiar sound behind him in the hut. Billy Bunter was fast asleep. Not another eye in the hut had closed: but the fat Owl was deep in slumber. The more soundly he slept, the better, in view of what the Co. had planned for that night. But Bunter, unreliable in most other respects, could always be relied upon to sleep soundly. Had he awakened, one howl from the Big Chief would have awakened Papeeto, and the game would have been up. Luckily, Bunter was not likely to wake.

Wharton fixed his eyes upon Papeeto-asleep on his mat a few feet from the door, his spear by his side. During the day, Papeeto had been watchful: there had been no chance of stealing off unnoticed. Five sturdy fellows, certainly, could have handled Papeeto: had he been alone. But till nightfall, there had been other natives at hand.

Harry Wharton turned back from the door, and whispered:

'You fellows awake?'

'Sort of!' came back a whisper from Bob Cherry.

'Wide awake,' muttered Johnny Bull.

'The widefulness is terrific,' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'We're all ready!' whispered Nugent.

They rose quietly from their mats, and joined Wharton at the door. Billy Bunter continued to snore. If they had made a sound, it would hardly have disturbed his slumbers. But they did not make a sound. Too much depended on silence.

'You've got the cord, Bob?'

'Here it is!' Bob held up a length of tapa cord.

'We've got to be quick!' breathed Harry. 'He will wake at the first step outside-and if he gets hold of his spear, we're done. You're all ready to risk it?'

'Ready!' murmured Bob. 'Give the word!'

There was a deep drawing of breath. Only too well they knew that they were taking desperate measures. Papeeto had to be secured, or the plan they had laid could come to nothing. Once his black hand grasped the deadly weapon that lay at his side, they would be defenceless; driven back into the hut, even if he did not thrust with the spear, as was only too likely. But their courage did not fail.

'Now!' breathed Harry.

He leaped out of the doorway, his comrades at his heels.

In a bunch, they flung themselves on the sleeping savage. Every hand grasped him with a tenacious grip. Papeeto awoke, with a startled howl, his black eyes rolling wildly in the moonlight, his hand flying instinctively to his spear.

One second lost, and the weapon would have been in his grasp. But they did not lose a second.

Five pairs of hands were on him. His arms were gripped and held, each by a pair of hands: and Frank Nugent snatched up the spear, and hurled it to a distance with all the force of his arm. As he strove to struggle to his feet, he was dragged over on his back, and Johnny Bull planted a sinewy knee on his black chest, pinning him down.

He glared up at five set faces, with rolling eyes, panting. 'You white feller, what name you makee hand belong you stop along this feller Papeeto!' he gasped.

'Hold him!' breathed Harry.

'We've got him all right.'

'Take it quietly, old black bean,' said Bob Cherry. 'You're not going to be hurt. Us feller likee you too much. Shove his paws this way.'

Papeeto resisted fiercely, as his black wrists were dragged together. He was not easy to handle, even for the five. But they were too many for him, and in spite of his struggles, his hands were dragged together, and Bob Cherry knotted the tapa cord round his wrists. Then another cord secured the wriggling black legs.

'That's that!' panted Johnny Bull.

'Big Chief he no likee you do this thing!' gasped Papeeto. 'Big Chief plenty angry along you feller.'

'Big Chief's dead in this act!' chuckled Bob. 'Big Chief can blow off all the steam he likes, and nobody will care a bean.'

'Get him into the hut,' said Harry.

Bound hand and foot, there was no further resistance from Papeeto. He was rolled into the hut: and, as a further precaution, a rag of tapa was stuffed into his mouth, and secured by a cord round his fuzzy head. It was not likely that a yell from Papeeto could reach as far as the native village: but the castaways were leaving nothing to chance. A helpless gagged prisoner, Papeeto lay on the matted floor, his rolling eyes watching the castaways-unheeded by them. They were through with Papeeto. Next came the Big Chief's turn.

Snore!

The struggle outside the hut had not been silent. But it had not awakened Bunter. He snored on.

But the time had come to wake him now! And the Big Chief, who had thrown his extensive weight about so loftily, was destined to wake in very changed circumstances.

'Wake the fat ass up!' said Harry.

Johnny Bull lunged with his foot at fat ribs. It was quite an emphatic lunge. It woke Bunter on the spot.

He sat up, blinking like a startled owl.

'Urrgh! What's that? Who's woke me up!' spluttered Bunter.

'Get up, Bunter,' said Harry.

The Big Chief gasped with wrath.

'You've woke me up! Haven't I given you my orders? I'll give you the lawyer-cane all round for this-'

'Get up, you fat chump!'

'Papeeto!' yelled Bunter.

The Big Chief was wrathful. Bunter did not like being awakened-against his explicit orders, too! especially by a foot lunging in his ribs. These fellows had to be taught a lesson. Papeeto and the lawyer-cane were to be the next item on the programme. Like another dictatorial Big Chief, Bunter's patience was exhausted!

'Papeeto!' he roared. 'You comey too quick, along lawyer-cane.'

He blinked at five grinning faces. Why they were grinning, Bunter did not know. 'You just wait a minute, you cheeky rotters! I'll have you whopped all round for this! I'll teach you who's boss here.'

Bob Cherry grasped the fat Owl by the back of the neck, and turned his fat face towards Papeeto, lying bound on the floor. Bunter blinked at the prisoner. Then he jammed on his spectacles, and blinked again. It dawned on his fat brain that Papeeto was not in a position to jump to his orders.

'There's Papeeto!' said Bob. 'You've done with giving orders here, Bunter. Get that into your fat head.'

'Get up, Bunter,' said Harry.

'Shan't!' roared Bunter.

'Kick him!'

'Yarooooooh!'

Billy Bunter got up in quite a hurry. 'Now listen to me,' said Harry.

'Shan't! I'll have you whopped all round! I'll jolly well-'

'Be quiet, you fat ass! We've tied Papeeto up, and he's safe till some of his crew come along in the morning. Now we're going-'

'What about my orders?' hooted Bunter.

'Kick him!'

'Yow-ow-ow-ow! Stoppit!'

'Better give him a few more,' growled Johnny Bull. 'It might make the fat chump come to his senses.'

'That is, supposing that he's got any!' remarked Bob. 'Have you got any senses to come to, Bunter?'

'Beast! You just wait!' gasped Bunter. 'There'll be a crowd of them along here in the morning, and every man-jack of them will jump to my orders, as you jolly well know. You just wait! You clear off, against my orders, and I'll jolly soon have you brought back, and whopped for your cheek! You've kept on asking for it, and now you're going to get what you've asked for. I'll let you know who's top dog here.'

'We're going,' said Harry, 'and you're coming with us, Bunter.'

'Wha-a-a-at?' stuttered Bunter. 'Mad? Think you can order me about?'

'Yes! Get a move on.'

'Shan't!' yelled Bunter.

'Kick him!'

'Yow-woooop! Keep your hoof away, Bull, you beast!' Billy Bunter squirmed away from Johnny's foot. 'Wow! You jolly well kick me again, and I'll jolly well-yarooooooh! Wow!'

'Listen to me, Bunter,' said Harry, quietly. 'We're getting out of this, and getting into touch, if we can, with that Kanaka in his canoe. You're coming with us, whether you like it or not. Get that into your silly head.'

'You see, you've thrown your weight about a little too much, old fat man,' said Bob. 'This is where you come down off your perch. It's your Majesty's turn to jump to orders!'

'Come on!' said Nugent.

'I won't come!' howled Bunter.

Bob Cherry took a firm grip, between finger and thumb, on a fat ear.

'You take his other ear, Johnny,' he said. 'Now, Bunter, are you coming?'

'Wow! No! Leggo!' howled Bunter.

'Your ears are!' said Bob, cheerily. 'Please yourself about coming along with them.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Billy Bunter's fat ears, each in a firm grip, were led forward. Needless to add, Billy Bunter went with them. In the midst of the Famous Five, he was marched across the glade to the run-way leading down to the lagoon. He spluttered with wrath and indignation as he went. Once more, the

mighty had fallen, and great was the fall thereof! Billy Bunter had had power in his fat hands, and he had used it not wisely but too well! He had swelled, and swelled, with self-importance, till he really had almost taken leave of his senses, such as they were. But now-! Now it was a deflated, dismal, disconsolate Bunter that rolled reluctantly along the run-way, with a boot applied to his fat person whenever he lingered.

CHAPTER 32

FRIEND OR FOE?

'HALLO, hallo, hallo!'

Bob Cherry whispered those words.

'What-?' whispered Harry Wharton.

'I heard something- Look out!'

'I say, you fellows-!'

'Quiet, you fat idiot!'

'Shan't!'

It was a breathless moment.

The castaways had tramped down the run-way to the beach. Once out of the shadowy bush, the lagoon lay before them, shining like silver in the moonlight. They scanned it anxiously for a sign of a canoe. But there was no canoe to be discerned, within their range of vision: and they tramped on along the beach, in the direction of their early camp under the palm-trees, within a short distance of the reef passage.

Bob had little doubt that the Kanaka he had seen in the canoe, making for the island, was Pompolongo. The other fellows hoped that it was. In any case, their hopes were centred on him and his canoe. He must have put in at the island some time during the day: and that the black tribesmen had seen nothing of him was certain, or they would have heard something of it. If it was Pompolongo, he would naturally keep in cover, knowing his danger; if it was some other sea-voyaging Kanaka, they might find him sleeping by his beached canoe, unaware of peril. Quite possibly they might not find him at all: whoever he was. It was a desperate chance they were taking: but it was their only chance of escape from the cannibal island. They could only hope for the best.

They reached the spot where they had camped, on landing on the island, under the shadow of the cluster of palms. The dead embers of Pompo's cooking-fire still lay about. All was dark and shadowy, silent and still. Perhaps they had had a faint hope that Pompolongo might have camped there for the night. But there was no sign of life: and no sound but the faint stirring of the palm fronds in the wind from the sea. But as they stood looking about them in the shadows, Bob suddenly bent his head to listen, and whispered a warning. His ear had caught some slight sound from the dark bush beyond the palms.

Five fellows listened breathlessly, with anxious faces.

Billy Bunter, for the first time since he had been marched off, grinned. In five minds was the dismaying thought that their attempt to escape might have been already discovered, and that pursuing savages might be hunting for them. But Billy Bunter was not dismayed. Far from it.

'Shan't!' he repeated. 'Fancy you can give me orders? If it's those niggers, after us, you're jolly well going to be marched back-'

'Will you be quiet?' hissed Johnny Bull.

'No, I won't!' retorted Bunter. 'And you won't be quiet, either, when I tell Papeeto to give you six all round with the lawyer-cane. I'll jolly well let you know who's boss on my island.'

It had been a deflated Owl, walked off with a boot to help him on his way when he loitered. But inflation had revived. That rustle in the bush could only mean pursuit and recapture-these cheeky fellows marched back the way they had come, and Big Chief Bunter in all his glory again! the fat Owl once more boss of the show, cock of the walk, lord and master. He grinned at five set and anxious faces.

'They mayn't spot us here, if you keep quiet, Bunter!' whispered Harry.

'Likely!' jeered Bunter. 'You're not getting me into any rotten old canoe, and you're not going, either. You're going to hop when I say hop. Just you wait till those Niggers come up, and you'll see.'

The fat Owl did not subdue his voice. It was evident that, if natives were at hand in the bush, they would hear that fat squeak. Any hope of escaping detection in the shadows was over.

'You fat villain!' breathed Johnny Bull. 'Take that!' He kicked-hard!

'Yarooooooh!' roared Bunter, as he took it.

That yell rang among the palms, and echoed in the bush.

It was followed by a very distinct sound of rustling undergrowth.

Evidently, there had been ears to hear. A shadowy form loomed in the shadows. Then came a voice:

'You feller white master!'

'Oh!' gasped Harry Wharton.

'Pompo!' yelled Bob.

That voice was familiar. It was the well-known voice of Pompolongo. Bob had not been mistaken. It was Pompolongo—he had seen making for the island in the canoe.

That sudden relief was almost too much for the juniors.

They fairly gasped, as they realised that it was not some pursuing savage, but the very man they had hoped to find. Pompolongo came towards them, grinning, with a flash of white teeth.

'Pompo!' exclaimed Harry. 'It's you, Pompo.'

'Jolly glad to see you, old boy,' chuckled Bob.

'The gladfulness is truly terrific!' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Every face was beaming—except Bunter's. Billy Bunter blinked at the brown man with an inimical blink. For a few minutes, Bunter had seen himself in his mind's eye, restored to his high estate as boss of the show, lord and master on 'his' island. Now he had to realise that he was not going to see it with any other eye!

'Me likee too much see white master stop!' said Pompolongo. 'Tinkee plaps go dead along black feller.'

'You came back to look for us, Pompo!' said Harry.

'Yessar! Tinkee plaps go dead, tinkee plaps no go dead!' explained Pompolongo. 'Me comey back along island look-see. Me plenty flaid along black feller. Me hidee canoe along reef, along black feller no findee. Me tinkee plaps findee white master stop. All white master stop!' added Pompo, looking from one to another. 'Me plenty glad all white master stop.'

'I say, you fellows—'

'Shut up, Bunter.'

'Beast!'

'Along night he come, me stop along this place,' went on Pompo. 'Me hear feller comey, ear belong me. Me run along bush plenty too quick, along me too much flaid along black feller.'

'It was us you heard coming,' said Harry.

'Me savvy now, sar. Tinkee plaps black feller, run along bush,' said Pompo. 'Me savvy white master comey, along me hear talkee along little fat white master along glass-eyes.'

There was a chuckle among the Famous Five. Pompo had taken the alarm at the sound of footsteps, and taken cover in the bush. It was Billy Bunter's voice that had apprised him that the new arrivals were not 'black fellers', but the white masters he had returned to the island to seek. Billy Bunter had refused to keep quiet, little guessing that his fat squeak would draw Pompolongo to the spot.

'It was jolly good of you to come back to look for us, Pompo!' said Nugent.

'And we won't forget it,' said Johnny Bull.

'Me likee white master,' said Pompolongo. 'Likee white master givee plenty piecee silver money, along me comey back findee.'

At which there was another chuckle. Pompolongo no doubt liked the white masters, and he had run very considerable risks in returning to the island to ascertain whether they had survived. But he had an eye to the business side of the matter. He was happy to find them still alive. He was also happy at the prospect of 'plenty piecee silver money' for his services.

'Plenty, plenty piecee silver money, along we go along canoe belong you,' said Harry. 'What place canoe he stop?'

'Stop along reef, along black feller no findee. You comey along me Pompolongo, go along sea plenty too quick.'

'I say, you fellows-'

'The sooner the better,' said Bob. 'By gum, I'll be as glad to get off this island, as I was to land on it a week ago.'

'Get a move on,' said Harry. 'Come on, Bunter.'

'I say, you fellows. I'm not coming. Haven't I told you I'm not going to chance it in a canoe?' demanded Bunter. 'You can go if you like-I'll let you fellows go-'

'Dear me!' said Bob. 'Bunter will let us go, you chaps! His Majesty grants us permission to go! Many thanks, your Majesty.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I'm jolly well not coming!' snapped Bunter. 'I had enough of that canoe last time. Clear off, and be blowed to you.'

'Have a little sense, Bunter,' said Harry. 'If we left you here, you'd end up in the cooking-pots sooner or later. Come along.'

'Shan't!'

'Little fat white master along glass-eyes no wantee comey?' asked Pompolongo, staring at the fat Owl.

'Oh, he's coming!' said Bob. 'I'm going to walk behind him, and help him on the way. That's for a start, Bunter.'

Thud!

'Yaroooooh!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Getting a move on, Bunter?' inquired Bob. 'I'll give you all the help you want. Like that!'

Thud!

'Owl Beast! Wow! Stoppit! I'm coming!' howled Bunter. And he came!

It was a rough and tough scramble over the rugged coral rocks, to the spot where Pompolongo had left his canoe hidden in a recess of the reef. Billy Bunter scrambled, and slipped, and stumbled, and squeaked: but there was always a hand, and every now and then a foot, to help him on his way. Bunter was not willing to go. He would vastly have preferred to carry on as Big Chief on 'his' island, with the ventriloquial voice of Komamaloo to see him through. But there was no choice for him: and he was glad, at least, when that rough scramble was over, and he was able to sprawl breathless in the bottom of the canoe while Pompolongo paddled out to sea.

CHAPTER 33

ONCE MORE UPON THE WATERS

DAWN on the Pacific.

Snore!

Billy Bunter had forgotten his woes in slumber. But the other fellows were wide awake, as the sun came up over the endless waste of waters. Pompolongo had paddle throughout the night, and many a long mile lay between the canoe and the island of Komamaloo. There was no sign of the island to be seen, when the juniors scanned the sea in the sunrise. A week ago, they had been glad enough to land on it. Now they were gladder still to have seen the last of it. The boundless ocean rolled round them, stretching as far as the eye could reach without a sign of land. But every heart was light. Escape from the cannibal island had seemed hopeless: but they had escaped. That was enough to lighten every heart and brighten every face.

Neither were they in such hard case as during their former experience in Pompolongo's canoe. It was clear that Pompo, during his days of absence, had touched at some other land: for there was a store of food in the canoe, and gourds of water. The castaways had nothing like their former experience to fear.

'Can't see anything of Bunter's Island!' remarked Bob Cherry, after a long survey of the horizon. 'Jolly glad, too, to see nothing of it.'

'The gladfulness is terrific,' agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'As the English proverb remarks, it is a long lane that has no turn-table.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Good old English proverb!' chuckled Bob. 'And a stitch in time saves a cracked pitcher from going longest to a bird in the bush, what?'

'Well, it's a long lane that has no turning, at any rate,' said Harry.

'And this is the turning! Our luck is in at last.'

'Who says brekker?' said Bob. 'Pompo seems to have picked up stores from somewhere.'

'He must have touched at some other island, while he was away,' said Harry. 'You feller Pompolongo, you findee 'nother island along you no stop along us feller?' Pompolongo grinned round from his paddle.

'Yessar! Go long way, along me plenty too much fright along black feller. Findee little feller island along no feller stop. Bimeby you see, eye belong you, sar. Plenty coconut, plenty banana, plenty feller water along spring he stop.'

'No feller stop!' repeated Bob. 'That means uninhabited, I suppose. Jolly good! We've had enough of the inhabitants of these parts.'

'And he's heading for it now!' said Harry.

That was good news for the castaways. Pompolongo, in his terrified flight from Kafoo, had fled to sea thinking of nothing but escape. But at a distance from the cannibal island, he had found some speck of land where there was food and water: and no inhabitants. Now he had set himself a course for the islet, far out of sight below the horizon. How even a Kanaka could follow a set course on the trackless sea, was a mystery to the juniors. But Pompolongo evidently had no doubts. He paddled on untiringly.

'By gum, we're in luck!' said Johnny Bull. 'Now for brekker! That fat ass is still snoring!' he added, with a glance at the sleeping Owl.

'Let him snore!' said Bob. 'We ought to wake him up and give him the booting he asked for so often, but-'

'But he did pull us through, with his ventriloquist tricks,' said Harry. 'We owe that to Bunter. And we really couldn't expect a born idiot to act as if he had the sense of a bunny rabbit. Let him snore as long as he likes.'

Pompolongo paddled steadily on, while the juniors ate their breakfast of dried fish, bananas, and coconuts: to the accompaniment of Billy Bunter's snore. While they ate, they scanned the sea. They were glad enough to know that Pompo was heading for some distant spot of land where there was food and water-and no inhabitants. But the sight of a sail, or a blur of a steamer's smoke would have been a tremendous relief to all. But in those solitary waters there was little hope of it.

'I say, you fellows!'

That squeak announced that Billy Bunter had awakened at last.

The fat Owl sat up, rubbed his eyes, jammed on his spectacles, and blinked at the Famous Five. Then he blinked at the surrounding sea. Then he blinked at the juniors again, with a very uncertain and uneasy blink.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' said Bob, cheerily. 'Your Majesty awake? Any orders, your Majesty?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, really, Cherry-'

'We ought to boot him!' grunted Johnny Bull.

'Beast! I say you fellows, where are we?'

'A jolly good many miles from your island, old fat man,' said Bob. 'You won't see jolly old Komamaloo again. You won't play any more tricks. And if you don't behave yourself, you're going to be kicked.'

'If that's what you call grateful, Cherry, after I shaved all your wives-I mean saved all your lives-'

'You fat ass!' said Harry Wharton. 'It's because you pulled us through with your trickery, that we're letting you off what you've asked for, for your cheek! Now shut up.'

'I'm hungry!' howled Bunter. 'I say, are those bananas? Chuck over a bunch of those bananas, Cherry.'

'Here you are!' said Bob. 'Catch!'

'Yaroooooh!' roared Bunter, as he caught the bunch-with his little fat nose. 'Ow! wow! Beast!'

It was a disconsolate Owl that sat and munched.

Perhaps it occurred to Billy Bunter's fat mind that he had, perhaps, carried matters with rather too high a hand, during his period of brief authority. It was at least a relief to him that he was not to suffer for his sins, now that the tables had been turned, and he was once more an inconsiderable nobody. But the Famous Five were not the fellows to nurse grudges. Billy Bunter had played the goat, which was really only to be expected of him: and now it was over, they were ready to dismiss it from mind. Billy Bunter munched and munched unkicked: the only consolation he had for his fall from his high estate as Big Chief Bunter.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!' came a sudden yell from Bob Cherry: so sudden, and so stentorian, that it made the other fellows jump.

'What the dickens-!' exclaimed Harry.

'Look!' roared Bob.

He was pointing to the blue dome of the sky. The juniors had been scanning the ocean, hoping against hope, as it were. But Bob had suddenly spotted something high up in the blue vault overhead. For a moment he fancied that it was an albatross. Then he knew-and he yelled!

'Look! It's a plane!'

'A plane!' echoed four voices.

They shaded their eyes and stared up at the sunny sky and masses of fleecy cloud. Was it a plane? They had hoped for a sail or a steamer. They had not dreamed of seeing a plane, so far from any air route. But it

was a plane-far, far up in the sky, cleaving the clouds. It was tiny at the great distance. But it was a plane.

'Ship stop along sky!' said Pompolongo, staring up.

'Me see, eye belong me-feller ship stop along sky.'

'Hurray!' roared Bob.

'If they see us-!' panted Nugent.

'If only they see us-!' breathed Harry.

'They've got to see us!' said Bob. 'Wave-yell-make them see us! Why, I wouldn't wonder if they're looking for us! Browney must have guessed that we were blown off Tomoo, and he wouldn't leave us to it. Bet you they've been looking for us ever since. Oh, crumbs-they mustn't miss us!'

In wild excitement, the castaways waved their hats, and shouted at the top of their voices. Even Billy Bunter added a squeak. Pompolongo stood up waving his paddle. One glimpse of the plane had brought hope and joy to the canoe crew. But their faces fell, as it disappeared beyond a bank of cloud. They had not been seen.

The canoe was but a speck on the boundless waters.

From the height at which the plane was flying, it could not have been seen. It was futile to wave-still more futile to shout. The plane had appeared for a few moments-a hope of rescue, a link with civilization: a reminder of home, and friends, and safety. But it had vanished as suddenly as it had appeared.

It was gone!

Even Bob's cheery face was overcast, as he stared skyward, hoping to see the plane emerge from the clouds. But it did not reappear.

'Rotten luck!' muttered Bob. 'If they'd spotted us-'

'The spotfulness would have been a boonful blessing!' sighed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'But what cannot be cured must go longest to the well.' But Bob was quick to recover.

'After all, what's a plane doing here, umpteen miles from any air route?' he asked. 'Looking for us, as likely as not. Let's hope so, at any rate.' That was all that was left to the castaways-to hope so: as Pompolongo resumed his paddling, and the canoe glided on once more over the blue Pacific.

CHAPTER 34

HOPE!

'THAT'S it!' said Bob Cherry.

That was it. It was a tiny islet, consisting chiefly of a dazzling beach of sand and shells and powdered coral, and nowhere more than a few feet above sea-level. But in the centre, where it was highest, there were bunches of trees, and palm fronds waved in the wind. Tiny as it was, the merest speck in the immensity of the ocean, the castaways were glad enough to see it, after the weariness of water, water, everywhere. Only Billy Bunter gave it a disparaging blink through his spectacles—no doubt comparing it very unfavourably with 'his' island. But the fact that it was at a safe distance from Bunter's island, and too tiny for inhabitants to have settled on it, made it doubly welcome to the Famous Five.

In the golden afternoon, Pompolongo paddled on to the beach. The juniors scrambled out to help him drag the canoe from the lapping water. Billy Bunter sat where he was, blinking at them. Bunter was waiting till the canoe was high and dry. But, with the selfishness to which the fat Owl was only too sadly accustomed, nobody was willing to drag Bunter's weight up the beach.

'Get out, Bunter!' rapped Harry Wharton.

'I don't want to get my feet wet,' answered Bunter, blinking at him. 'You fellows don't seem to mind. I do!'

'Anybody feel like dragging a ton of tallow up the beach, so that Bunter won't get his feet wet?' inquired Bob Cherry.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Getting out, Bunter?' asked Johnny Bull, in a voice rather resembling that of the Great Huge Bear.

'No, I'm jolly well not!' snapped Bunter. 'I'm not going to get soaked to please you, Bull. Wow! Leggo my neck, will you?'

Splash! A swing of Johnny's sinewy arm, and Billy Bunter was out of the canoe. He floundered headlong in a foot of water, spluttering frantically.

'Urrggh! Wurrrgh! Help!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Gurrrggh! Help! I say, you fellows-wurrrggh!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Billy Bunter was left to flounder out of the shallows, as the canoe was dragged up through soft sand and sea-shells and sea-weed. He floundered out, dripping from head to foot: gurgling for breath, his eyes gleaming wrath through wet spectacles.

Had the castaways been still on Bunter's island, with Papeeto at his lordly beck and call, it was probable that the lawyer-cane would have come into operation. But alas for Big Chief Bunter! His glory had departed: and his wrath could be expressed only in a series of infuriated blinks—which did not seem to affect the general equanimity in the very least.

Having beached the canoe, Bob Cherry stood looking round him, measuring the wide stretch of sand with his eye.

'Lots of room for a plane to land here,' he said.

'Lots!' said Nugent. 'If only they'd spotted us—'

'They're going to spot us, if they're still around!' said Bob. 'Couldn't expect them to spot a canoe on a pond the size of the Pacific. But they're jolly likely to spot a smoke-signal.'

'It's a chance, anyway,' said Harry. 'Pompo knows how to make a fire, if we don't, and there's plenty of fuel lying about.'

'It's more than a chance,' insisted Bob. 'What do you think Browney would do, when he missed us on Tomoo a week ago?'

'Goodness knows,' said Nugent. 'He must have been mystified.'

'Well, he wouldn't think we'd vanished into thin air, like jolly old Mercury in the Æneid,' said Bob. 'He would know we'd left Tomoo, and even if he had a brain like Bunter's he would guess that we left it in a craft of some kind and were blown away and couldn't get back. Might even have seen the canoe running before the wind.'

'Might!' said Johnny Bull.

'The air-liner must have gone on to New Zealand, after that blow,' went on Bob. 'Browney wouldn't leave it at that. His pater runs an air-line. Well, the minute he stepped out of the air-liner at Auckland, he would put it up to his pater to send out a plane to look for us.'

'If that's so, old chap, a smoke-signal may do the trick,' said Harry.

'Here, you feller Pompo.'

'Yessar!' Pompolongo was lying in the sand, resting after his labours with the paddle. But he sat up, as Wharton called.

'You savvy makee feller fire!' said Harry. 'Wantee makee big-feller fire, along makee signal.'

'Yessar.'

The process of making a fire with dry sticks was a slow one. But the castaways lost no time in gathering fuel, of which there was plenty to be had, in fallen branches, and masses of sea-weed scattered on the beach, as dry as tinder in the blaze of the tropical sun.

'Lend a hand, Bunter!' called out Bob Cherry.

'Beast! I'm all wet.'

'You'll soon get dry in the sun. A spot of work will do you good,' said Bob. 'Lend a hand, anyway. We want lots and lots of fuel.'

'You don't want lots and lots of fuel for a cooking-fire,' snapped Bunter. 'What are you going to cook, anyway?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at! Pompo hasn't caught any fish-'

'It's a signal-fire, fathead-a smoke-signal to that plane we saw from the canoe this morning-'

'Rot!' said Bunter. 'That plane's gone for good. I'm not slogging about in this sun, I know that. I'm going to look for some shade.'

'Kick him, Johnny.'

'Yaroooooh!'

'Have another?' asked Johnny.

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter did not seem to want another. Reluctantly but inevitably, he joined in the task of slogging about in the sun to gather fuel.

By the time Pompolongo had produced a flame, there was quite an imposing stack on the beach. It burned fiercely as soon as it was set alight, and the juniors promptly backed away from the heat. More and more fuel was tossed on the pile, and a dense column of smoke rolled skyward.

'If that plane's buzzing anywhere around, they'll see that, sooner or later,' said Bob. 'Must be blind as bats, or Bunter, if they don't. Keep an eye on the sky.'

That injunction was hardly needed. Almost every minute, glances turned to the blue heavens and the fleecy drifting clouds.

That glimpse of the soaring plane, brief as it had been, had brought hope of rescue. It was probable, indeed more than probable, that a plane had been sent out from Auckland, after Tom Brown's arrival there, to search the sea for them: in the hope, faint as it must have been, that they had survived the hurricane that had blown them off Tomoo. Such a search, on the vast Pacific, was no doubt like looking for a needle in a haystack. But a smoke-signal might be seen from afar.

Thicker and thicker it rose, as they piled on fuel, rolling to the blue sky. The sun sank to the Pacific, and the brief tropical twilight came. Not till the last glimmer of daylight was gone, did they cease to scan the sky with hopeful eyes. Then, at last, they camped by the little spring that bubbled up under the palms. They had scanned the sky in vain: but there was hope for the morrow: and hopes were high when they turned out at sunrise to bank up the signal-fire.

CHAPTER 35

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

'I SAY, you fellows.'

Nobody heeded Billy Bunter's fat squeak. It was late in the sunny morning.

The Famous Five had been up, within minutes of the sun's rim gleaming over the Pacific Billy Bunter had snored on under the palms. Not till inward premonitions warned the fat Owl that a meal-time was overdue, did Billy Bunter cease to snore, and heave up his fat limbs from his bed of leaves. Harry Wharton and Co. had been glad of a wash in the spring under the palms. Bunter was not bothering about such trifles. Having ceased to sleep, Bunter's thoughts ran naturally on food.

The signal-fire on the beach was burning steadily.

There was little wind, and the dense column of smoke rose almost directly to the sky. But the castaways were not, at the moment, attending to the fire. They were standing in a group, their heads tilted back, shading their eyes with their hands, and gazing skyward; and Pompolongo was similarly occupied.

'I say, you fellows!' repeated Bunter, irritably.

Still he was not heeded.

The fat Owl turned his eyes, and his spectacles, upward.

Only a drift of fleecy cloud met those little round eyes and big round spectacles. Then he blinked at the Famous Five again.

'I say, you fellows!' he howled. 'What about brekker?'

That word, magical to Bunter, had no magical effect on the half -dozen sky-gazers. They continued to stare upward unheeding, apparently unconscious of the fat Owl's existence.

'Deaf?' howled Bunter.

Really, they seemed deaf. They were, at all events, deaf to the fat Owl's irritated squeak. But Pompolongo broke the silence at last.

'Tinkee see ship stop along sky, eye belong me,' he said.

'Plenty too much me tinkee see ship stop along sky.'

'I say, you fellows-'

'Shut up, you fat ass!' roared Johnny Bull.

'I'm hungry!' roared back Bunter. 'Look here, what have we got for brekker? Isn't there any fish? Why can't that nigger catch some fish? Think a fellow can live on coconuts for ever? If we were back on my island-'

'Kick him!'

'Beast!'

Billy Bunter dodged a lunging foot.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! I can see it now!' yelled Bob.

His hand shot up to point. 'Look! Look! That's a plane!'

'Oh, good!' gasped Nugent.

'Oh, what luck!' breathed Harry Wharton.

'The luckfulness is truly terrific!' chuckled Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

There was no doubt about it! Pompolongo had spotted it first, a speck in the distant sky. But all the Famous Five could see it now, which meant that it was drawing nearer. And what could that mean, but that the smoke-signal had been seen and that rescue was coming? Five faces were as bright as the sunshine that streamed down on the islet.

'Hurray!' roared Bob. 'Didn't I tell you they'd be looking for us? Now they've jolly well found us.'

'They've seen the smoke, and they're heading this way!' said Harry. 'They know somebody's stranded here, making signals for help. That's all they can know: but that's enough to make them look in. They're coming!'

'I say, you fellows-!'

'Brace up, old fat man!' roared Bob. Bob's spirits were generally high. Now they were quite exuberant. 'I can't see the markings yet, but I'm sure that's the same plane we saw yesterday. We're going to be picked up, old fat man. They're looking for us, and here we are!'

'I can't see any plane!' yapped Bunter. 'I expect it's a seagull. Anyhow, what about brekker? Is there any fish, or isn't there?'

'Next stop New Zealand!' trilled Bob. 'We're going to get that holiday in N.Z. after all, old porpoise. And after that, England, Home and Beauty! and then you'll be bending over under Quelch's cane once more in the jolly old form-room! Think of that!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I'm hungry!' howled Bunter.

Sad to relate, nobody seemed to care whether Bunter was hungry or not. The plane was approaching, losing height as it approached. Evidently watchful eyes had spotted the smoke-signal, and the plane was coming to investigate. All attention was on the plane: and Billy Bunter, having indignantly ascertained that nothing more substantial was available, chewed coconut unregarded.

'Here she comes, here she comes, here she comes!' chanted Bob. 'They've seen the smoke, and they've seen this spot of the jolly old earth we're standing on-and they'll jolly soon see us. They'll think we look rather a ragged lot. But you might as well cut off and get a wash, Bunter, now you're going to see company.'

'Yah!' was Bunter's rejoinder to that.

The plane was in full view now. It was circling over the little islet, the pilot looking for a possible landing-place to touch down. The Famous Five waved their hands, and waved their hats, with joyful and excited faces. Even Billy Bunter could see now that it was not a seagull. And a thoughtful and uneasy expression came over his fat face. He ceased to chew coconut.

'I say, you fellows!' he squeaked.

'Here she comes!' roared Bob. 'I wouldn't wonder if old Browney's up there, with his eye on us. Anybody like to see old Browney again?'

'What-ho!'

'I say, you fellows, will you let a fellow speak!' howled Bunter. 'I say, if that's one of Brown's pater's planes, and we're getting to New Zealand after all-'

'Bank on it!' said Bob.

'Well, look here, I don't want any trouble when we get there,' said Bunter. 'Old Brown might remember that he never put my name in that letter, so-so don't you fellows get saying anything.'

'You fat villain!'

'I-I may have said something that made you fellows think that I wangled it on Quelch's typewriter-'

'So you did, you fat sweep!'

'Nothing of the kind,' said Bunter. 'I never touched Quelch's typewriter, and I hadn't got Browney's letter in my pocket. Besides, it was all Quelch's fault for sending me in to wait in his study. I never read Browney's letter, and I shouldn't have if it hadn't come open by accident, and of course, I thought that old Brown had just forgotten to put in my name, and there was room to put it in. But I jolly well didn't, and after all we've been through, I can tell you I wish I hadn't-'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Blessed if I see anything to cackle at. Can't a fellow open his mouth without you fellows cackling?' hooted Bunter. 'What I mean is, don't you fellows get saying anything about it. Old Brown might think I did it, if he knew I did-'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'She's coming down!' roared Bob.

'I say, you fellows-!'

'It's all right, you fat villain!' said Harry Wharton. 'We shall say nothing about it. Now shut up-here comes the plane.'

On a level stretch of sand, the plane touched down.

The juniors ran breathlessly towards it. They had hoped for it-they had almost expected it-but now that it had happened, it seemed almost too good to be true. But it was true: for there was the plane, and as a door flew open, a familiar face appeared-and Tom Brown waved a hand to them.

'Browney!' yelled Bob.

They raced across the beach. Tom Brown came racing to meet them. It was a joyful meeting.

'You fellows-!' gasped Tom. 'You're all here-all safe-'

'All here-safe, sound and sober!' chuckled Bob. , And are we glad to see your jolly old phiz again, Browney!'

'The gladfulness is terrific,' grinned Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I say, you fellows.' Billy Bunter came panting up. 'I say, I suppose we can get a decent brekker on the plane? I can jolly well tell you I'm sick of coconuts. I say, Browney, if there's something to eat-!'

'Lots!' said Tom, laughing. 'Cut in and feed, old fat man.'

Billy Bunter did not need telling twice!

Tom Brown and the Famous Five had much to tell one another. But Billy Bunter's fat squeak was not added to the chorus of happy voices. Bunter was busy packing away the foodstuffs: and he was still going strong when the plane took off with the rescued castaways, and soared away through the clouds for New Zealand.

It was a happy holiday after all! En route, Pompolongo was landed at his native island, with so munificent a reward for his services that he was probably the richest Kanaka in Osako. Then the plane flew on to Auckland, where Mr. Brown was doubtless surprised, but undoubtedly delighted, to see his son return with his schoolboy chums so long missing. Billy Bunter felt a little trepidation at that meeting: and Mr. Brown was probably a little puzzled, having no recollection whatever of having included Bunter's name in his letter to Greyfriars. However, as nothing was said on the subject, nothing, luckily for Bunter, transpired: and being happily unconscious of the fact that he was a young rascal who deserved to be kicked, Billy Bunter was quite satisfied with himself and things generally. To Harry Wharton and Co. the memory of their sojourn among the savages was rather like a nightmare, which they were glad to dismiss from mind. Only Billy Bunter liked to recall his brief period of tremendous importance, when he had been a Big Chief on 'his' island.

The next book in THE BILLY BUNTER SERIES will be No. 34. JUST LIKE BUNTER
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