

**THANKS TO
BUNTER**



FRANK RICHARDS

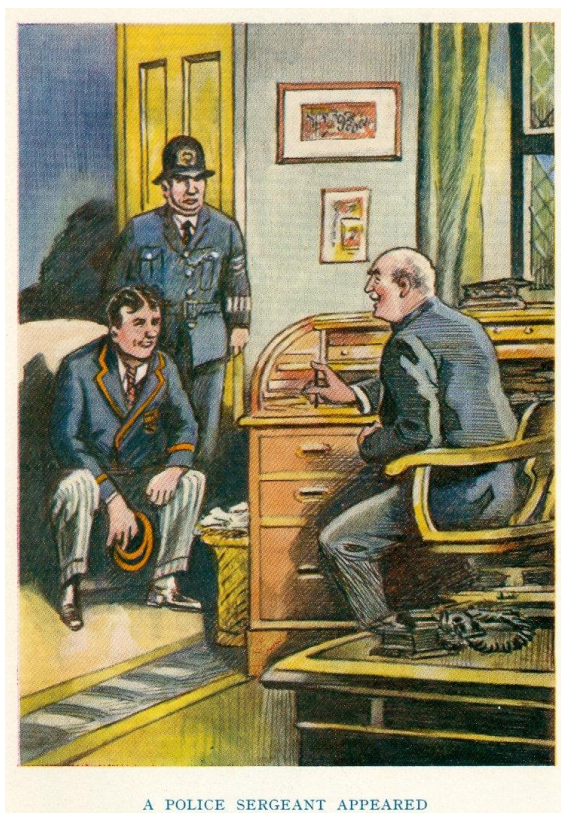
THANKS TO BUNTER

WHEN Horace Coker decided that it was necessary to punish Wingate of the Sixth for 'cheek' by pouring a bucket of water over him, he let loose a flood of startling events! For it was Mr. Quelch, the Remove master, who got that water and - in consequence - a bad cold, which necessitated his absence from duty and the engagement by Dr. Locke of a temporary substitute.

Meanwhile, the author of the watery outrage remained unknown to the authorities; but William George Bunter, seeing a crime 'going-begging' as it were, which he thought might lend lustre to his name, claimed to have done it. Unfortunately, he was overheard and apprehended by Mr. Prout, who proceeded to take him to the Head.

The terrified fat Owl broke away, and hid in Mr. Quelch's study, which he knew was empty of Quelch. It did not, however, remain empty for long, as the new temporary master Mr. Foss, was soon ushered into it by Mr. Prout. Mr. Foss was a meek-looking gentleman who, unknown to anyone, ran a strange but profitable side-line! His meekness suddenly disappeared when Vernon-Smith discovered part of his secret. He dealt drastically with Vernon-Smith, who became determined to find out the rest of that secret!

How he did it, and how the fat and fatuous Bunter protested that it was really owing to him that the mystery was cleared up, is related in *Thanks to Bunter*.



THANKS TO
BUNTER

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CHAPTER 1

JUST LIKE COKER!

'FOR goodness' sake, Coker-!'

'Shut up, Potter!'

'But look here-'

'I said "shut up".'

'Now, wait a minute-'

'And that applies to you, too, Greene!'

Harry Wharton and Co. exchanged glances. It was not surprising to hear Coker of the Fifth arguing and laying down the law to his friends. He frequently did - but it was surprising to hear him doing so in Study No. 1, in the Remove passage.

Fifth-form men had no business in the Remove quarters.

The Famous Five were surprised-and not pleased.

'What the dickens-?' ejaculated Bob Cherry.

'That ass, Coker!' said Harry Wharton.

'What are they doing in our study?' exclaimed Frank Nugent.

The study-door was half-open. Johnny Bull pushed it open wider and the juniors looked in. They had come up expecting, naturally, to find No. 1 Study empty. And they had found three Fifth-formers in it!

They stared, blankly, at what they saw.

Coker and Potter were standing by the window, which was open. Greene was on the other side of Coker. On the window-sill stood a bucket, full of water. Horace Coker had a hand on that bucket. George Potter had a hand on Coker's shoulder, and was, apparently, endeavouring to pull him away from the bucket.

'What the thump-?' murmured Harry Wharton. The three Fifth-formers had their backs to the door of Study No. 1. They had not yet seen the juniors.

'Let go my shoulder, Potter. He may come along any minute, now.'

'That's why I'm holding it. Don't be such an ass!'

'That will do from you, George Potter!'

'You utter chump!' exclaimed Potter. 'If you swamp that bucket of water over Wingate's napper-'

'No "if" about it! I'm going to!'

The Removites stared, almost petrified. Wingate of the Sixth was Captain of Greyfriars. He was not only captain of the school, but also head prefect. He was a great man in every way - tremendous, in fact! A fellow might be 'sacked' for pouring a bucket of water over Wingate. It would be almost as bad as pouring it over the Head! No one but Coker, it was certain, would ever have thought of such a thing. If the Famous Five had not already known that Coker was the biggest ass in Greyfriars, they knew it now.

'But-?' It was almost a groan from Potter. He was, evidently, still striving to restrain Coker from rushing to destruction.

'Don't jaw', said Coker. 'Look here, you ass-'

'You heard him talking to me, didn't you?' continued Coker, regardless.

'I'd just smacked a fag's head-that fat fool, Bunter's. Things are coming to a pretty pass, when a Fifth-form man is jawed for smacking a fag's head.'

'Yes, but-' began Greene. Coker interrupted again. 'Wingate jawed me! Me! Taking an unfair advantage of his being a prefect. And when I told him to shut up, he said that, although it wasn't usual to give a Fifth-form man "six", it could and would be done if necessary - and would be, if I said another word. Cheek!'

'Awful!' observed Potter, gravely. 'All the same, old man-'

'He might have tried to do so,' continued Coker. 'I'd have punched his nose, if he had. As it was I nearly did so - Still, a fellow might get bunked for punching a prefect. I've got some discretion and restraint and the proper judgement of a situation I should hope-'

'What a hope!' murmured Greene. 'What did you say, William Greene?'

'What about passing it off with your discretion and restraint and judgement and coming along to tea--?'

'No. I've decided not to punch him. But there are other ways of putting a cheeky swab in his place. Wingate may be sorry he jawed me, when he gets this over his cheeky head!'

'If he spots you-' exclaimed Potter.

'He won't. I'd like to tell him I did it, of course. But that wouldn't do. I should have to go up to the Head. I shall keep this dark.'

'But-'

'Don't waste time jawing. He may come along any minute. I spotted him talking to Quelch just round the corner. He will come back this way. I can get him from this window a treat. Let go my shoulder, you fathead!'

'You can't do it!'

'Can't I, Greene? You'll see in a minute! It's all right, you ass! Safe as houses - we cut as soon as I've tipped this bucket over him.'

'He may get after us - and he'll certainly get after the fags this study belongs to,' said Potter. 'He will know it came from here.'

'If he does, they can tell him they never did it. Don't talk any more now - listen! If you keep quiet we'll hear him on the gravel, as soon as he comes round the corner. I don't want to put my head out - might be seen from the quad! So shut up!'

'Oh, you goat!' exclaimed Potter. 'For goodness sake, Coker-'

His protest was immediately reinforced by the Removites. A chorus of voices joined in.

'You utter ass!' said Harry Wharton. 'Put that bucket down.'

'My esteemed and idiotic Coker!' exclaimed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Get out of here and take that bucket with you,' roared Johnny Bull, 'or we'll swamp it over you.'

'You should never let him off his chain, Potter.' observed Bob Cherry.

Potter and Greene swung round. Coker turned his head to look at the Removites, still keeping his hand on the bucket.

'Keep quiet you fags, and clear off!'

'Keep quiet and clear off while you empty a pail of water over Wingate from our study window!' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'You blithering chump! Get that pail in and take it out of here.'

'Kick those fags out, you fellows. I can't leave the window,' observed Coker.

Potter and Greene looked expressively at each other.

Kicking out five juniors was not a light task, even if they had been disposed to undertake it! Kicking them out so that Coker could get on with one of the most goatish enterprises of his career was not a proceeding which appealed to them at all.

'Chuck it, Coker, and come along out of here,' said Potter.

'I said "kick out those fags-"'

Breathing rather hard. Potter turned and walked out of the study, followed by Greene. They did not want to be on the spot when Wingate got the contents of that bucket. As they left, the Removites advanced towards Coker.

'Stop acting like a chump and get out!' said Harry Wharton. 'Sharp!'

'You cheeky little tick-'

'Collar him and chuck him out,' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'It's no good talking sense to Coker. He doesn't recognise it when he hears it!'

As they moved towards Coker, a sound came up from below—the sound of footsteps on gravel. As five pairs of hands stretched out to grasp Coker, he tipped the bucket, and its contents flooded out and downwards. It was too late for the Removites to stop him. The deed was done!

A startled yell came from below the window as a torrent of water splashed on an astonished head. Coker chuckled. He grabbed the empty pail and rushed for the door.

Coker disappeared, leaving the Famous Five in a state of consternation. From below the window gurgling sounds floated upwards.

'Oh! Ah! Ooooh! Groogh! I am drenched! What-what-upon my word! '

The Famous Five looked at each other in horror. It was not the voice of Wingate of the Sixth. It was the voice of Henry Samuel Quelch, the Remove master! Coker had drenched the wrong man!

'Oh, crumbs!' gasped Bob Cherry. 'Quelchy!'

'Quelch!' echoed Nugent, faintly.

'That utter ass, Coker!' exclaimed Johnny Bull. 'He's drenched Quelch!'

'Quelch!' said Harry Wharton.

'My esteemed chums,' said the Nabob of Bhanipur, 'this is a time not to stand upon the order of our gofulness, but to go immediately or at once.' Hurree Singh's advice was good. The others nodded and made for the door. Quelch would, very probably, come up to make inquiries, and it would be as well not to be caught *in flagrante delicto*, as it were. Quelch, when and if he came, would be in no mood to listen to explanations. The juniors could not explain in any case without giving away Coker, which must not, of course, be done, chump though he undoubtedly was. For the time being, it was better to be in another and a safer part of Greyfriars.

CHAPTER 2

BUNTER TAKES COVER

'OH!' gasped the Owl of the Remove.

'You fat tick!' exclaimed Vernon-Smith.

They had met, face to face, in the doorway of Study No. 4 of the Remove. Bunter was coming out - Vernon-Smith was coming in. They both halted, Vernon-Smith glaring in wrath at the fat junior, Bunter blinking in alarm at the Bounder.

Bunter had a bundle under his fat arm. It had been wrapped hastily in a newspaper, but it was easy to see what it was - it was a large cake! And Herbert Vernon-Smith knew that cake - being its proprietor!

The study of the millionaire's son usually contained a good deal of the fat of the land. That was a fact well-known to the Owl. He had been there before. Surprised by Vernon-Smith on some previous occasions in illicit possession of jams, jellies, tarts or other eatables, he had escaped with a few kicks, but the Bounder was not disposed to worry. He could always buy more. There was, however, a limit. Walking off with a special cake the Bounder had laid in for a party that afternoon was right up to the limit and a little over.

Vernon-Smith had invited several fellows to tea - Harry Wharton and Co., Lord Mauleverer from No. 12 Study, Tom Brown, the New Zealand junior, and Peter Todd and Dutton from Study No. 7. The other occupant of No. 7 Study had not been invited - but here he was - with the cake.

'You fat, frumptions freak!' roared the Bounder. 'Put that cake back - and then sheer off before I boot you - see!'

'I-I say, it isn't your cake,' exclaimed Bunter. 'It's-it's mine. It came by the afternoon post - and I brought it here - for-for you to have a slice, Smithy. Because I like you, Smithy, old man. I-I don't think you're a purse-proud upstart like most of the fellows do-'

'Shut up, and stick that cake on the table!'

Bunter reluctantly backed into the study. There was no escape from it with the Bounder in the doorway.

He squinted, sadly, at the cake as he laid it down on the table and sighed. It was a shame having to give up a cake like that to a greedy fellow like Smithy. Having got away with it, so nearly, Bunter had almost come to look upon that cake as his own. The pangs of parting were severe. Vernon-Smith stared into his study cupboard, where many good things were packed - or had been packed. It was now apparent that they were packed elsewhere. They were, in fact, packed inside Bunter.

On the floor, before the cupboard, were many scattered crumbs, which looked as though someone had been standing there feeding. The Owl of the Remove now wished that he had not stopped for a few jam-tarts and some doughnuts, before disappearing with that cake. It would have been wiser to push off earlier.

'I-I never touched those jam-tarts, Smithy,' gasped Bunter. He backed as he saw Vernon-Smith's expression. Vernon-Smith had realised now, the extent of Bunter's depredations on the supplies he had laid in for that tea-party. He would either have to shop for more, or that tea-party would have to go on a diet. 'I-I never saw any jam-tarts - or doughnuts, I-I didn't know there were any-'

The fat Owl jumped back and dodged round the table, as Vernon-Smith made a stride towards him. The Bounder was looking dangerous.

'I-I say, keep off!' gasped Bunter. 'Oh, lor!' There had been little left in the way of foodstuffs to pick up in that cupboard, but there had been a few other things, and the Bounder had taken hold of one of them. 'I-I say, what are you going to do with that fives-bat, old chap?'

'Guess!' invited Vernon-Smith.

'Yaroooooh!'

The Bounder hadn't waited for Bunter to guess. The fives-bat had landed on him with a terrific swipe as he dodged further round the table. A roar woke the echoes of the Remove passage.

The Owl made a wild rush for the door-but the Bounder's left hand caught him by his collar, and his right hand wielded the fives-bat.

Swipe! Swipe! Swipe!

'Ow. Wow! Beast! Leggo!'

Bunter roared and tried to wrench himself away, but the Bounder kept hold of him and laid on the bat as if he were beating a carpet.

'Ow. Wow! Yaroooooh!'

In sheer desperation, the Owl squirmed round and hit out. A fist, with the weight of the fattest junior in Greyfriars behind it, landed on Herbert Vernon-Smith's nose.

'Ow!' gasped the Bounder.

He was quite taken by surprise at that unexpected punch. Letting go Bunter's collar he staggered back, and sat down with a bump on the study carpet.

Bunter gazed at him, almost in horror. Vernon-Smith dabbed his nose gently with a handkerchief and it came away crimson.

'Oh, lor!' gasped the Owl.

He had knocked down Vernon-Smith and given him a prize nose! What Vernon-Smith would do when he got up again was too awful to think of!

He decided not to wait to find out.

William George Bunter was not normally a swift mover, but on this occasion, anyone who saw him might really have been mistaken in thinking that he had, perhaps, a chance in the next Junior Hundred Yards. He went through the doorway like a stone from a catapult, and flew down the Remove passage.

For the moment the Bounder was *hors de combat* - but it was only for the moment. With a stream of red running from his nose, he jumped up and rushed in pursuit.

Bunter reached the corner at No. 1 Study and blinked back in alarm, in time to see the Bounder emerging from No. 4.

There was no time to go any further. There was not a moment to lose.

Bunter rushed into No. 1 Study and closed the door. Vernon-Smith came down the passage after him like lightning.

Click!

The fat Owl had turned the key inside, just in time. It had hardly turned when Vernon-Smith was wrenching at the handle outside - but it had turned, and the door was locked! Bunter spluttered with relief. Thick, strong oak was between him and the avenger!

Thump! Thump!

'Open this door!' roared Vernon -Smith. 'When I get hold of you, you pilfering porpoise, I'll boot you all along the passage!'

This really was not the way to induce the Owl of the Remove to open the door. He had no desire whatever to be booted along the passage.

'You fat rotter! Open this door!' Vernon-Smith resumed his thumping.

'Wharton-Nugent-if you're there let me into this study!'

'They ain't here!' gasped Bunter. 'Catch me letting you in. I never had the tarts or the doughnuts - or the biscuits - you beast. I haven't even got the toffee in my pocket-'

The Bounder resumed his thumping on the door. As an inducement to William George Bunter to open it, the thumping was utterly valueless, and the Bounder, breathing fury, had to realise as much.

'Go and eat coke,' came the voice of Bunter. 'I'm jolly well staying here 'till Wharton or Nugent comes up. Yah!'

Outside the door, Herbert Vernon-Smith dabbed his damaged nose with a handkerchief. It was quite clear that Bunter was not going to unlock the door of Study No. 1, and his nose needed bathing - in fact it needed it, very much! Bestowing a last, infuriated thump on the solid oak, the Bounder tramped away to bathe his nose.

Bunter was glad to hear his receding footsteps.

He rather hoped that the Bounder might be in a better temper, when he saw him again. Bunter had a hopeful nature! In any case, he could hardly be in a worse one! For the present, the Owl of the Remove was safe from being called to account for that punch on the nose. The door of Study No. 1 was staying locked, until the owners came up to tea.

In the meantime, Bunter had a pleasant occupation, while he waited for them. From one pocket he turned out a cargo of biscuits; from another a bag of toffees. He had not succeeded in walking off with the cake, but before Vernon-Smith came upon him, he had parked a few odds and ends in his pockets, and they were now a comfort.

Nobody had been in the study, when he made rapid entry; though had he but known it, it had, very recently, been occupied by Coker & Co., as well as the Famous Five. The window was wide open, and there was a big wet splash on the window-sill. Bunter squinted at that splash, wondering how it had come there. However, he was not much interested; what interest he had to spare was concentrated on the toffees and the biscuits.

The Owl sat down in the study armchair, and packed his plunder into a capacious mouth.

From below, in the quad, there came the sound of voices which sounded a little excited. Something, it would seem, was on; Bunter did not know what. Neither did he care, so long as the toffees and biscuits lasted. With a good supply of these, and a locked door between the Bounder and himself, he was quite content to stay and sprawl in the armchair - and he continued to do so, in a state of fat and sticky contentment - which alas, was destined to be interrupted!

CHAPTER 3

SPOTTED ON THE SPOT!

HENRY SAMUEL QUELCH, master of the Remove Form, spluttered.

He spluttered, he gurgled and he gasped.

Seldom had the master of the Greyfriars Remove been so utterly taken by surprise!

Life is full of surprises, and no doubt Mr. Quelch had had his share of them, but this was one of the biggest he had ever had!

He had been chatting with Wingate of the Sixth, and, leaving Wingate, came round the corner to walk along the path, which ran beneath the Remove study windows. Then it happened!

The afternoon was fine. A bright sun shone in a cloudless sky. There was no sign of rain - but suddenly and unexpectedly, a torrent of water descended upon the head of the Remove master.

It swamped him, drenching him and knocking his mortar-board sideways. It splashed over his gown and down his neck!

Mr. Quelch staggered, spluttering wildly. For a moment, it had seemed to him that it must be a cloud-burst or something of the kind - a sudden and unexpected torrent of rain! He soon realised that it was not - but what it was he did not, immediately, guess. Mr. Quelch was quite bewildered. 'Oh! Ah! Ooooooh! Woooooh!' gasped Quelch.

'My dear Quelch!' Prout, the master of the Fifth, had been walking in the quad and he rolled up at once. 'What -what-what? You are quite wet, Quelch!'

Quelch did not need that information. He was undoubtedly wet. He had seldom been wetter.

'I-I am soaked!' he gasped. 'Drenched! What has happened? - How-?'

'It is water!' ejaculated Mr. Prout. 'Water has been flung from a window - a most careless act - most reprehensible-'

A dozen fellows, who had been in the 'quad', crowded alongside. Sad to say, most of them were grinning, as if there were something funny in a 'beak' getting suddenly drenched with water poured from a study window! If the affair had a funny side, it was wholly lost on Quelch!

He gouged water from his eyes and stared upwards. It dawned upon him that that sudden torrent must have proceeded from a study window. High above, one study window was wide open; Study No. 1 in the Remove passage.

'Oh!' gasped Quelch. 'Some young rascal - oh! Upon my word! This was no accident - this - can you see anyone at that window?'

'No one, my dear Quelch!' observed Mr. Prout. Coker of the Fifth, after emptying that pail, had already vanished like a ghost at cock-crow. The Famous Five, unwitting witnesses of the happening, had swiftly followed. The window had been left wide open; no one could be seen. Bunter, in the armchair, was out of sight.

'Some Remove boy!' observed Mr. Twigg, master of the Second form, who had joined the crowd. 'That is a Remove study window, my dear Quelch. I fear that some boy of your form-'

'Groogh! Oooogh!' Quelch dabbed at the water, which was still streaming down him. He pulled off his mortar-board and shook it. Prout and Twigg started back from a shower of drops. 'Upon my word! I am drenched - the boy shall be flogged - expelled - oooogh! I will find him at once-'

'I should suggest an immediate change, my dear Quelch,' said Prout. 'You are soaked - you will catch cold-'

It was good advice, but Quelch did not heed it. He started back to the main door, not for the purpose of getting a change of clothing, but getting hold of the pourer of the water! Quelch wanted to get hold of that reckless youth, and he wanted to get hold of him at once!

Unfortunately, a good many minutes had already been wasted - it was quite probable that the perpetrator of that foul deed had departed from the spot and disappeared from discovery! Quelch, all the same, hoped for the best as he whisked away, leaving a trail of water behind him.

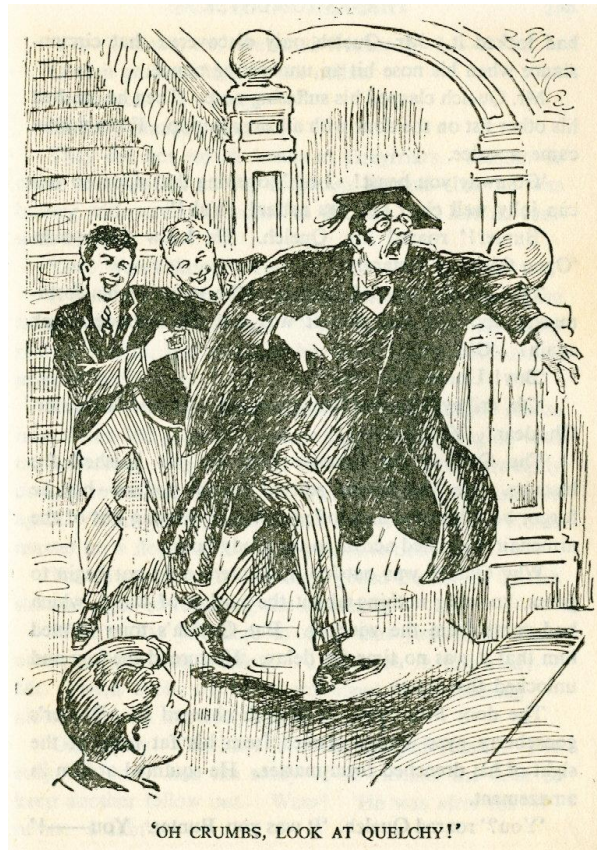
He almost ran. Mr. Quelch was a stately gentleman, who generally moved in a stately manner. Now, however, he sped into the building at such a rate that he did not see Temple, Dabney and Fry of the Fourth coming out - until there was a sudden crash! Quelch tottered and gasped, Temple staggering to one side of him, Fry to the other and Dabney, who had borne the charge, end on, so to speak, staggering back and sitting on the floor!

'Oh!' gasped Mr. Quelch.

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Dabney.

There were simultaneous gasps from Temple and Fry.

Quelch gave the Fourth-formers an angry glare. Really, they were not to blame - they could not, possibly, have foreseen, as they walked to the door, that a form-master would suddenly enter it like a runaway lorry. Still it was very annoying!



'Cannot you look where you are going?' hooted Quelch. 'How dare you collide with me in this manner?'

He did not wait for an answer, but headed for the staircase, leaving the three Fourth-formers looking at one another.

Up the big staircase went Mr. Quelch, dripping water as he progressed. A voice was heard from somewhere.

'Oh, crumbs! Look at Quelchy! He's been for a swim with his clothes on!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Mr. Quelch did not heed. He ran up the staircase, and charged along to the Remove passage. Arriving at the door of No. 1 Study, he turned the

handle and pushed to enter with the opening door - which, no doubt, he would have done had the door been unlocked.

It had not occurred to the exasperated Remove master that the study door might be locked - but it was! Bunter had locked it. Mr. Quelch only discovered that circumstance when his nose hit an unresisting panel. Mr. Quelch clasped his suffering nose. Then he crashed his other fist on the door with a heavy thump. From within came a voice.

'Go away you beast! I ain't opening that door, so you can jolly well clear off, you rotter! Yah!'

'Bunter!' roared Mr. Quelch. He knew that voice. 'Open this door instantly!'

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter. The voice of his form-master apprised him that it was not the Bounder back again!

'Oh, lor'.'

'Boy! Unlock this door!'

'Oh, crikey!' gasped Bunter, again. 'It wasn't me, sir. Oh, dear! Yes, sir!'

The Owl of the Remove had not yet finished the biscuits. He had hardly started on the toffees - but he forgot both biscuits and toffee now. Squirring out of the armchair, he rolled across to the study door. Why Quelch was outside it, Bunter could not begin to guess, knowing nothing about the bucket of water, which had come from the window. But Quelch's tone warned him that it was no time for delay. He turned the key and unlocked the door.

The door flew open, as Quelch charged in. Bunter's gooseberry eyes almost started from his fat face, at the sight of his drenched form-master. He squinted at him in amazement.

'You?' roared Quelch. 'It was you, Bunter. You-!'

'Yes - I mean, no,' stuttered Bunter 'I-I-'

Quelch grabbed him by the collar.

'Yaroooooh! I-I say-'

Smack! Smack! Smack!

They did not smack heads at Greyfriars. Seldom or never had Quelch so far forgotten himself - but he was boiling with wrath, drenched to the skin, and had no cane with him!

'Ow! Wow! Stoppit! Help!'

It seemed to the fat Owl that his form-master must have taken leave of his senses. Why Quelch had suddenly rushed at him, and smacked his head, was a bewildering mystery to Bunter.

'Bunter! -Atchoooooh-atishoo!' A prolonged sneeze interrupted Mr. Quelch's evident intention of going on with the smacking. He let go of the fat Owl, who promptly dodged round the table. Mr. Quelch sneezed and sneezed again. 'You young rascal I shall report you to the Headmaster for a flogging, for what you have done-'

'But I haven't done anything!' yelled Bunter, as Quelch showed signs of resuming the smacking.

'What? Do you dare to deny that you threw water over me from that window? I find you in this study-' Mr. Quelch broke off for a prolonged fit of sneezing '- alone and with the door locked-'

'Oh, crikey! Oh, lor'!' I never,' gasped Bunter. 'I've only just come into the study -I-I- locked the door to keep another fellow out. Wow! He was after me! I never. I didn't-'

Mr. Quelch gave Bunter a watery glance. It was dawning upon him that he had, perhaps, taken too much for granted.

'If you were not responsible for this outrage, Bunter, who else was here?'

'I never saw anybody, sir. Wow!' The fat Owl rubbed his head.

Mr. Quelch was stopped from further comment by more sneezes. He realised that he had caught that cold of which Prout had warned him! Turning to the door, he hurried out of Study No. 1. He was very anxious to get hold of the boy who had drenched him, but it was better not to pursue the matter at the moment. It was more judicious to get out of his wet clothes. He rushed away, sneezes floating back as he went.

CHAPTER 4

COKER ASKS FOR IT!

'HEARD about Quelchy?' asked Skinner, with a grin.

'What about Quelchy?' said Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five had been out of gates. After what had happened in Study No. 1, they had considered it judicious to keep off the scene. Now they had come back, just in time for call-over, and Skinner of the Remove met them with that question and a grinning face.

'Spot of good news, I fancy!' chuckled Skinner. 'We're not having Quelchy in the form-room tomorrow!'

'Why not?'

'The dear man's in sanny.'

'Oh!'

Harry Wharton and Co. had rather wondered whether Mr. Quelch might catch a cold as a result of Coker's antics. Apparently, he had!

'If you fellows hadn't been more than a mile off, you might have heard him sneezing,' continued Skinner. 'Some ass drenched him with water - from your study window. He was soaked to the skin - and instead of changing at once, the old ass cut up to the studies after the man - in his wet clothes - and came down sneezing his head off! Believe me, he's got a cold on him like a blanket!'

'Is that what you call a spot of good news?' asked Johnny Bull. 'The goodnessfulness for the esteemed Quelch will not be terrific,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Skinner laughed.

'Not for Quelch - but for us!' he said. 'Bet you we shan't see him in the form-room again for a week or two - looks like an easy time for the Remove. I've got lines for him - he won't ask for them now he's "in sanny".'

Bob Cherry grunted. The good-natured Bob, at any rate, was not disposed to rejoice at Mr. Quelch's removal to the sanatorium, even if it did spell an easy time for the Remove in his absence.

'Has it come out who did it?' asked Harry Wharton.

He and the rest of the Famous Five had no idea of mentioning Coker, but they hoped no suspicions had been aroused.

'Well, Quelchy got Bunter-'

'Bunter?' It was a chorus of surprise. 'Why, Bunter?' asked Nugent.

'He was in the study-'

'Our study? What was the fat ass doing in our study?' exclaimed Wharton.

'Smithy says he bolted in there and locked the door - Smithy was after him for something, and that must have been a minute or two after Quelchy was swamped, as far as I can see,' said Skinner. 'Anyway, Quelchy found him there, and smacked his napper right and left - but I don't believe it was Bunter - he wouldn't have nerve enough to tip a bucket of water over a beak.'

'Hardly!' observed Harry Wharton. He rarely agreed with Skinner in anything, but certainly could in this - even without his prior knowledge of Bunter's innocence.

'I fancy Quelchy knows it, too,' added Skinner. 'Bunter has not been up before the Head for it! I'm dashed if I know who did it - if you fellows didn't!'

'Well, we didn't,' said Johnny Bull.

'That water was poured from your study window,' observed Skinner. 'I noticed you came downstairs in rather a hurry, and cleared off out of gates. Still, of course, you don't know anything about it!'

'We had no hand in swamping Quelchy,' declared Wharton. 'It was a silly trick; we'd have stopped it if we could have done.'

'Don't be an ass, Skinner,' growled Johnny Bull. 'If you want your silly nose punched, you've only got to put that story about. I've a good mind-' Johnny took a step forward and Skinner retreated hastily and vanished from sight.

The Famous Five went into the House. It would seem that Skinner had an idea that they might know something about the matter - as, indeed, they did, though not in the way Skinner supposed.

'That ass, Skinner-' murmured Bob Cherry.

'Poor old Quelchy,' observed Nugent. 'It's tough on him. That idiot, Coker!'

'Just like him to let the wrong man have it,' said Harry Wharton. 'Coker, all over!'

'The assfulness of the esteemed Coker was always terrific,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'There will be a searchfulness made. As your English proverb says, A still tongue saves nine.'

'Good old English proverb,' said Bob Cherry, with a grin. 'Might save someone "six" anyway.'

'If they do pin it on Coker, he won't get off with "six",' said Johnny Bull. 'Might get off with a flogging - though, being a Fifth-form man, who ought to know better, he'll probably get the "sack".'

'Did Coker ever know better about anything?' asked Bob Cherry. 'Well - come on! Mustn't be late for "call-over".'

The Removites went into Hall for 'call-over.' Quelch was conspicuous by his absence. Prout called the names. Harry Wharton glanced at Coker, standing in the ranks of the Fifth, and he noticed that Coker's expression was a troubled one. Coker had now, no doubt, learned that it was not Wingate, but Quelch, the master of the Remove, who had received his attentions from that study window, and the discovery had, obviously, worried him. Swamping the captain of the school would have been a serious enough matter, for all that Coker had refused to see it - but swamping one of the masters was much more serious. Even Coker had realised that. It was no wonder that he seemed uneasy.

'Smacked my head!' The indignant bleat of the Owl of the Remove could be heard as they left Hall. 'I'm jolly glad he's got a cold - he smacked my napper right and left. Beast! And I never even knew that he'd been drenched. I was only in the study because Smithy was after me! As if I'd taken his biscuits - or toffee-'

'But who did it, if it wasn't Bunter?' said Wibley. 'Must have been a Remove man, I suppose - someone with a particular grudge against Quelch?' 'Not you or Nugent?' asked Vernon-Smith, smiling at Wharton. 'The bucket was emptied from your study window.'

'No, you ass!'

'More like your work, Smithy,' observed Johnny Bull. 'You were on the scene of the crime at the time, or about then?'

'About,' said the Bounder, 'but Bunter's my alibi. I was trying to get into your study to deal with him for pinching stuff from mine, but he'd shut himself in.'

'I was just about to come out and deal with you for your impertinence, Smithy,' said the Owl, loftily. 'Lucky for you, I didn't-'

'And for you, too!' retorted Vernon-Smith. 'Never mind. Here I am. You can deal with me now.'

'I'm not the fellow, I hope, to get into a vulgar brawl,' observed Bunter.

'Seems to lie between Bunter and Smithy,' put in Skinner. 'They're alibis for each other-' He backed away as the Bounder made a step forward. There

was keen interest amongst the Removites in the mystery of the affair. The act had been so wildly reckless that more than one of them glanced suspiciously at the Bounder; it was in keeping with his character. Some sympathised with Quelch; others were amused. There was much speculation as to who had done the deed, but the mystery remained.

Harry Wharton and Co. went up to No. 1 Study. They rather desired to keep clear of any discussion of a matter of which they knew more than they cared to say.

'That utter ass, Coker!' said Harry Wharton.

'The chump!' observed Bob Cherry.

There was a heavy tramp in the passage, and the study door was suddenly flung open to disclose the object of the Removites' remarks. They regarded Coker, coldly. He came into Study No. 1, and shut the door behind him.

'I suppose you fags have heard about that ass of a form-master of yours?'

'We've heard that Quelch was drenched with water by a brainless nit-wit, if that's what you mean,' said Harry Wharton.

Coker frowned.

'If I get any cheek from you fags, you'll regret it,' he observed.

'However, I've no time to deal with that now. It's entirely Quelch's own fault that he got drenched.'

'His own fault?' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Yours, you mean, you fat-head!'

'That'll do from you, Cherry,' said Coker. 'Of course it was Quelch's own fault. He had no business to be where he was. I don't suppose he deliberately interfered with my arrangements-'

'No, I don't suppose he did!' said Nugent.

Coker frowned again. 'But he did all the same. The fault was entirely his, but I can't explain that to the Head.'

'No, I should think you could not: observed Johnny Bull. 'Of all the crass asses-'

'Still, the fact remains,' continued Coker, 'so I've come here to warn you that you fags have got to keep this matter dark. No tattling, see? It might be misunderstood.'

'The mightfulness is terrific,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, 'as is also the chumpfulness of the esteemed Coker.'

'I don't want any opinions from any of you,' said Coker, in a warning tone. 'If you want to have the whopping of your lives, you'll get it if I hear any of your tattle. See?'

'You blithering, blethering fathead!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'We shan't say a word about it - we don't want to get you bunked - but if you say any more about whopping us-'

'I shall certainly whop you if you jaw,' said Coker, calmly. 'I've warned you - that's enough.'

'Not quite,' said Bob Cherry, moving towards Coker, as he turned to leave the study.

'Let's give this blithering cuckoo what he deserves for swamping Quelch?' suggested Johnny Bull.

'Good egg!' agreed Nugent.

'The goodeggfulness is the proper caper.'

'Hands off, you fags,' roared Coker. 'Ow!'

Horace Coker sat on the floor with a bump. It was most certainly not a case of 'hands off', but on the contrary one of 'hands on'. Five pairs grabbed him, and he was up-ended.

'Bump him!' said Harry Wharton.

Coker hit the floor again with a crash and a roar.

'Ow! You cheeky little ticks! I'll smash you all round. Ow!'

It really was not practicable for Coker to smash the Removites all round. He felt, indeed, as if he were being smashed all round himself. The

Famous Five could not, of course, hand over Coker to justice. They could only deal out some on account, and they did so faithfully.

Coker had not only selected Study No. 1 of the Remove for his activities which led to the drenching of their form-master, but he had come up afterwards, not to ask the Removites to keep quiet about it, but to threaten them if they didn't! They felt that Coker needed a lesson, and were giving him one!

'There!' The Famous Five left him at last. Coker sat on the floor spluttering. Then, as he showed signs of rising, Bob Cherry grabbed an inkpot.

'Better keep away, Coker,' said Bob. 'and go quietly - out of this study!'

Coker made a step forward. Bob Cherry swung the ink-pot.

'Wrrgh! Grrrrgh!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

Coker spluttered ink. A considerable quantity seemed to have gone into his mouth, but leaving plenty for his features. Ink streamed over his crimson and furious face. The Famous Five swung him round, and pushed him into the passage.

'Wrrgh - I say - I'll jolly well-'

Bob Cherry grabbed another inkpot, and Coker, after another furious glare, turned and went to his own study. Coker of the Fifth did not always know when he had had enough, but on this occasion, that fact had been made very plain to him. He wanted no more of Study No. 1 in the Remove; what he did want and need was soap and water and plenty of it.

CHAPTER 5

BUNTER'S BRAIN-WAVE

WILLIAM GEORGE BUNTER had a thoughtful look on his fat face in form the following morning. He was thinking - not a thing he often did. In an unusual state of meditation, the Owl of the Remove had little attention to give to lessons, but, fortunately for once, that did not matter very much. Quelch was not taking the form.

Quelch was on the sick list, and Wingate of the Sixth was, temporarily, in charge.

Even those Removites who sympathised with Quelch felt that this was a change for the better. Wingate was an excellent captain of the school and a dutiful prefect, but in the place of a form-master he was satisfied if the juniors kept quiet and did not kick up a row under his charge. While this arrangement lasted, the Remove were not likely to absorb any remarkable amount of knowledge, but it was a sad fact that few of them were frightfully keen to do so!

It was rumoured that it might be some time, perhaps quite a long time, before Mr. Quelch could take his form again. He was long past the age when he could, recklessly, disregard wet clothes, and no doubt, in the quiet shades of 'sanny' he rather regretted that he had not acted on Prout's good advice, and rushed in for a change instead of rushing after the culprit, who caused the need for it. He had not caught the culprit, but he had, most certainly, caught a most fearful cold.

No one, it would seem, knew who the man was who was responsible for Quelch being now in 'sanny'. Bunter's fat head had been smacked by Quelch, under that gentleman's first impression that he had caught the culprit. Then the Remove master realised that he might have made, and probably had made, a mistake, and would have to look further afield, but he was in no condition to do so. The Head had ordered an inquiry, which had so far led to nothing.

What fellow had been so utterly reckless as to chuck a bucket of water over a form-master remained a mystery. No one, of course, guessed that Quelch had got it in mistake for someone else, and even the most zealous and painstaking prefect was not thinking of looking in the Fifth-form for the offender.

Coker was safe, it seemed, so long as the Famous Five kept quiet, which, of course, they were going to do.

So the affair remained a mystery, and meanwhile the Remove had an easy time under Wingate, who was blissfully ignorant of the fact that the contents of that bucket had been intended for him.

In third school, Billy Bunter was buried in deep thought - though not on the subject of the Latin paper which lay before him on his desk. That paper did not interest the fat Owl.

The general opinion in the Remove seemed to be that it must have been a dashing and reckless fellow who had swamped Quelch. Bunter knew, of course, that he was a dashing and reckless fellow! The trouble was that no one else seemed to know it. He'd show them!

'He, he, he!'

Skinner looked round at the fat cackle near him, and Bunter caught his eye.

'I say, Skinner!' The Owl took a wary glance at Wingate, sitting at Quelch's desk. 'It was me all the time, you know. He, he, he!'

'What was you all the time, you fat ass?'

'I did it.'

'Did what?'

'Swamped old Quelch!'

Skinner stared. On the previous day, Bunter's voice had been eloquent on the subject. He had told everyone who would listen, and a great many who wouldn't, that he hadn't done it, and that that beast Quelch had smacked his head for nothing. This was quite a startling change of front!

'You?' ejaculated Skinner. 'Just me,' said Bunter.

'Gammon!'

'Look here, you beast-'

Wingate looked up. 'Who's talking in class?' he demanded. 'Bunter, do you want me to call you out and give you "six"?'

'Ow! Oh, no thanks!' gasped Bunter, 'I wasn't talking, Wingate - I never said a word to Skinner. I wasn't saying I did it!'

'What?'

'I wasn't, really!' gasped Bunter, in alarm. 'I never did it, you know. Never thought of it. I wasn't there.'

Wingate stared at him. So did the rest of the class.

'It wasn't me really, Wingate. I was in the tuckshop at the time.'

'At what time, you young ass?'

'When Quelch caught me in Study No. 1.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Silence! If you talk in class any more, Bunter, look out. Now be quiet!' There was silence in the form, but a good many curious glances were cast at the fat Owl.

Bunter winked when he caught any fellow's eye. He did not want Wingate, a prefect, to learn that he, Bunter, was the desperado who had swamped the form-master. But he wanted the form to know. It would show them what a wild and reckless fellow he was - bursting with pluck, taking a risk no one else cared to take! It would show the Bouncer that he wasn't the only one who was capable of being reckless!

Smithy? Pooh! Bunter snorted, and Wingate glanced up. He had punched Smithy's nose. That he had done it by accident, and had found it wise to leave the scene immediately, now escaped the fat Owl's memory.

The fact that he hadn't drenched Quelch was a trifle, light as air to Bunter. Nobody else claimed the distinction of having done so; nobody had been found out. It was glory going begging so to speak. William George Bunter saw no reason why he shouldn't annex it. And he was going to! That was the decision to which his deep meditations that morning had led him.

'I say, Cherry-' Bunter began whispering again.

'Quiet, ass!'

'But, I say, I did it. Me, you know.'

'Did what?'

'Poured that water over Quelchy.'

'Oh, my hat!' ejaculated Bob.

'You did?'

'Little me. What do I care for beaks? I've got the nerve. You haven't.'

'You fat fibber.'

'Look here, old chap-'

'You podgy Ananias!'

'I tell you I jolly well did. How do you know I didn't, you beast?'

Bob Cherry chuckled. As he knew that Coker of the Fifth had done it, he was not likely to believe that Bunter had. Bunter, of course, had no idea that the identity of the culprit was known to the Famous Five.

'You can snigger-'

'Are you talking again, Bunter?'

'Oh, no! Not a word, Wingate,' stammered Bunter. 'I never opened my mouth. You can ask Cherry - I was speaking to him.'

Wingate grinned.

'If you talk again in class, Bunter, you'll get "six",' he said. 'That's the last warning.'

With a great effort the Owl of the Remove contrived to bottle up his eloquence. He really did not want 'six' from Wingate. But when the Remove came out, he could, hold his news no longer. He grasped Wharton by the arm. 'I say, Harry, old chap, it was me!' he gasped.

'What was you, fathead?'

'Me who poured that water over old Quelchy.'

'You?' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

'Me,' said Bunter with a cackle. 'Drenched him from head to foot. Put him into "sanny". You wouldn't have had the nerve to do that. He's lying there now because of me.'

'And you're lying out here,' said Johnny Bull.

'You were telling the world you hadn't, yesterday,' observed Frank Nugent. 'And now you're saying you did?'

'Don't you fellows believe me? I should hope that you can take my word!' said Bunter, with an air of hurt dignity.

'Which word - yesterday's or today's?' asked Bob Cherry. 'We don't believe today's. You see we know you didn't.'

'Oh, lor'! I say, it wasn't you fellows did it, was it?' That question, as Bunter claimed he had done it, struck the juniors as funny. They roared.

'Don't cackle! I say, did you?'

'No! No more than you did, you fat ass,' said Harry Wharton.

'Oh, that's all right, then - I mean, I did it. You mustn't let the prefects hear. I don't want to go up to the Head. It was me. Drenched Quelchy from head to foot.' The fat Owl went into the 'quad' to spread the news and invite glory.

CHAPTER 6

SKINNER PLANS A JAPE

'Foss?'

'That's his name,' said Peter Todd. '"Harvard Foss" and he's coming today. Due by the three-thirty train at Friardale, I heard.'

'Rotten!' observed Skinner.

It was Wednesday afternoon - a half-holiday at Greyfriars. After dinner there was news for the Remove, and Peter Todd, who had been the first to see the Head's notice on the board, brought it to the fellows in the 'quad'.

Several days had elapsed since the swamping of Quelch.

The Remove master was no longer in the school sanatorium - he had been taken away to a nursing-home in Courtfield, it having become evident that he would, perhaps be on the sick-list for some time. The Removites would have been quite satisfied to have Wingate in Quelch's place all the time that Quelch was away. Dr. Locke - without consulting them - had decided otherwise. Wingate's jurisdiction could only be a temporary one until a new master was engaged to fill the gap. Now, it seemed, such a man was coming.

'Won't be such a Tartar as Quelch,' remarked the Bounder. 'Only some temporary beak engaged for a few weeks - just a stop-gap. I expect all he'll want will be a quiet time - which he may not get!'

'Don't let's begin by ragging him,' said Bob Cherry. 'Give him a chance! May be quite a nice chap.'

Under Quelch's rule there was never anything in the nature of a 'rag' in the Remove form-room at Greyfriars. Even Vernon-Smith did not venture to 'rag' Quelch. But it rather looked as if he were thinking of experimenting with the new man.

'Not done old man,' said Lord Mauleverer, gently. 'Go easy with the stranger within the gates, what?' Vernon-Smith laughed.

'Better be careful, Smithy,' advised Harry Wharton. 'The Head will keep a fatherly eye on the new beak to see how he gets on. They haven't found out yet who swamped that water over Quelch. If anything happens to the new man, too-'

'They'll find out who swamped it over Quelch quick enough, if Bunter keeps on boasting that he did it,' said Skinner.

'It wasn't Bunter!' said Bob Cherry.

'Well, he says it was and he ought to know. How do you know it wasn't, if it comes to that?' demanded Skinner.

'Well, I jolly well do know,' replied Bob, 'but never mind that. I'm not giving a man away.'

'The speech may be silvery, but the silence is of the goldenfulness as your English proverb says,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Inky puts it in a nut-shell,' said Wharton, with a grin. 'Come on, you men. Don't let's waste the afternoon. Let's get out the bikes and go for a spin to Courtfield, and have tea at the bun shop.'

'Don't,' put in Skinner. 'Come with me, and help to pull the new man's leg. Just to show him what nice, quiet fellows we are-'

'Chuck it, Skinner,' said Johnny Bull. 'If he knew the sort of nice quiet fellow you are, he'd cane you at sight. And more power to his elbow.'

'He isn't that sort,' said Skinner. 'This chap's soft as putty - anyone can pull his leg!'

'And how do you know?' demanded Nugent.

'Because I remember his name now,' replied Skinner. 'I've heard about him from a man I know at St. Rich's-'

'St. Rich's? Where on earth's that?' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'About a hundred miles away, but I met a man last hols, who's there, and he told me about a temporary beak, who came to take a form-master's place when he was laid up the last Christmas term. His name was Harvard Foss. There can't be a crowd of them about with that name. Must be the same man! Came from Bycrofts' Agency, too, and that's where our Head gets temporaries when he wants 'em.'

'And he's soft as putty, is he?' asked Vernon-Smith.

'Yes. They called him "The Babe in the Wood" at St. Rich's. I thought of meeting him when he arrives-'

'What?'

'And directing him to the school. Not my fault if anyone made a mistake and he found himself walking into Highcliffe.'

The Bounder laughed.

'And if he complains to the Head and identifies you-?'

'Temporary beaks don't start their careers by complaining to the Head who's engaged them!' said Skinner. 'Not good for their business.'

'Then he'll take your skin off, on his own account, as soon as he recognises you - and serve you right!' said Johnny Bull.

'He won't,' said Skinner. 'He never whopped anyone at St. Rich's. I expect he was afraid to. He's afraid of being a schoolmaster at all, I think, but can't find anything else to do. The St. Rich's man told me that he'd heard their Head beak had offered him a permanent job, as an assistant master, but he'd refused to take it. Temporary spells are as much as he can stand, I suppose. Coming, Smithy?'

'No!' replied the Bounder. 'It doesn't sound like a wildly exciting afternoon, and what it does sound like I'm not quite sure yet. Anyway, the Head will probably send his car to meet the man at Friardale.'

'No he won't,' said Skinner. 'I heard Prout talking to Hacker. He said Foss was arriving at half-past three and was walking from the station; he preferred walking when he was in the country. I didn't know what that meant then, but I do now. I suppose the chap only has one suitcase. Doesn't want the chauffeur to see that, I expect. Well, I'm going if you aren't, Smithy. I've got a Highcliffe cap I took off one of their fags the other day and I'm wearing that. Safe as houses. Land him miles away in the wrong school!' Skinner laughed.

'That's not playin' the game at all,' observed Lord Mauleverer 'but you don't mind that, do you, Skinner?'

'Skinner wouldn't know how to play the game, if he tried,' said Harry Wharton.

'And never does try!' added Johnny Bull.

Harold Skinner ignored them.

'Come along, Smithy? It will be rather a lark!'

'No!'

'Oh, well, if you funk it-' Skinner broke off as the Bounder turned round, looking warlike, and walked hastily away.

'Get your bike and come with us, Smithy,' invited Harry Wharton.

'Can't!' said Vernon-Smith. 'Got a puncture, which I've been too lazy to mend. Might join you later.'

'Oh, all right, old man.' The Famous Five turned and made their way to the bicycle shed. They were sorry that Vernon-Smith could not accompany them, but very glad that he had not accompanied Skinner.

TROUBLE FOR TWO

'HALLO, there's Bunter!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Race him,' suggested Nugent.

Harry Wharton laughed.

The Famous Five had covered a good distance on their machines. They had started fairly early and did not want to have tea at the bun shop in Courtfield before four, so they had plenty of time on hand. They had ridden along to Hawkscliff, then turned again to get on to the Redclyffe Road for Courtfield. It was Bob Cherry who suggested that as the Redclyffe Road was a bus route, and the traffic, generally, not too pleasant for cyclists, they should keep right on passing Greyfriars again before going on to Courtfield. He pointed out that there was still plenty of time. It was shortly after they had taken his advice that they caught sight of Bunter.

They were at the top of a little hill near Friardale Wood, when they recognised him. They only had a back view, but the back view of the Owl of the Remove was quite easy to recognise.

Bunter had, apparently, found no one else to listen to his dashing exploit in drenching Quelch and had got out his bike. He was, probably, thought the Famous Five, heading for the bun shop in Courtfield, where he would find some of the other Removites having tea. He would not be invited to join, but would dispense with any such formality! The fat Owl knew that it was not possible for an uninvited guest to be ejected quite so ruthlessly from the bun shop as he might be from a Remove study.

It was probably that Bunter, being Bunter, had walked the bicycle up that little hill, but now that he was on the top of it, he was freewheeling down the other side. Bunter's method of freewheeling was to pull himself up with a jerk by applying both brakes when he found his pace too swift, and then wobble all over the road.

'Look at that fat ass!' said Johnny Bull. 'Lucky for him that there isn't anyone else coming the other way.'

'Something will happen if he keeps on jamming his brakes like that,' said Harry Wharton. 'Better keep behind until he's on the level. If we try to pass he may wobble into us - Oh, my hat!'

Lower down the hill a lane joined the road, emerging from deep shady woods. From that lane another cyclist had suddenly shot out! Who was to blame for what followed, it would have been difficult to say. The Owl of the Remove was, certainly, proceeding in a most eccentric fashion, but the other cyclist had shot out, like a pip from a squeezed orange, into the main road, without even ringing his bell.

Bob Cherry had given a roar of warning, but that had been much too late to be of any use. It had barely left his lips when the crash came.

The man, who had appeared so suddenly - a rather slight man, with thick bushy eyebrows and moustache and a very prominent nose, which curved like a beak - made an effort to avoid a collision, but it was too late.

Bunter's bike crashed into his front wheel!

The beak-nosed man's machine went whirling, and its rider landed in a sprawling heap on the grass verge of the road. Bunter's bicycle wobbled, as its owner jammed on both brakes, and nearly turned over. Bunter slipped off, somehow, and sat down gasping as his bike crashed at his feet.

'Oh, lor'! Oh, dear! The silly ass!' He spotted the Famous Five. 'Did you see that chump? Oh, dear!'

'Better look at the other chap,' observed Bob Cherry. 'Bunter isn't hurt.'

'Beast! I am hurt - that-that silly fool-'

Harry Wharton went over to the stranger, ignoring Bunter and his complaints. Bob Cherry picked up his machine. It creaked and rattled as he did so. The front wheel had taken the impact of Bunter's bike with Bunter's weight upon it, and was considerably bent. It was clear that extensive repairs would be necessary before it could be ridden again.

'You're not hurt, sir, I hope?' asked Harry Wharton of the man who was still sitting on the grass verge, tenderly touching his prominent nose, as though it had been bumped.

For a whole minute the beak-nosed man had remained there, but now he got up. He stared at Wharton with glinting eyes, with a look in them which indicated that his temper was roused - that it was, indeed in a very bad state, which was, perhaps, not surprising in the circumstances. 'Can I help you, sir?'

The man gave a growl and scowled, but did not speak.

He was not a prepossessing man to look at. He brushed the dust off his clothing and a satchel, which hung round his shoulder, and then went over and grabbed his bike from Bob Cherry.

A muttered curse came from his lips as he saw its condition. He glared at Bunter, and as the fat Owl recoiled, he leapt at his bicycle.

'Ow!'

'What-?' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

The juniors did not realise, at first, why the man was picking up Bunter's bicycle, but the next moment they knew. Having ascertained, at a glance, that it was still a going concern, the beak-nosed man swung a leg over it and heaved himself into the saddle.

'Here, I say-!' ejaculated Harry Wharton.

'He's stealing my bike!' howled Billy Bunter.

'Stop!' roared Johnny Bull.

But the man with the crooked nose had already gone - he was shooting down the hill, at almost lightning speed, on Bunter's bicycle!

CHAPTER 8

FIVE ON THE TRACK

HARRY WHARTON & Co. stared blankly after the man on the bike. His action had been so sudden and so swift that not a hand had been raised to stop him; he was far out of reach before the juniors realised his intention, and now he was whizzing along at a terrific pace.

'Oh, crumbs!' gasped Bob. 'He's taken Bunter's bike.' The fat Owl scrambled up. 'He's bagged my bike! My father paid £50 for that bike.' Bunter waved fat hands. 'Stop thief!'

'Come on,' said Harry Wharton, 'we'll go after him.' The rest of the Co. were keen and willing. They certainly did not believe that Mr. Bunter had ever paid £50 for his son's bike, and whatever he had paid, it was certainly worth much less now, for William George Bunter was sparing in his use of oil and all necessary attention. Still, it was a Remove man's bike, and they had no intention, if they could help it, of letting a thief take it.

They dragged their machines on to the road and started.

In a moment they were in hot pursuit.

'We'll get him,' panted Bob Cherry. 'Fancy going off with Bunter's jigger like that! The cheek of it.'

'The whole fifty pounds worth of it.' observed Johnny Bull.

'More like fourpenny-worth,' said Nugent.

'The exchangefulness is not a terrific robbery,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, 'but its present possessor has nine points of no lawfulness.'

The Removites grinned but saved their breath as their machines gathered speed, The man with the beaky nose was far ahead, but gaining no more than he had already. They were keeping pace.

It was apparent that the man was in a great hurry to get somewhere - but even if that had been the case, he had no right to take Bunter's bicycle, as he had done. He was now heading in the direction of Courtfield, and if that was so, they had no doubt that they could keep him in sight. In the town he could hardly escape with the machine, whether he had borrowed or stolen it. And if he did not hand it over, the Removites were ready to call in the aid of the local police. Certainly they were not letting him get away with a machine belonging to a Greyfriars junior, if they could help it.

A mile flashed by at dizzy speed. Then, suddenly, the man looked back, and shot off the road into a lane. He rocked round the corner, at a speed which almost threw him over, and disappeared.

'Hold on!' gasped Harry Wharton.

The juniors braked and slowed down at the turning.

They did not care to take the corner at top speed, as the man had done - but they lost little time, and turned into the lane in a bunch.

It was a narrow lane, winding and turning amidst thick woods. It was not so easy to keep the man in sight, as it had been on the open road. They glimpsed him once and then again - and then he was gone from their sight. They rode on as hard as they could, and then had to brake suddenly, as they saw a woodcutter's cart ahead of them blocking the lane.

'It's old Joyce,' exclaimed Bob Cherry, jumping from his bike. The old man was well known to the Removites. 'Have you seen a cyclist in this lane - coming this way?'

The woodcutter shook his head.

'Nobody's passed me,' he said.

'The deep rotter,' breathed Harry Wharton. 'He turned and wheeled the bike somewhere into the wood.'

'He's done us,' observed Johnny Bull. 'Better chuck it.' They rode slowly back to the road, keeping sharp eyes on the wood on both sides as they went. They saw nothing of the man, and it was evidently hopeless to go hunting for him in the wood. They came out, at last, into the road.

'Nothing doing,' said Nugent, 'but this shows that he wasn't in a hurry to get anywhere. He's pinched that bike; not just borrowed it.'

'It doesn't show that!' retorted Johnny Bull. 'That chap wanted to get somewhere in a hurry - pretty urgently - or he wouldn't have pinched a bike to do it. He wouldn't have been able to do that if we'd stopped him. So he had to waste a little time to dodge us.'

'Which he has done,' added Bob Cherry. 'May be on the way now to Courtfield, Lantham, Pegg - anywhere.'

'With the bike of the ridiculous Bunter,' added Hurree Singh. 'My esteemed chums, the only certainfulness of this matter is that the pinchfulness is great, whether or not it has been done borrowfully. Would it not be as well to report the loss of the esteemed bicycle to the respected Inspector Grimes?'

'Good!' said Bob Cherry. 'Let's go and report the loss of Bunter's £50 bike to Grimey. A theft's a theft. We aren't far from Courtfield, and it's still pretty early.'

Outside Courtfield Police Station the juniors divided forces. Bull and Wharton went inside to tell the tale of the recent happenings to Inspector Grimes, while Hurree Singh, Cherry and Nugent went on to the bun shop. Cherry and Nugent each wheeled two of the bikes. They could be 'parked' outside the bun shop, until the other fellows joined them. It was still much too early for tea, but pleasant to wait at a table under the big trees. and watch the life of the small town - such as it was - pass by.

Inside the police station a constable took down a description of Bunter's bicycle, and of the man who had stolen it. Wharton and Bull could see that Inspector Grimes did not think there was much chance of Bunter ever seeing his bicycle again - and still less of anyone seeing the man who had taken it. However, the police would do their best. The two juniors thanked the inspector and went outside.

'Looks as though Bunter has lost his bike for good,' observed Harry Wharton.

'He's got the other,' said Bull. 'It won't go, but it could be made to. The police will want to look at it, of course, to see if they can find any clues to the business, but I dare say they'll let Bunter use it in the meantime.'

'Let's hope so!' said Harry Wharton. 'Can't do anything more now. Come on!'

The two juniors walked up Courtfield High Street to the bun shop. Courtfield did not look particularly lively, at the moment. One or two people were going in and out of the Courtfield and County Bank, which was opposite the bun shop. It was nearly three-o'clock when the bank would close. A policeman, standing at the corner, looked half-asleep. Amidst the general somnolence, however, there came one piece of energetic life, as Wharton and Bull joined the others at the bun shop. A motor-bicycle came noisily along the street, and also stopped outside the bun shop. It was ridden by Horace Coker of the Greyfriars Fifth, who parked it under one of the trees, and then favoured the Removites with a glare. Coker, it seemed, had been out on his motor-bike that afternoon, and had the same idea as the juniors, of stopping for tea at the bun shop. He did not seem pleased to see them there.

'What are you kids doing here?' he snapped. 'I don't want a lot of fags here while I'm having tea. Clear off!'

'What a coincidence,' said Bob Cherry. 'We don't want a Fifth-form fathead here while we have tea. We'll let you clear off.'

The Famous Five chuckled. Coker gave them a grim look. 'I'll jolly well lick you, presently,' he grunted. 'That's another coincidence,' put in Johnny Bull. 'We'll jolly well lick you, presently - if you start anything.'

Coker glared, but made no other rejoinder. Even Coker seemed to realise that such war-like operations were out of place in Courtfield High Street. He sat down at a table as far away as he could from the Removites, evidently desiring that none of the local people should think they had anything to do with him.

That did not worry Harry Wharton & Co. The further away they were from Coker, the better, in their opinion. They sat down at a table under a tree, and considered whether they should order tea. They had first begun the afternoon by deliberately wasting the time pleasantly. Then they had used up more time at much speed, in unsuccessful pursuit of the man who had stolen Bunter's bike. That enterprise had ended near Courtfield, and it was still not quite three in the afternoon.

'May as well have tea now,' said Bob Cherry. 'We've been taking it pretty strenuously, and I'm thirsty - oh, crumbs!' Bob started to his feet with a sudden yell. 'Look! That man on the jigger!'

'Great pip!'

The juniors stared; they could hardly believe their eyes.

Up the High Street came a cyclist riding rather fast. He was a man with a yellowish complexion, bushy brows and moustache and a beaky nose! It was the man who had taken Bunter's bike-!

'By gum!' gasped Harry Wharton.

As they gazed, astounded, the man stopped the bicycle almost opposite to them, lodged the machine against the kerbstone, and went through the doors of the Courtfield and County Bank.

THE BANK RAIDER

'IT's him!' gasped Bob Cherry, breathlessly and ungrammatically.

'The same man!' exclaimed Nugent. 'With Bunter's bike,' added Johnny Bull.

There was no doubt of it. They had taken it for granted - as they guessed Inspector Grimes had - that the man who had taken Bunter's bicycle, leaving his own crooked machine in exchange, had cleared off, well out of the neighbourhood, where he might be seen again, and the 'pinched' bicycle reclaimed.

They had been mistaken - for there was Bunter's bicycle, against the edge of the pavement - and there was the man who had taken it, now gone into the Courtfield and County Bank!

'We're after that bike,' said Harry Wharton. 'Come on!'

Forgetting about tea, the five juniors crossed the street, and hurried along to the bank. Now that they had spotted Billy Bunter's bike again, they were certainly not going to let the beak-nosed man get away with it, when he came out of the bank.

'Looks as though he may not have meant to steal it, after all, as I said,' commented Johnny Bull. 'May only have borrowed it, because he was in a hurry-the bank closes at three, you know, and if he was in a hurry to get to the bank-'

'Like his cheek all the same!' said Bob Cherry. 'Well, yes - only Bunter did barge into him, and he couldn't get going again on his own bike-'

'My esteemed chums,' observed Hurree Janset Ram Singh. 'the possiblefulness of the pinchfulness and the temporary borrowfulness are alike great. Let us stay here with the bike until he comes out, to make a ridiculous inquiry.'

'That's sound sense from Inky,' said Bob Cherry, with a grin. 'We will. Borrowed or pinched, we'll keep possession of this bike and walk it back to the school for Bunter!

'Yes, rather!'

The Famous Five were in no doubt about that. The bicycle, now propped on the kerb outside the bank's premises, was the property of the Owl of the Remove, and they intended to see it safely back to Greyfriars. It was possible that the man who had taken it had only dodged them on the road, because he did not want a party of schoolboys arriving at the bank, at his heels, demanding a stolen bicycle. They were prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt - but not the benefit of the bike! That was going back to Bunter.

They gathered by the bicycle. They did not intend to wheel it away before the man came out - they were ready to deal with him, if he disputed possession, and, if necessary, call the policeman at the corner. It was not for a man to take the law into his own hands, and exchange his own bicycle, however much damaged, for the one which damaged it.

Johnny Bull put his hand on the handle-bars, holding on to the machine, just to be on the safe side, if there happened to be any attempt to grab it again.

From under the trees, outside the bun shop, Coker had been staring at the juniors. Now he rose to his feet, and shouted.

'Leave that alone, you young sweeps - larking with a man's bicycle! Leave it alone, do you hear?'

'Fathead!' called back Bob Cherry.

'Can't you behave yourself out of gates, you scrubby fags?'

'Bow-wow!'

Apart from such replies, the Famous Five did not heed Coker. Coker's impression was that they were 'larking' with a stranger's bicycle, but they had no inclination to deal with Coker and his impressions. Coker was not a prefect, though he often seemed to fancy that he was!

'Look here-' began Coker, with a roar. Crack! Crack!

Coker broke off suddenly. The juniors jumped. The policeman, at the corner, gave a sort of bound. From the interior of the bank, two sharp shots, in quick succession, had rung out, whip-like. The report of a firearm, in such a place, was the very last thing one would have expected to hear!

'What-?' spluttered Bob Cherry.

'Who-?' gasped Nugent.

'That was a shot-two shots.' Johnny Bull stared at the bank entrance.

'What the thump-?'

The swing doors flew open, and the man with the beaky nose came running down the steps. He ran straight across the pavement towards the bicycle. so swiftly that he crashed into the juniors before he saw them.

'What's happened?' exclaimed Bob.

'Oh! A raid - a hold-up! A man has been shot.

Call the police - quick!' He waved his hand to the constable, who had been standing at the corner, and was already on his way to the bank.

'Quick!' he shouted. 'A hold-up! Quick!'

The juniors stood staring towards the swing-doors of the bank. There was a sound of loud excitement within. The beak-nosed man grabbed the bicycle, jerking Johnny Bull's hand from it.

'Here - stop-!'

A heavy hand pushed Johnny Bull aside. The man leaped on the machine and crashed at the pedals. Bob Cherry made a jump, but there was no chance of stopping him! The man was already speeding down Courtfield High Street like the wind.

The bank doors swung open again, and a bare-headed man ran out, almost gibbering with excitement.

'Stop him!' he was shrieking. 'That man - he has robbed the bank - he has shot a man - stop him!'

'Him?' yelled Bob.

'That man-?'

'He's the raider!' gasped Nugent.

The man's cool presence of mind had deluded the Removites; they had not guessed that he was the bank raider. They knew now! The bare-headed man on the bank steps was pointing after him, and almost raving. The policeman, changing his direction, rushed into the road after the fleeing cyclist.

'If we'd known,' gasped Harry Wharton. 'If we'd grabbed him-'

'Our bikes - get on the bikes!' yelled Bob Cherry. 'After him!'

The juniors rushed to their machines, parked under the trees outside the bun shop. The man on Bunter's bicycle was already at the end of the High Street; the constable, on foot, had no chance of catching him.

The quiet High Street of Courtfield, so sleepy a few moments before, was now buzzing with life and excitement. Shopkeepers ran out of shops - errand boys appeared from nowhere - there was a roar of shouting voices. In hot haste, the Removites dragged their bicycles into the street. Coker stared at them.

'What's up?'

'Bank raid!' yelled Bob Cherry. 'Didn't you hear the shots? That beaky nosed blighter on the jigger.'

'Oh, my hat! '

They raced down the street. The man, on Bunter's bicycle, was almost out of sight. Coker of the Fifth stood staring blankly; he was not quick on the uptake. But understanding came at length and he rushed to his motorbike. Coker was not going to be left out of the chase. And on a motor-cycle he had a very good chance of overtaking a man on a push-bike. Coker lost no time, and - for once - neither did his motor-bike.

Amidst a roar of excited voices, Harry Wharton & Co. shot down the street on their machines, and were soon outside Courtfield, on the wide road which led across the common.

On that road, the man on Bunter's bike was in view again - distant, but easily seen. He was riding like the wind; no mean feat on a bicycle which was not, being Bunter's, in first-class condition. However, the Famous Five raced in pursuit.

At that moment, they did not reflect that a man who had used a deadly weapon in the bank, and was, doubtless, still armed, and undoubtedly desperate, was a rather dangerous customer to pursue! They were only thinking of over-taking him, or at least keeping him in sight. Before long, there would be cars on the road after him, for which reason the fugitive was not likely to keep long on the main road. He would certainly turn off into any suitable cover, as he had done when they chased him before. This time, if he did, they were not going to be shaken off, if they could help it.

At racing speed they shot along the road over Courtfield Common. Behind them, the quiet county town of Courtfield was in a roar of excitement.

A PERILOUS PURSUIT

'PUT it on!' breathed Harry Wharton.

'You bet!' said Bob Cherry.

The bicycles of the Famous Five were now fairly whizzing along after the bank robber. He was also speeding rapidly, a long way ahead, but the distance between them was decreasing. If he kept on in the direction he was going, he would soon be passing the school gates, but they did not expect him to keep to the road. At any moment, he would, probably, shoot off it, and endeavour to escape before a car came out of the town in pursuit.

Chug-chug-chug!

It was the sound of a motor-bike, coming from Courtfield. As it overtook the juniors and roared past, they recognised Coker of the Fifth.

'Oh, there's Coker!' exclaimed Bob. 'Good man! Go it!'

Coker did. That motor-bike of Coker's had alternate moods. Sometimes it would remain obstinately silent, despite his most desperate efforts, and at others it would go like the wind - like a hurricane or a tornado, in fact, when Coker was riding it.

However, Coker was now rapidly overtaking the bank robber, with the Removites following as fast as they could. The Greyfriars fellows had the chase to themselves for the moment. Further pursuit was undoubtedly on the way from Courtfield, but it had not yet come. Unless they could capture him, themselves, it looked as if the bank raider must escape. At that moment, it really seemed that Coker might catch him.

The man was getting every ounce of speed he could from Bunter's bike, but petrol will always beat muscle. Coker was diminishing the distance between them every moment.

The Removites saw the man glance back over his shoulder. The next moment he swerved suddenly from the road and shot by a bumpy footpath across the common.

So sudden was that movement that it beat Horace Coker, who went roaring on, on his motor-bike, past the spot where the man had turned off. Harry Wharton & Co. had been watching for just such a move - Coker, obviously, had not - and then turned off where the bank robber had gone.

Coker did an unnecessary hundred yards before he could turn his bike round. They were on the footpath before Coker could get there. Fast as the raider was ridding, they were now keeping pace. They saw him look back again and then head for a patch of woodland, which lay between the common and the Sark.

Suddenly the bank robber stopped.

He leaped down, and stood with his left hand holding the bike, his right hand slipping into his pocket. The next moment, his hand came up, with something in it.

Crack!

'Look out!' shrieked Frank Nugent.

The desperate man was firing on them. A bullet knocked up a cloud of dust from the footpath in front of the juniors.

'Oh, crumbs!'

Harry Wharton & Co. were plucky enough, but to ride on, in face of a spitting automatic, was more than they wanted. The rascal, who had shot a man at the bank, was not likely to hesitate using his pistol again to drive off pursuit. The juniors threw themselves off their machines, and jumped behind the cover of the nearest bush. The automatic spat again as they reached cover, tearing the hawthorn bloom round them, with a bullet.

'Keep low!' said Johnny Bull.

There was nothing else for it. There was no arguing with an automatic in a reckless hand. The five bicycles lay on the footpath, while the five juniors ducked deep behind the hawthorn bush, their hearts beating hard and fast.

Harry Wharton peered through the bushes. He had a glimpse of the man again, riding hard for the wood by the river. He had only stayed long enough to stop pursuit, and then resumed his flight immediately.

Chug, chug, chug!

Coker's motor-bike was coming on again. The juniors jumped out from behind the hawthorns, as he came careering up from the road.

'Look out, Coker!' yelled Bob Cherry. 'The man's got a gun!'

If Coker heard, he did not heed. It was like Coker not to heed juniors. He roared on past them towards the wood, into which the crooked-nosed man had now vanished. But he did not get very far!

From the dusky wood came the sharp crack of a firearm. The bank robber had stopped again, within the wood; he could not be seen, but the crack of the automatic showed that he was watching for the motor-cyclist, who had come after him.

'Coker!' gasped Bob.

Coker's motor-bike suddenly staggered wildly, and crashed into a bunch of hawthorn by the footpath, Coker sprawling on the earth with a yell.

The Removites rushed towards Coker. The unseen man in the wood had fired, and the terrible thought was in their minds that one of the bullets had hit Coker.

No more shots came from the wood; the man, having stopped the motor-cyclist, was doubtless in flight again, but the Removites were thinking of Coker, sprawling on his back.

'Coker? Are you hurt?' gasped Harry Wharton.

'Ow! Oh! My hat! Wow!' spluttered Coker. 'Ooooh. Ah!' He scrambled to his feet. It was apparent to the Removites that Coker was certainly hurt, but to their relief, seemingly not hit.

'You're not hit?'

'Eh? No! Oh, crikey! I came a purler,' gasped Coker. 'I think the bike was hit - that rotter, ow!'

Coker had not been hit. Probably the desperate man had fired at the machine and not the rider. The front tyre was flat. Anyway, he had stopped the pursuit. Coker stood, gasping for breath, and rubbing aching bones, which had hit hard on the unsympathetic earth. The motor-bike gave a cough, and ceased to splutter - but its owner did not. Coker went on spluttering and spluttering!

COKER FINDS BUNTER'S BIKE

'COME on!' said Bob Cherry.

The Removites picked up their bicycles again and mounted them. They had no doubt that the bank robber was still in full flight, and they were going after him. The footpath, where they now were, entered the wood and continued until it joined the tow-path by the Sark. In single file, they sped on between the trees. Coker, after giving them a glare as they passed, stopped spluttering and, pushing his motor-bike, which would, temporarily, splutter no more, came along behind them.

'Dear old Coker!' chuckled Frank Nugent. 'Still sticking it! But what good does he think he can do now, having to push his bike?'

'Coker's got lots of pluck, even if he hasn't much sense,' observed Bob Cherry.

'We'd better keep quiet,' said Johnny Bull. 'That fellow we're after may be listening for us, and if he's still got his gun - and ready to use it - Oh, crumbs! What's that?' There was a frantic yell behind them from Coker.

The Removites sprang off their machines and, dropping them, ran back. They found Coker emerging from some long grass, mixed with nettles, some way from the side of the path. He was spluttering again, as he dragged his motor-bike after him.

'That rotter's mucked up all my steering.'

'But what happened?' asked Wharton. The Famous Five were relieved. It was apparent that Horace Coker had not been shot at again, as they had, at first, feared. He had only been extensively stung by nettles and thistles, which he seemed to consider quite bad enough!

'Did you see him?' said Johnny Bull.

'No,' said Coker. 'When I do-' He paused, evidently thinking out some drastic means of dealing with the beak-nosed man - when he saw him! 'He's shot my bike. Something in the steering as well as the tyre. It suddenly turned and pulled me into those beastly nettles. If you fags don't take those grins off your faces, I'll wallop you all round.'

The Famous Five composed themselves. It was a light touch in a serious enterprise - though evidently not light enough for Coker - but they were annoyed at being delayed. 'Dragged me into those nettles and into another old bike that's stuck there. I came down crash!'

'What?' The Famous Five looked at that clump of nettles. It certainly did look as though something had come down flat in it. Bob Cherry stepped forward, as he caught sight of a gleam of metal. Wading cautiously through the undergrowth, he caught it and pulled it up.

'Bunter's bike!'

'That chap must have put it there,' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'And Coker chose that identical place to dive in with his own bike and find it. This may be lucky,' said Johnny Bull.

'Lucky?' It was a roar from Coker. Apparently, he considered the circumstance anything but lucky.

'The luckfulness for the esteemed Coker was not terrific,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I mean,' exclaimed Johnny Bull, 'that it shows us that the fellow has now no kind of transport. He can't have picked up any kind of vehicle in the wood.'

'He still has a gun,' commented Nugent.

'He wouldn't expect us to find the bike he threw away.'

No one in their senses would explore a patch of nettles.'

'He didn't know Coker and the ways of Coker's bike,' said Bob Cherry.

'Look here,' roared Coker, 'if I have any of your cheek-'

'Never mind, Coker,' continued Bob, interposing. 'Nice of you to find Bunter's bike for him. What Johnny means, you fellows, is that the man can't get far away. He didn't know we'd get on to that.'

'He'll never get away on foot!' exclaimed Nugent. 'There'll be a swarm of people here soon - police and all-'

'They'll hunt him out,' said Harry Wharton. 'Unless-?'

'Unless what?'

'He can get across the river. That may be his game - probably why he threw away the bike. He may have a boat handy.'

'Let us lookfully explore,' suggested Hurree Singh. The juniors remounted their bicycles. leaving Bunter's propped against a tree. The distance was short; in a couple of minutes, they were gazing at the Sark shining under the sun.

There was no sign of the fugitive. A boat was approaching from the direction of Popper's Island. It was the only one to be seen. In it was the solitary, elegant figure of Cedric Hilton of the Fifth. The Removites waved their hands at him, and shouted. He pulled in and blinked inquiry.

'Yes?'

'Have you seen a boat, coming from this bank about here, Hilton,' asked Harry Wharton.

'No. Not one. Why?'

'There's been a bank raid in Courtfield, and the man came this way. We followed him. He's cornered, I think, unless he can get across in a boat.'

'Haven't seen a solitary boat, except this one, the whole of the afternoon,' said Hilton. 'Sorry to disappoint you.'

'That does it - and him!' said Bob Cherry. 'If he hasn't crossed the river, he must either be hunting cover here, or have gone back on foot to Courtfield Common. He hasn't the remotest chance of getting away now.'

'My esteemed chums,' observed the Nabob of Bhanipur. 'I am wonderfully curious to know why he threw away the esteemed bike. if he could not cross the river.'

'Can't cross the river on a bike, Inky,' said Bob Cherry, with a grin.

'He may not have known there was a river to cross,' observed Nugent.

'In either circumstance why the no-bikefulness?' asked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'He might still escape on a bike - the might-notfulness is much greater on foot. Unless-'

'Unless what, Inky?' asked Johnny Bull.

'If I may make a suggestive remark-?'

'Fathead!' roared Bob Cherry. 'You may make a suggestion or a remark, or anything else you like!'

'It may be that the findfulness of the bike of the esteemed Bunter, and the non-foundfulness discovery of the execrable bank raider is because he has now arrived where he wanted to be!'

The other Removites stared at the nabob.

'Here?' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'He can't have wanted to come here!'

'He did, my esteemed chum,' said Hurree Singh. 'We chased him, but he ledfully took this way.'

'That's so,' agreed Nugent, 'but he hadn't much time to think - owing to us. Might not have known the country. The river cuts him off from going further here, without a boat - and this wood will be packed soon with people on the hunt!' Already, in fact, there was the sound of an increasing number of voices, as an excited crowd of people from Courtfield came swarming into the wood. 'They're almost bound to get him.'

'I think they will not find the execrable bank raider,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'He will be hiding some place near here. Some place

where he did not need, or could not take, the bike of the esteemed Bunter.'

'That's rot, Inky!' exclaimed Johnny Bull. 'If he hangs out near here, he's bound to be spotted. Any fellow with a nose like that can't hide himself.'

'If he continues to wear the absurd and ridiculous nose.'

'Oh, my hat!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Inky's right about that. It may be a false one.'

'False nose or not, he can't hide in this wood!' declared Johnny Bull, who was slow in changing his opinions. 'The nearest buildings are the Three Fishers and beyond that, Popper Court, and I shouldn't think he'll call at either of those! Nowhere else he can hide that I can see!'

'My esteemed Johnny, it has been said that the best place to hidefully conceal oneself is in a crowd,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a smile, 'and there will soon be a crowd in this wood. If he is some local person, he will join the others looking for himself.'

'That's true - and possible enough,' said Bob Cherry. 'He had the bank's loot in that satchel - one which might be bought by anyone and worn by anybody. No one will ask him to open it.'

'I think Inky's right' added Harry Wharton. 'His taking a bike for a bank raid - I know most bank raiders take cars - but you can't use a car without displaying a number. People in Courtfield might recognise it, and report the driver as a stranger. Not like London. A bike with no number is much safer for his job. Let's chuck it and see if we can find Inspector Grimes. He's bound to be here somewhere, and will want a report from us. Then we can stay on and help look if we like, but I don't think it will be of much use.'

Johnny Bull grunted, but made no further comment.

The juniors turned and went back through the wood, convoying Bunter's bike with their own. It looked as though Coker's motor-bike had done more damage to it than the previous collision with the raider's!

They found Inspector Grimes, accompanied by four or five policemen, and about a hundred of the inhabitants of Courtfield, at a near distance. Having made their report, the Removites now found that they wanted their belated tea. Urged, however, by Johnny Bull, who was reluctant to abandon, even now, any theory of his in favour of another, they agreed to hang around for a while to see if anyone found the raider. They could, of course, always pick up something necessary to sustain the inner men at Uncle Clegg's shop near Friardale.

THE NEW MASTER OF THE REMOVE

'CHUCK it, I think' suggested Bob Cherry.

'Looks as if he's crawled into a hole, and pulled it after him,' said Harry Wharton.

'Keep on a bit longer,' observed Johnny Bull.

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh smiled, and said nothing.

Nugent grinned at him cheerfully, and also said nothing.

The search for the bank raider had been going on for some time in that tract of woodland between Courtfield Common and the Sark. Usually solitary, it now swarmed with helpers and hunters. But there was no sign of the man for whom they were all looking.

It seemed certain that he had not got over the river. He was not anywhere on the common. And the wood, though not extensive, had been very thoroughly searched in every thicket and glade of it. The grounds of Sir Hilton Popper's estate, and the premises of the Three Fishers had also been searched by the police - much to the annoyance of Sir Hilton and of the landlord! Yet the man with the beaky nose had not been seen - or if seen, not recognised.

Even Bull was beginning to think that, perhaps, the Nabob of Bhanipur had been right - although he was not yet prepared to admit it.

Coker, in high dudgeon, had collected his bike, and wheeled it to the nearest garage for extensive repairs. Some of the other searchers were already giving up. Bob Cherry looked at his chums.

'Nearly four!' he observed. 'We shan't get any tea anywhere at all, if we stay here much longer.'

'I don't know,' said Johnny Bull. 'Someone's bound to come across traces of him soon-'

'All right, Johnny,' declared Harry Wharton, 'you stay here and keep on looking for him. We'll join you again after afternoon school tomorrow.'

'The chap may be anywhere now,' remarked Frank Nugent, 'except here. Might be in Greyfriars.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Dear me! Are you Greyfriars boys?'

The juniors turned their gaze as a highly pitched voice spoke near them. They saw a rather small man, with a chubby face. He was quietly dressed in dark clothes, and had a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, and carried a shabby suit-case. He blinked owlshly at the Famous Five.

He was a stranger to the Removites, although they had seen him once or twice in the last quarter of an hour or so amongst the searching crowd; one of the many civilians who had come to the wood, helping - or hindering - the efforts of the police.

'Yes; we belong to Greyfriars, sir,' replied Harry Wharton, politely, although he wondered why this stranger wanted to know.

'Dear me! That is good, I thought I recognised the school colours in your caps. I have seen a-ah-reproduction of them,' said the little man. 'But, my boys, I hardly think this wood is a safe place for schoolboys just now. I understand that a search is being made in it, for a most dangerous man. I heard someone say that a shot had been fired.'

'More than one, sir,' said Bob Cherry, cheerfully, 'but I don't think he'll try any more shots with all these people about. We aren't afraid of him - but we're just off to tea, anyway - yes, Johnny, we are!' he added, as Bull gave a protesting growl.

'Very wise-very wise!' chirped the little man. 'Perhaps I should mention that I am also on my way to Greyfriars School. I was taking a little

stroll on this beautiful afternoon, when I walked into this wretched foray! Dear me! My name is Foss!

'Oh?' ejaculated Harry Wharton, 'Mr. Harvard Foss?'

'Yes, yes, quite so!'

It was the new, temporary master of the Remove. They gazed at him, with some interest. By his looks he certainly answered to Skinner's description of him. He seemed a mild, harmless ass.

The juniors, now that they had learned who he was, were thinking of Skinner's projected jape at Friardale Station. It looked as if something had gone wrong with Skinner's plans. Mr. Foss was here, and had evidently not been inveigled into going to Highcliffe and entering the wrong school.

'Will you, please, tell me what form you are in, my boys?'

'Your own, sir - the Remove,' answered Harry Wharton.

'Excellent - most excellent - I am happy to meet you,' said Mr. Foss, 'even in such an upheaval as has happened this afternoon. I thought, when I came out of the station, that it looked such a quiet, peaceful countryside - but ah, me!' The little man sighed.

'You came by the train which arrived at half past three, sir?' asked Harry Wharton.

'Yes, that was my train!'

'I wonder no one was there to meet you, sir,' observed Johnny Bull, fishing for information.

'Indeed, I requested that there should not be! I always do, on any new appointments.' Mr. Foss smiled at the juniors. 'I like to see the country of my new surroundings, and I travel light.' He looked at his old suitcase. 'I am a simple man, and I do not wish to give trouble. Now, come with me my boys, and let us go to Greyfriars together. I think it is not far away.'

'Quite near, sir,' said Nugent.

'Then come! I must not keep Dr. Locke waiting.'

The Famous Five looked at each other. They were all - except, perhaps, Bull, quite willing to abandon a search which now seemed hopeless. They were willing, too, to oblige the new master who seemed quite a pleasant kind of man, if a little ineffective. Yet, they were now feeling that they wanted their tea - not so desperately as Bunter would have wanted it in similar circumstances, but still they felt hungry.

'If the esteemed sahib would let us leave him at the gates-' began Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The new master stared at the Nabob of Bhanipur, evidently struck by his remarkable English.

'We haven't had any tea yet, sir.' said Bob Cherry. 'We were just going to have it in Courtfield, when all this affair started. And we're too late now for tea in Hall. We thought of going to a shop in Friardale for something-' added Wharton.

'Indeed, indeed, my boys.' exclaimed Mr. Foss. 'You must not go hungry on my account. Please see me to the gates of Greyfriars and then go where you want.'

The Removites left Mr. Harvard Foss at the porter's lodge, and walked on. 'Quite a nice sort of fellow.' said Bob Cherry. 'I'm glad Skinner didn't play his silly games on him.'

'I wonder why he didn't?' observed Johnny Bull. 'Thought better of it, I expect,' suggested Harry Wharton.

'The execrable Skinner has rarely thought better of anything,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Seems to have done so in this case,' said Frank Nugent. 'Rather a shame to rag a chap like that. We look like being all right, if he's taking over while Quelchy is away.'

That there was another side to the quiet, gentle Mr. Harvard Foss they had yet to discover.

NO LUCK FOR SKINNER & CO.

VERNON-SMITH having, rather belatedly, mended the puncture in his bicycle, looked at his wrist-watch. He could join the Famous Five at the bun shop in Courtfield for tea. Then he remembered the other invitation he had received from Skinner to join him in 'guying' the new master. The Bounder might have had many interests not held in common with Harry Wharton & Co., but he had still fewer in common with Skinner, which was why he had refused to join him on this enterprise. He despised Skinner. Nevertheless an impish curiosity decided him to go to Friardale Station and see what Skinner did with the new master due to arrive by the 3.30. He would just watch.

Getting on his bicycle, he rode out of gates and towards Friardale, getting to the station in time to see the 3.30 approaching from the distance. Skinner, Stott and Snoop were on the platform. They turned towards Vernon-Smith as he appeared, but, ignoring them, he turned to look at a time-table as the train neared the station.

Only four passengers alighted from the train, of whom three were female and one Sir Julius Hogben of Hogben Grange. The Bounder grinned as Skinner, with a disgusted look on his face, came along to him.

'The ass must have missed his train.' said Skinner. 'Must have. Going to wait for the next?'

'The 4.15? Yes.'

'I'm not!' said Stott. 'I want my tea.' He turned to go.

'Look here, Stott!' began Skinner.

'Oh, rats!' Stott stalked away.

Skinner turned on Snoop, his other study-mate, who was much more under his influence.

'You'll stay-'

'Oh, all right!' Snoop's answer lacked enthusiasm, and Skinner looked at the Bounder.

'You'll be with us, Smithy-?'

'No! I thought you'd make a mess of it, somehow, Skinner - just came along to see - and amuse myself,' replied Vernon-Smith. 'I'll wait and see what happens when the 4.15 comes in - might as well wait here as anywhere. Not with you!' he added. Skinner scowled. 'I'll take the air at the other end of the platform. You take it at this one.'

The Bounder strode off smiling. The tame collapse of Skinner's jape amused him. There was Skinner in that Highcliffe cap - and Snoop and Stott, against all school rules, with no caps at all, lest the contrast in school colours called forth comment - and nothing had happened! There were only two passengers who descended from the 4.15. and they were both local farmers, well-known by sight to the schoolboys. There was no sign whatever of Mr. Harvard Foss.

The Bounder walked back to where Skinner and Snoop were standing.

'Old Harvard Foss must have got out at the wrong station Skinner - if he's such a fool as you make out.'

'Then he'd take the next train,' growled Skinner. 'But he hasn't!'

'I can't understand it,' said Skinner. 'He's got to report to old Locke today. Can't turn up any time he likes. Daren't!'

'If he did get out at another station, he might have taken a taxi,' suggested Vernon-Smith.

'Temporary beaks from Bycroft's Agency haven't money to waste on taxis.'

'You may be right. Perhaps some fellow on the road gave him a lift?'

Skinner started. 'Oh, that's possible! If he did get out at the wrong station-'

The Bounder laughed. 'You've taken all this trouble for nothing, Skinner,' he said. 'Wherever the chap is he isn't here! Well, good-bye! The next train's 6.15 - waiting for that - or chucking away that Highcliffe cap and calling it a day?'

Skinner gave him a venomous glance as he walked away.

Then, with deep feelings, he followed the Bounder, and was followed by Snoop. They had missed tea in Hall, and had missed the new master at the station and it had been a thoroughly unsuccessful afternoon. Which is what Skinner & Co. deserved, although they were unlikely to see it!

BUNTER ASKS FOR IT!

'BEAST!' murmured Bunter.

He was applying that epithet to the beak nosed man who had taken his bicycle, leaving him, in exchange, a useless one with a twisted wheel. Bunter had left that where it had fallen; as for his own, the Famous Five had gone in pursuit of the thief to recover it, and in Bunter's opinion, that was now their responsibility. If they failed he would expect them to pay for it!

His principal grievance was that the loss of his bike had meant a long walk back, and the afternoon had been a warm one. The Owl of the Remove had taken things slowly, only stirred at all by the hope of finding something for tea. It was too far to walk to the bun shop, and even if he got there he might not discover someone willing to act as his 'host'. It was, the Owl reflected, a world of 'beasts'.

However, fortunately, on arrival at Greyfriars, Lord Mauleverer's study had yielded a cake, and Bob Cherry's a bag of jam-tarts. In Tom Brown's he had discovered a bottle of ginger-pop and some biscuits. Fortified by these involuntary contributions, he reclined in Peter Todd's armchair, in his own study, lazily surveying the 'quad' below through the open window. There were few people about on a fine half-holiday.

Presently, he saw a small gentleman being escorted by Gosling, the porter, to the Head's house. Had he but known it, that was Mr. Harvard Foss, the new temporary master of the Remove, just left at Gosling's lodge by Harry Wharton & Co. A little later, he grinned at the sight of Prout, the Fifth-form master, ambling in slowly, looking exhausted by the heat and a walk he had chosen to take. Prout was overtaken by Hacker, the master of the Fourth, who entered the gates immediately afterwards.

'He, he, he!' chuckled Bunter.

It was evident that Prout did not appreciate his being joined by Hacker. The 'Acid Drop', as he was generally known, was not a popular person. The Owl of the Remove, always interested in other people's business, saw Prout detach himself, and proceed to a clump of shady trees on the far side of the 'quad' behind which there was a seat.

After his refreshment. Bunter exerted himself sufficiently to go down to the 'quad'. Fellows were coming in now, and he might find someone who would stand him another ginger-pop at Mrs. Mible's or even cash the postal order he expected. It would only be a just recognition of his services to the form in drenching Quelch. By this time, Bunter almost believed, himself, that he had drenched Quelch!

Peter Todd, his study-mate, was the first victim.

Bunter's little eyes saw Todd entering the 'quad' before Peter Todd could see him.

'I say. Toddy-'

'No!'

'No what, you ass?'

'No, to what you were just going to ask me. Sorry; I'm stoney. Thanks for offering to stand me a ginger-pop all the same.'

'I-I wasn't going to offer to stand you a ginger-pop!' exclaimed the Owl, indignantly. 'At least-I'd stand you one with pleasure, old man, if my postal order had turned up. Perhaps Mrs. Mible would let you have a couple on tick? And-and a cake or two. I'm frightfully hungry,' concluded Bunter, pathetically.

'Go, on!' said Peter, sarcastically, 'you surprise me.'

'I say, Peter, don't be a beast! I've had an awful time this afternoon!'

'So has someone's cake, judging by the crumbs all over your waistcoat!'

'Oh, lor'!' Bunter hurriedly brushed them off with a fat hand. 'Don't you tell Mauly- I-I say, my bike's been stolen! My pater gave £70 for that bike, you know.'

'No, I don't know that bike at all,' answered Peter. 'Never seen it. I only know the one for which you might get half-a-crown in old Lazarus's secondhand shop - if you cleaned it and gave it a bit of oil.'

'It's been pinched,' said Bunter, indignantly. 'A chap took it and rode away on it. A beaky nosed beast. Of course, I knocked him senseless, but-'

'He still rode away,' said Tom Brown, who had just come in. 'Clever of him, of course.'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Peter Todd. 'Bunter's been riding his bicycle senseless. He always does!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

A gathering crowd of juniors laughed. Bunter blinked at them, indignantly.

'I punched him hard, I tell you - but he got away.'

'Sure it wasn't a cushion or a toy balloon you punched?' asked Wibley.

'More in your line - and safer. It can't hit back.'

'It's all very well for you fellows to cackle. I punched Smithy's nose the other day.'

'And then you woke up?'

'I tell you-'

'I noticed Smithy's nose seemed to have had a bang,' observed Squiff.

'Are you claiming credit for that, too, as well as drenching Quelch?'

'Yes,' said Bunter. 'You fellows don't dare to do things like that. It doesn't matter to me. I never think of it. I punched Smithy's nose- and-'
'So you did.' It was the voice of the Bounder, who had just come in. 'I'd almost forgotten it - but now you've reminded me-'

'Ow! Oh, I say, you fellows, keep him off - it-it was an accident - I never meant-'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The Bounder laughed, but made no further attempts to come nearer Bunter. Knowing the Owl, he had come to realise that it must have been an accident.

'And your pouring water over poor old Quelch - was that an accident, too?'

'And you're punching the man who stole your bike and rode off senseless - another accident?'

'No - yes - I mean I did-' Bunter broke off. He had just caught sight of the Famous Five coming into the 'quad'. They were wheeling their bicycles but not Bunter's. The Owl frowned.

'I say you fellows, where's my bike? I left it for you to look after. If you've lost it, you'll have to pay for it.'

'You fat ass!' exclaimed Johnny Bull. 'We got it back, but the police have it now - looking for finger-prints or something of that sort. I don't expect that will be of much use, but the bike isn't either at the moment. You wouldn't be able to ride it for a bit anyway.'

'Beast! If you've damaged it-'

'No, chump!' said Bob Cherry. 'But Coker's motor-bike did. It almost leaped at yours and took a bite out of it.'

'Oh, lor'! My pater paid £80 for that bike!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You might get Coker to pay, though it wasn't his fault,' suggested Nugent.

'If the esteemed Bunter will lend his bike to a bank raider, he must expect the damagefulness,' observed Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

'What's that about a bank raider?' asked Wibley. Harry Wharton & Co. recounted the events of the afternoon. A gathering crowd of juniors listened intently.

'Well, you're coming on, Bunter,' observed Wibley. 'You lend your bike to a bank raider. That makes you an accessory. I don't suppose they'll send you to Borstal the first time-'

'Ow!'

'But it might almost make us believe that story of yours about pouring that bucket of water over Quelch.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I tell you I did-'

'You fat chump!' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'Are you still talking that nonsense? It's asking for trouble!'

'Bunter's ferocious these days, and no mistake,' observed Tom Brown. 'He assaults Smithy, and a bank raider and Quelch. Let's leave him to walk alone before he begins on us.'

The New Zealand junior laughed and moved away, and the other Removites followed him. They went nearer to the shade of the trees. There were cooler ways of passing the time than standing in the blazing sunshine, listening to Bunter!

'I say, you fellows, don't walk away when I'm talking to you. I did swamp that water over Quelch. You owe it to me-'

'Shut up, you silly ass!' said Bob Cherry.

Bob Cherry's advice was wasted. The fat Owl of the Remove did not shut up. It was his habit, apparently, like the little brook, to go on for ever. Bunter moved after the others.

'I did swamp Quelch-'

AND BUNTER GETS IT!

'UNPARALLELED impertinence!'

Paul Pontifex Prout was not in the best of humours.

Coming in at the gates, tired by his afternoon's walk, he had been overtaken by Hacker. Hacker, seeing his weariness, had smiled benignly, and murmured '*eheu! fugaces labuntur anni*'. That had annoyed Prout very much.

He was well aware that the flying years slipped by-an injudiciously long walk in the summer sunshine had brought that fact home to him - but he objected to being reminded of it by Hacker, an impertinent fellow, his junior in years.

It was, of course, better to sit quietly in the sunshine, without exertion - and without Hacker.

He continued to do so.

Prout's mood had softened a little, but not much, when he was roused by the sound of approaching voices.

'Go away, Bunter!'

'Beast! You ought to be grateful to me - all of you.

I drenched Quelch and put him in "sanny".'

The Fifth-form master sat bolt upright. The mystery of who poured that water over the Remove master had remained a mystery. Now it seemed to be solved! Prout knew Bunter's voice, and that he been Quelch's first suspect in the matter - a suspicion which he had, subsequently, abandoned. Now it seemed that he had abandoned it in error!

Prout rose to his feet. The expression on his face was grim. Generally, he would have taken no notice of such information, gained by accident, but this matter was too serious to ignore.

'BUNTER!'

Bunter spun round.

'Oh, lor'!'

'I heard you, Bunter. I shall take you to the Headmaster, and report this matter.'

'Oh, crikey! I-I-say, sir-'

Bunter's audience eddied away, but there was no eddying away for the Owl of the Remove. Prout's grip was firm on his shoulder and he found himself being conducted towards the Headmaster's study.

Bunter almost tottered as they progressed. It was being borne upon him that there was something to be said for telling the truth! He had not poured that water over Quelch, but he had declared that he had, in order to be regarded as a reckless and daring fellow! At the present moment, in the grasp of Prout, with an awful interview with Dr. Locke in prospect, he felt far from daring and reckless.

'I-I say, sir - I never did it - I never poured that water over Quelch - over Mr. Quelch - oh, lor'!'

'What?' thundered Prout. 'I heard you actually boasting of that deplorable happening!'

'But, I never did, sir -I-I meant that I hadn't done it at all!'

'Be silent!' Prout was not likely to believe Bunter's statement, after what he had heard from behind that tree. 'You may speak to your Headmaster. He continued to push Bunter along.

The fat Owl was almost dizzy with terror. He was being taken to the Head - to be flogged or sacked - or, perhaps, both! As they came through the doorway into the school, the prospect became too much for him. He jerked his shoulder from Prout's grip, and ran.

'Bunter! Come back at once!' roared Prout.

Bunter did not come back at once. He continued to run. The fattest figure in Greyfriars vanished round the nearest corner. Prout went in pursuit. The Owl put on a turn of speed which, in other circumstances, such as on the running-path, would have done him credit. He dashed on blindly, and found himself in the Masters' Passage.

It flashed into Bunter's mind that one study in that passage had no occupant - Quelch's. Quelch had gone and the new master not yet arrived. It was a safe refuge. The Owl of the Remove pulled open that study door, shot in and closed it behind him.

Prout's heavy tread was heard almost immediately afterwards. Bunter had gone to cover with but a split second to spare - but he had had that split second! Much as Prout had disliked that quotation from Hacker, a little while earlier, it could not be denied that there was truth in it! To the Owl's relief Prout passed on down the passage - but he might come back and look into that study! Bunter squirmed behind Quelch's desk. After waiting for about five anxious minutes, he heard Prout's voice outside.

'Monsieur Charpentier, I am looking for Bunter of Mr. Quelch's form. He came along here, Have you seen him?'

'Mais non?' came the voice of the French master in reply.

Prout grunted. 'He must be found. It transpires that he was responsible for that outrage on Quelch. He must be taken before the Headmaster. I will call the prefects to search for him.'

'Oh, lor'!'

A quaking Owl sat tight - safe for the moment!

THE HUNTING OF BUNTER

'THAT ass, Bunter!' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'The utter fathead,' said Nugent.

'The calamityfulness is great,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'but the asking-for-it-fulness of the fatheaded Bunter was considerable.'

'Inky's right,' said Johnny Bull. 'Bunter's asked for it and got it.

There's nothing to be done. Perhaps it will teach him a lesson.'

The Famous Five were discussing the calamity which had befallen Bunter.

Knowing - as the rest of the Remove did not - that the fat Owl had not poured that water over Quelch, they were concerned at what had befallen him. Johnny Bull might take the view that Bunter had asked for this trouble and got it, and that was that. The others could not view the matter so equably.

'That's all very well, Johnny,' said Harry Wharton, 'but the fact is that we know that Prout has bagged the wrong man. The fat ass has asked for it - but that doesn't make him guilty.'

'Can't let him be whopped or bunked - or perhaps, both,' put in Bob Cherry, 'and just stand aside doing nothing.'

'What can you do?' demanded Johnny Bull. 'Sneak on Coker?'

'No, fathead, of course not - but-'

'My esteemed chums,' said the nabob, 'let us go and see the excellent and fatheaded Coker, and tell him what has happened to the ridiculous Bunter.'

'Can't see that doing any good, Inky,' observed Johnny Bull.

'Perhapsfully not, but it is right that we should leave no stone unturnedfully, as your English proverb says.'

The juniors grinned at the English proverb. Johnny Bull might be right that no good would come of such a visit to Coker, but the others were of the opinion that Coker should know of the latest development of the situation caused by his fatheadedness.

'Inky's right,' said Harry Wharton. 'We must tell Coker what's happened whether that's any good or not. Come on!'

The Removites moved towards the Fifth-form passage, Johnny Bull following, if somewhat reluctantly. Turning a corner, they encountered Loder and Carne. Loder looked at them, with a grim expression.

'Seen Bunter anywhere?' he asked, peremptorily.

'Not for half-an-hour or so,' replied Harry Wharton.

'Sure?'

Harry Wharton crimsoned.

'Look here, Loder. I don't tell lies, and-'

'You'd better ask Prout,' put in Johnny Bull. He did not want Wharton to get into a row with Loder, which seemed only too likely to happen. Loder was a prefect, and apt to make the most - and the worst - of that circumstance. 'Last any of us saw Bunter was when Prout was marching him off to see the Head-'

'I know that,' snapped Loder. 'He ran away from Prout, and is hiding somewhere. It's coming to something when prefects have to hunt for a grubby Remove fag! All right; you lot can cut! Come on, Come! Don't let's waste time with this crowd!'

Loder, followed by Carne, strode on, and the Removites looked at each other.

'Gave Prout the slip and is hiding somewhere - the fat ass!' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'Still it gives us a bit more time-'

'What for?' asked Johnny Bull.

It was difficult to answer that and Bob did not attempt to.

'Come on! Let's see Coker,' he said. They resumed their progress to the Fifth-form passage, and entered Coker's study.

Coker was looking worried. He had, apparently, already learned that a Removite had been apprehended for his own brilliant idea of emptying that bucket of water from a Remove study.

'It's awkward,' he was saying to Potter and Greene, as Harry Wharton & Co. entered, 'and annoying. Rakes the whole thing up again, just when it's beginning to be forgotten.'

'It isn't - and wasn't,' said Potter. 'Beaks don't forget those things in a hurry!'

'That's enough from you, Potter.' Coker turned to look at the Removites.

'What are you fags doing here? Clear off.'

'My esteemed Coker,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'We came to respectfully advise you that the esteemed fat Bunter has been accused of your crime-'

'My crime?' exclaimed Coker. 'Of all the cheek!' Potter and Greene chuckled and he glared at them. 'If you mean that accident with that bucket of water-'

'Accident?' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

'Oh, crikey!' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'We do,' observed Johnny Bull.

'That was entirely Quelch's and Wingate's fault. They made a shocking muddle of the business between them-'

'They did?' said Nugent, faintly.

It was difficult for anyone, not knowing Coker, to account for his looking at the matter like this! Still, Coker was always Coker!

'My beak's been brought into it too,' continued Coker. 'I don't approve of that - a master of my form being involved in fag form trouble. Still, I suppose I shall have to do something for that fat ass, Bunter!'

'Good man!' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'It will be difficult for me, explaining to the Head that it was really Quelch's own fault that he got drenched and taken to "sanny."'

'Yes,' said Harry Wharton, faintly. 'I think it may be difficult to do that.'

'For goodness' sake, Coker-' began Greene.

'That's all I want to hear from you, William Greene.

Perhaps I'd better have a word with Prout - as man to man. He shouldn't be in this business at all really. I can't understand why he is.'

'He overheard Bunter talking about it - saying that he'd done it.'

Harry Wharton realised that Coker knew that Bunter had been accused of swamping Quelch, but did not know of the events leading up to it.

'He was boasting of having done it - thought it would make him look big in the eyes of the form, I suppose. No one else knew who'd done it, and it seemed like prestige going begging.'

'What?' Coker put on a tremendous frown. 'He claimed to have done it? Of all the cheek! That puts a different complexion on the matter, of course. If they'd got hold of that fag, by mistake, I'd have been bound to go to the Head and Prout to get them to see reason-'

'Oh, crikey!' murmured Bob Cherry again.

'-but if Bunter chooses to say he did it, he can get on with the matter. Cheek, anyway!' Coker sat down. 'You fags can clear off now.'

'But Coker-' began Harry Wharton.

'Because a fat fag chooses to go round telling fibs, is a fellow with an accepted, if unofficial, position of standing in the school to sacrifice himself?' demanded Coker. 'If he'd kept quiet, there would have been no trouble.'

'There's something in what Coker says, you fellows,' declared Potter, in a tone which indicated that he was rather surprised to discover anything worth listening to in anything Coker said. 'If a fellow acts like an ass, it's worse for a senior man than a junior-'

'Are you saying I acted like an ass, Potter?'

'Merely speaking on general principles,' continued Potter, hastily. 'I was saying that Bunter may only get a few licks with the Head's birch, but a senior man might be sacked. The Head would say he was old enough to know better.'

Potter could have added that Horace Coker was never likely to be old enough to know better, but in view of Coker's grim expression at the trend of the remarks, he refrained.

'That's so,' agreed Greene, deliberately being equivocal, and avoiding Coker's glare. 'I can see your line of thought, you fags, but, in the circumstances, you're asking too much.'

'And now you can clear off before I boot you out,' added Coker.

Potter held open the study door politely, as a kindly hint that it might be as well for them not to stand upon the order of their going but to go at once. The juniors looked at each other and went.

BUNTER LIES DOGGO!

'OH, crumbs!' gasped Bunter.

He had heard the bell for 'call-over'. It was a summons which must be obeyed. No one in Greyfriars was allowed to cut 'call-over' - but, for once, the Owl of the Remove did cut it, for he dared not do anything else!

He was still squatting behind the desk in the corner of Quelch's study. He had no doubt that he was being looked-for. Prout had, almost certainly, made his report to the Head and left it at that. Bunter would be collected at 'call-over' and taken up for judgement - if he were there to take!

The thought of such an interview made Bunter positively shiver. To stand before the gaze of Dr. Locke, indicted as the perpetrator of the outrage, which had drenched Quelch with water and sent him into 'sanny' that was too much for flesh and blood to stand - at least the flesh and blood of William George Bunter!

The fat Owl realised that though he might be safe enough in cover for the present, he was only postponing the evil hour. He could not remain, for the term of his natural life, hidden behind the desk in Quelch's study. Moreover, he was getting hungry. That was serious!

'Oh, lor'!'

Luckily - for Bunter - he had managed to collect and consume those contributions from other Remove studies before Prout had collected him. Yet, the interval between tea and supper was a long time - to the fat Owl - one which he was apt to fill, when he could, with a series of snacks to sustain his strength. He really did not know how he could survive until supper without them. And supper? If he turned up at the supper-table he would be nailed. And if he didn't he would have no supper!

It was really awful. Bunter groaned. He felt that he was a good man struggling with adversity. That he should have to endure this, merely because old Prout thought he had swamped Quelch, having heard him say so! There were footsteps in the passage outside, which halted at the door. The door opened. The Owl's heart quaked. The light was switched on.

'This is your study, my dear fellow. It was Quelch's.'

'Thank you so much! Quite a pleasant room!' exclaimed a voice, which Bunter had never heard before.

'Yes, indeed, Mr. Foss. I trust you will find yourself comfortable during your stay at Greyfriars.'

Bunter wondered who Mr. Foss was. There was no one with such a name, at Greyfriars, of whom he had ever heard.

'Thank you, Mr. Prout. I am sure I will. Mr. Quelch, I understand, may be away for some time?'

'He is laid up with a severe chill, Mr. Foss. A foolish boy in the Remove swamped him with water from a window-'

'Oh, dear, dear!'

'The culprit has, fortunately, now been discovered, owing to his actually boasting of his exploit!' observed Prout. 'He will certainly be flogged and possibly expelled-'

The Owl suppressed a squeak of anguish.

'A reckless young rascal, Mr. Foss. His name is Bunter. He was missing from "call-over" as you may have noticed?'

This Mr. Foss, it would seem, had been present at 'call-over'. It began to dawn on Bunter that this was the new temporary 'beak' who was to take Quelch's place, and that Prout was showing him the study. Bunter could

have groaned aloud - though he was careful not to do so! For days that study had been deserted - now it was to have an occupant at a most inconvenient time - for Bunter! The stars, in their courses, seemed to be fighting against Bunter, as against Sisera of old!

'Dear me!' exclaimed Mr. Foss. 'And he belongs to my form? Oh, dear me! Most of the boys seem very nice indeed. This Bunter is surely an exception.'

'I imagine so,' observed Mr. Prout. 'An incredibly stupid boy. No one else here is likely to perpetrate any such outrage! Well, Mr. Foss, I will now leave you here. Let us see you again in Common-Room?'

'Oh yes, certainly. Soon, my dear Mr. Prout. I have first a little unpacking to do.'

Prout rolled away and the new master shut the door.

Bunter peered cautiously round the corner of the desk.

He saw a little man with a chubby face, wearing a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, perched on a small nose. His appearance was rather reassuring to the Owl - he did not look anything like so stern as Quelch. Anyone, at a glance, would set down Mr. Foss as a harmless ass.

Bunter popped back into cover, as the new master turned from the door. He might look harmless enough, but the fat Owl realised that, if he were discovered, he would be turned out at once. With what awaited him on discovery, he did not want to be turned out. He waited and quaked in silence.

Mr. Foss had a small bag in his hand, which he laid on the table. Then Bunter heard him step back again to the study door. There was the faintest of clicks as the key turned in the lock.

He had locked his study door - why, Bunter could not imagine. And he had locked it carefully and almost noiselessly, almost as if he did not want anyone who might be passing in the passage to hear him doing so. Bunter, not now daring to peep out, could not see the new master - but his fat ears reported the movements of Mr. Foss. Bunter was curious; even the position in which he found himself could not lessen the fat Owl's curiosity.

Mr. Foss turned and came towards the window. For one dreadful moment, Bunter thought that he was going to look over the top of the desk! But he did not; Bunter could hear him drawing the curtains at the window, although it was still quite light.

Then he came back to the table. Bunter heard him unlock his bag. Then there was a rustle of papers-a prolonged rustle, as though he were counting something.

The faint mutter of a voice reached the listening Owl. 'Nearly eight hundred! Not a bad afternoon's work!'

This was Greek to Bunter. Then he heard a low laugh, and the click of the bag being locked again. The new master approached the desk. Bunter quaked, but remained undiscovered. Mr. Foss halted, and appeared to be examining his desk. Then the Owl heard the turning of another key. That, too, had been locked.

'O.K.'

He heard the key withdrawn; no doubt, Mr. Foss had taken it out, and put it in his pocket. Then he went to the study door; it opened and closed again with the very faintest of sounds; Mr. Foss had gone out. Bunter was alone.

'Oh, lor'!' he murmured, 'Oh, dear! I-I'm hungry. I-I wonder if he was locking up a pie or something?'

That seemed to Bunter quite a reasonable supposition.

Why should Mr. Foss - or, indeed, anyone else for that matter-take such precautions to safeguard anything unless it was something to eat? Bunter wondered if he could get that desk open. Locks sometimes yielded to a

little pressure, as he had occasionally found with cupboards in the
Remove studies, which he suspected of containing foodstuffs, which might
sustain a fellow in need of constant snacks. But suppose Foss came back?
Bunter crept cautiously to the study door, to open it quietly, and peep
out to see if the coast were clear. Then he discovered that that, also,
was locked! He was a prisoner - a hungry prisoner, getting hungrier!

SMITHY AND THE NEW MASTER

'THAT ass, Bunter!' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'Cutting "call-over"!' said Harry Wharton.

'They're bound to dig him out soon,' observed Frank Nugent. 'All the prefects will be on the hunt for him. And then-'

'What do we do?' asked Bob Cherry.

'Nothing!' declared Johnny Bull, firmly. 'We can't sneak on Coker. Bunter's asked for it - and will get it - and take it. That's all!'

'That's all very well, Johnny,' said Harry Wharton, 'but I don't know that we can leave it at that.' As head boy of the Remove, he was rather feeling the position. Certainly, he was not responsible for Bunter's activities; the fat Owl was hardly responsible for them himself! Yet, he could hardly stand by, placidly, while an injustice was done, as Johnny Bull seemed prepared to do, even if the recipient of that injustice had absolutely begged for it!

'Leave it alone!' replied Johnny Bull, firmly. 'It's going before the Head. Prout will see to that. They'll find Bunter. He said he did it, didn't he? Let him explain that!'

'All the same, knowing what we know-' Bob Cherry broke off as he saw Vernon-Smith approach. The Bounder smiled as he came up to them.

'Knowing who really did swamp that bucket of water over Quelch?' he said. 'You did say you knew, didn't you, Cherry? Might an inquisitive fellow ask the name?'

'No!' snapped Johnny Bull.

'It was Coker,' said Bob Cherry. 'No harm in telling Smithy, Johnny. That Fifth-form chump! We tried to stop him, but were just too late!'

The Bounder chuckled.

'Coker's every sort of an ass!' he observed, 'but hardly the man to let another fellow - even a fathead like Bunter - suffer on his account. Why did he want to pour water on Quelch?'

'He didn't!' said Nugent. 'He meant it for Wingate. Wingate had ticked him off for something. He chose our study window because he thought Wingate would be passing underneath. Like his cheek!'

'The cheekfulness was terrific,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, 'and the chumpfulness was also great. There is a bird-of-a-feather-fulness between the chumpfulness of the fathead Coker and that of the asinine Bunter.'

'There certainly is,' the Bounder grinned, 'but now that Coker knows that they're after another man for what he did-'

'Coker says that if Bunter had been nailed by something just coming out he would have spoken up,' put in Harry Wharton, 'but as Bunter was overheard claiming he'd done the thing, he says that makes it different.'

'Nothing more might have been heard of it, if Bunter hadn't been such a fool,' added Johnny Bull. 'It's serious enough for a fat ass, like Bunter, to do such a thing - much worse for a senior man. Why should he come into it, as things have turned out. That's Coker's point of view - and chump though he is, I agree with him in this!'

Vernon-Smith laughed.

'And suppose it gets back to a beak's ears that you fellows knew who did it, and that it wasn't Bunter - after Bunter's been flogged or expelled? You admitted, Cherry, that you knew as much as that, when Skinner asked you. Skinner isn't discreet - and he's in a particularly beastly temper just now-'

'Why?' demanded Johnny Bull.

The Bounder chuckled again.

'His joke on the new man went flat. That fellow, Foss, never turned up!'
'What do you mean - never turned up?' said Harry Wharton. 'He was there at "call-over" - that was the chap talking to Prout.'

'He didn't turn up at Friardale Station, anyway.'

'You weren't there - at least you told Skinner you weren't going to be. You said you'd join us in Courtfield - and didn't! Where did you go - Lantham Races?'

Vernon-Smith smiled. 'No, Bull. I admit I had the idea. I find the society of horses better than that of some others I know-'

'Oh, rats!'

'-but I thought I'd go to Friardale Station, merely as a looker-on in Vienna, as it were - and see Skinner and his pals make a mess of that jape of his. As it was it made a mess of him. Old Foss never arrived!'

'He did. He came by the 3,30,' said Bob Cherry. Vernon-Smith stared.

'He did not!'

'We met him in that stretch of woodland, running down to the Sark from the common,' said Harry Wharton. 'He was amongst the crowd who'd come hunting for that bank raider. He told us who he was, and said that he'd arrived in Friardale by the 3.30-'

'Then he's lying!' interrupted Vernon-Smith. 'I don't know why - but he certainly is!'

'Smithy!'

'There were only three women, and Sir Julius Hogben, who came by that train,' continued Vernon-Smith, 'and then I waited for the 4.15. No one came by that whom I didn't know by sight. Just two local farmers I've seen before. He wasn't there. He never arrived at Friardale.'

'Rot!' exclaimed Johnny Bull. 'Why should he say he had, if he hadn't? You must have missed him somehow!'

'How? Talk sense!' snapped the Bounder. 'Friardale isn't that kind of station. It's not Euston or Paddington. You can't miss people on it! Foss did not arrive at Friardale by the 3.30, and if he says he did, he's lying!'

'Smithy!' gasped Bob Cherry. He put out a restraining hand, but was too late. Looking the other way, he had seen Mr. Harvard Foss enter the Remove passage as the Bounder was speaking. He had evidently overheard him!

The Bounder swung round. There was a dead silence as he and the little gentleman with the gold-rimmed glasses looked at each other!

NOT SUCH A MILD LITTLE MAN!

THE Removites waited. What they had already seen of their new temporary master had made them agree that he was, indeed, worthy of the description he had earned at St. Richard's, of 'the Babe in the Wood'. However, even the most harmless ass could hardly ignore one of his pupils characterising him, as the Bounder had done.

The mild-looking eyes blinked behind the gold-rimmed glasses.

'My boys,' said Mr. Foss, quietly. 'I came here to inquire whether anything has been seen of Bunter, who was absent from calling-over?'

'No, sir. He isn't here,' stammered Harry Wharton.

'The boy must be found,' continued Mr. Foss. 'The Headmaster wishes to see him. However, let us leave that for the moment. As I entered this passage I heard some words uttered.'

The juniors stirred. The Remove passage was becoming more crowded. Lord Mauleverer and Peter Todd, Wibley, Squiff and Brown, and Skinner, Stott and Snoos had all come out of their studies.

'I am a newcomer here,' said Mr. Foss. 'I had hoped to deserve - and receive - the respect of my form. Yet, the words I heard just now-' His eyes turned upon the Bounder. They were no longer mild! 'Your name, please?'

'Vernon-Smith, sir.'

'I am surprised. Vernon-Smith - I am amazed! You have cast doubt on my word - the word of your form-master - in the most reprehensible language! Why?'

'I am sorry I used those words, sir,' replied the Bounder, 'but I heard that you had told some fellows that you had arrived at Friardale by the 3.30-'

'So I did. What is that to you?'

Vernon-Smith stared at him.

'I was at Friardale Station then, sir,' he said. 'I was waiting to meet someone - who was expected to come by that train. I saw all the passengers who got out of that train - and the next. You were not amongst them. That's all!'

There was a touch of insolence in the Bounder's voice now.

Mr. Foss's expression had lost its mildness. It was now obvious that he was very angry.

'Upon my word, Vernon-Smith,' he exclaimed. 'You did not see me - a man whom you did not then know by sight - amongst a crowd of passengers - and for such a reason you state that your form-master is lying?'

Vernon-Smith set his lips.

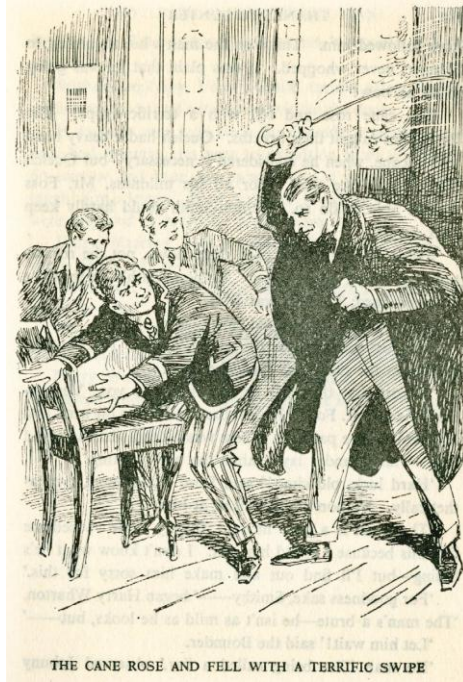
'There wasn't a crowd, sir,' he said. 'Only a few people got out at Friardale - and I knew them all.'

'Indeed? Do you persist in your statement, Vernon-Smith, after I have informed you that I, most certainly, came to Friardale by the train which arrived there at 3.30 this afternoon?'

Vernon-Smith was silent. Even the reckless Bounder could hardly go to the length of calling a form-master a liar, to his face!

'This is a small matter,' said Mr. Foss, 'but it does not alter the fact, Vernon-Smith, that you have been guilty of almost unheard-of insolence. I cannot allow such an offence to pass by. Reluctant as I am to punish a boy on the first day of my arrival, I must deal with you with the greatest severity.' He turned and looked at Skinner. 'You - what is your name?'

'Skinner, sir.'



'Go to my study, Skinner - no, not to my study. It is not yet in order - to Mr. Prout's or some other master's and ask him to lend me a cane.'

'With pleasure, sir!' Skinner grinned at the Bounder, as he left. He had not forgotten Vernon-Smith's remarks to him at Friardale Station that afternoon! All eyes turned on the Bounder. That he had made a mistake, unlikely as it seemed, most of the Removites were disposed to believe. He had only to say so - but Vernon-Smith knew that he had made no mistake! Not for a whopping or a dozen whoppings would he state that he had, when he knew that to be false.

Skinner returned with a cane. Mr. Foss took it, flung open the door of the nearest study and pointed to a chair. 'Bend over that chair, Vernon-Smith.'

Vernon-Smith entered the study and did so in silence.

Foss followed him. This was the man who, according to Skinner, never whopped. It was plain that he was going to do so now!

The cane rose and fell with a terrific swipe. The Removites caught their breaths. Quelch had a heavy hand with a cane, when he considered it necessary - but Quelch never caned like this! For all his mildness, Mr. Foss seemed able to do so. Vernon-Smith could hardly keep back a yell. Swipe! Swipe! The cane came down, not the regulation six times, but twelve. Vernon-Smith's teeth were clenched hard; his face was white.

'Oh, my hat!' murmured Bob Cherry.

Mr. Foss stopped after the twelfth stroke. The Bounder rose from the chair, his face like chalk.

'I trust that this will be a warning to you, Vernon-Smith,' said Mr. Foss. He put the cane under his arm, and left the Remove passage. There was a dead silence behind him. The Bounder lay against the wall panting. 'Hard luck, old chap!' said Lord Mauleverer, sympathetically. Vernon-Smith looked at him.

'That man is a liar,' he said, thickly. 'He swiped me like this because I found him out. I don't know what he's hiding - but I'll find out and make him sorry for this.'

'For goodness sake, Smithy-' began Harry Wharton. 'The man's a brute - he isn't as mild as he looks, but-'

'Let him wait!' said the Bounder.

'No man likes being called a liar,' observed Johnny Bull. 'You did ask for it, and wouldn't retract. All the same-'

Without replying, Vernon-Smith turned away, walked to his own study and entered and closed the door.

It was not very long since the Bounder's reckless conduct had brought him near to expulsion from Greyfriars. So narrow had been his escape, that it seemed to have taught him a lesson. Now, however, it did not look as if he were disposed to profit by it any more.

Harry Wharton, with a troubled face, made a step towards Study No. 4 - and then stopped.

'Better not,' said the voice of Bob Cherry. 'Leave him alone for a bit.'

'The speech is silvery, but the esteemed silence is of the goldfulness,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Harry Wharton shrugged his shoulders. He felt that his friends were right. Turning, he went into Study No. 1.

NO EXIT FOR BUNTER

'COME in!'

Bunter almost groaned.

He was still hiding in Mr. Quelch's study - now Mr. Foss's, and he dared not move, for Mr. Foss had returned and showed no signs of going out again. Bunter was cramped and, what was much worse, very hungry. Now there was a tap on the door, and someone entered.

'I'm Wingate, sir,' said a voice, 'Captain of the School. I have to report to you that Bunter can't be found anywhere.'

'Dear me, Wingate, how deplorable! And how odd! The boy must be in the school somewhere.'

'Yes, sir. I do not think he can have left the school premises. Gosling, the porter, would have seen him, if he'd passed the gates. Yet, I've just seen "lights out" for the Remove, and he wasn't with the others in the dormitory. He's been searched for everywhere. However, we'll keep on looking. Might try and get out from wherever he's hiding, later. He must be getting hungry.'

It was all the Owl of the Remove could do to suppress a groan at that remark of Wingate's. He was, indeed, getting hungry - hungrier and hungrier every minute.

'A most foolish boy,' observed Mr. Foss. 'Well - no more can be done at the moment, Wingate. Good night!'

'Good night, sir!'

Wingate left the study.

What had become of William George Bunter was a mystery to all Greyfriars - except William George Bunter himself. There was, at that very moment, much speculation as to what had happened to him, and the conversation still eddied from bed to bed in the Remove dormitory after Wingate had left.

'Bunter's been well in the limelight today.' observed Wibley.

'In the limelight? Is that what you call hiding away, and not being found?' asked Peter Todd.

The Removites chuckled. Wibley was always addicted to the terms of the theatre.

'Yes. He first lets a bank raider get away with his bike-'

'There wasn't much "let" about it,' said Harry Wharton. 'The man grabbed it from him, and was away like the wind-'

'Must have been a small chap.' observed Lord Mauleverer, quietly, 'bein' able to ride Bunter's bike.' Peter Todd laughed.

'Do you call Bunter small?'

'Not sideways,' replied his lordship. 'Not tall, though.'

His saddle must have been pretty low. Yet that fellow was able to distance you chaps. No time to alter anythin'. Must have been a small chap!'

'Yes; now you mention it, he was.' said Harry Wharton

'Didn't think of it at the time. Well - small or large, he got away from the wood and vanished somewhere.'

'I am stillfully of the opinion, my esteemed chums,' said the voice of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, 'that he hidefully concealed himself in the crowd in the wood like the needle in the haystackfulness!'

'Possibly, Mr. Inky Sherlock Holmes,' said Bob Cherry, with a laugh. 'And where's Bunter? Standing about somewhere with everyone passing him by because he's too little to be seen - as Mauly suggests?'

'Must be hidin' somewhere no one would think of lookin',' observed Lord Mauleverer. 'Punishment room, perhaps-?'

'He isn't,' said Tom Brown. 'It's kept locked, and only a few of the masters have keys to it - the Head, Prout, Quelch - wherever he is, it isn't there!'

'I wish the fat Owl would show up,' said Harry Wharton. 'Hiding like this will only make it worse for him, and-' Harry broke off with a sigh. Faced with the obstinacy of both Coker and Bunter, and knowing what he knew but could not reveal, the position worried him. He could not see how it would end.

Conversation diminished, and the juniors fell asleep - all except the Bounder, who could not, because of the pain in which Foss's caning had left him, and the anger and bitter desire for revenge which remained in his mind.

Meanwhile the subject of his form-fellows' speculations remained in Foss's study, hidden, cramped and now ravenously hungry, until, at last, the new master switched off the light, and left the room.

Bunter listened until his footsteps in the passage died away. All was silent. He got up and, creeping cautiously to the door, turned the handle. It did not open! It was locked!

'Oh, crikey!' gasped the Owl, 'Oh, lor!' Oh, dear!' Almost he made up his mind to bang on the door - and attract attention - almost but not quite! That would get him supper - but it would get him a lot more!

With a groan he put his hand in his pocket and produced a pocket-knife! He might be able to open the door with that! A few minutes' ineffective fumbling convinced the Owl that he could not! With another groan he turned his attention to the desk which Mr. Foss had locked so punctiliously. Surely such a precaution as that meant that he must be concealing something to eat?

This time the Owl was more successful with the lock.

There was a click, and he was able to pull up the lid of the desk. Not daring to switch on the light, he frantically fumbled in the moonlight coming through the window, for something eatable.

There was nothing! Mr. Foss's desk was like Mother Hubbard's cupboard, as far as anything to eat was concerned. With another frantic, despairing search, he disturbed a small article which fell on the floor. At that moment, he heard footsteps in the passage outside. Bunter put down the lid of the desk and dived for cover.

As he crouched down, he felt the small article he had dropped from the desk. He grabbed it and stuck it in his pocket, hardly daring to breathe.

'We've searched everywhere for the fat little beast,' said the voice of Loder, 'and he won't be in a master's study, you can be pretty sure.'

'Might be in any port in a storm.' It was Wingate who replied. 'Have to have another look in any case. Head's orders. He isn't in this one anyway. Door's locked!' The handle was rattled and Bunter quaked. 'Come on, Loder! We'll keep on a bit before we call it a day!'

There was a growl from Loder, and the footsteps moved along the passage. A foodless fat Owl remained. Deeply did he regret that he had ever sought lustre and prestige by claiming to have swamped Quelch!

IN THE NIGHT

'SMITHY, old man!'

Harry Wharton spoke quietly. Most of the Removites in the dormitory were asleep. There were only two who were not; one was himself, and the other Herbert Vernon-Smith. The Bounder had got out of his bed and was standing by it, partly dressed, when Wharton's voice reached him. He turned his head in the direction from which it came.

'So you're awake, too, Wharton?' he muttered.

'Yes. I stayed awake, Smithy.'

'Why?'

'I fancied you might turn out.'

'Did you think I was going out on the tiles - that I feel like it after what I've had? I haven't been asleep - I couldn't. That little brute, Foss, saw to that! I'm going out all the same - with a purpose. Now keep quiet, and don't wake the rest of the dorm.'

'Hold on a minute, old chap!' Wharton's voice was low. 'You've been through it, I know - that fellow Foss, acted like a brute, although he looks like a tame rabbit - but don't make matters worse for yourself! If you're thinking of some mad raid-'

'A raid - but not a mad one.'

'Have a bit of sense, Smithy. You can't get back on a beak. If anything happens tonight, don't you think Foss will guess who's the cause, after what he did?'

'I'm going to leave him nothing to guess about,' said Vernon-Smith, grimly.

'What are you going to do?'

'Find out why he lied about that train he's supposed to have come by,' said the Bounder, between his teeth. 'The man must have a reason for doing so. Why did he lay into me like a wild beast? To terrorise me into inquiring no further, I suppose? He hasn't!'

'Smithy, I know the chap acted like a beast - but he did hear you say he was lying! He might have gone to the Head and asked him to expel you for that-'

'Temporary beaks don't go to the Head the day they arrive, and ask for anyone's expulsion,' said Vernon-Smith, in a fierce voice, 'and to complain to the Head would have set him wondering about that arrival time. Foss didn't want that - I'll find out why. Now, shut up, and go to sleep.'

'Old man, you must have missed him at Friardale Station. Skinner thinks so-'

'Skinner?' There was scorn in the Bounder's low voice. 'Skinner's too frightened even to begin to think anything else - after what happened to me! I'm not! The man has some secret to keep. He has some reason for insisting that he came by that train - when he didn't! He was up to something which he doesn't want known. I'm going to his study now to see if I can find anything, which will tell me what it was!'

'Smithy, you can't-'

The dormitory door opened noiselessly, and then closed.

Vernon-Smith had gone. Harry Wharton sat up in his bed, as though he would go after him - and then sank back.

If he went after Vernon-Smith to try and dissuade him, there might be - almost certainly would be - a dispute, which might become noisy. If they were, in consequence, found by a master or a prefect, there would be trouble. Vernon-Smith had had enough trouble that day.

THE DISCOVERY OF BUNTER

VERNON-SMITH moved quietly downstairs towards Masters' Passage. The look on his face was set and savage. His feelings towards Mr. Harvard Foss, the new temporary master of the Remove, were deep and bitter.

He had been punished with cruel severity - for what?

For unparalleled insolence to a master, some would have said, while admitting that the punishment had been too severe. That was not the way the Bounder looked at it.

The man had lied about the time and place of his arrival, and had attempted to terrorise him - Vernon-Smith - into endorsing his lies as truth - that was the Bounder's opinion. The man had been up to something which he had reason to hide. What? That was what Vernon-Smith was determined to find out.

Passionately angry as he was, he did not, nevertheless, lose his caution. It was by no means the first time he had left the Remove dormitory after 'lights-out'. True, he was not thinking of breaking bounds - but it was after eleven o'clock and any junior found out of his dormitory at that hour, was 'booked' for an interview with the Head in the morning. Vernon-Smith could not have explained the reason for his escapade to Dr. Locke, as he had to Harry Wharton. So he had to be careful - and he was careful! It was unlikely that anyone would be up at that hour, but it was barely possible that some master might be burning the midnight oil - even that some Sixth-former might be doing so. The other forms had fixed bed-times, but the Sixth were a law unto themselves in that respect. So the Bounder proceeded with the greatest caution - and it was well for him that he did so.

The voice of Gwynne of the Sixth came to him from the end of the Remove passage. Vernon-Smith paused. 'If he'd been going to raid any of the Remove studies for tuck, he'd have done so long ago, Wingate.'

'H'm! I thought he'd be almost certain to come here to raid someone's study for grub.' It was Wingate, replying. 'He must be ravenous by now.' 'Bunter always is from what I've heard. What about calling it off, old man?'

'The Head's pretty keen he should be found,' said Wingate.

'The fat little beast may not be in the school at all.

Might have gone home.'

'No! His father would have reported it, if he had - and he hasn't been seen at any railway station. The Head's made discreet inquiries through old Grimes. He hasn't any cash for a ticket, either, from all accounts. Walker heard him trying to borrow half-a-crown from another fellow, on the strength of an expected postal-order, only this afternoon. He must be somewhere on the premises.'

'Well - we're the only two left in the hunt, old man,' replied Gwynne.

'The others have chucked it, and turned in. Let's go and have a final hunt in the larder. He might have gone straight there. Better cover than in the Remove passage!'

'Oh, all right! We'll wait down there for a bit.' There was a sound of moving footsteps, which then died away.

Vernon-Smith had forgotten about the missing Owl.

He grinned, and then dismissed him from his mind again. He had other things to do, and moved quietly along Masters' Passage, until he came to Quelch's study - now in possession of Harvard Foss. Vernon-Smith turned the handle silently, but the door did not move. It was locked!

The Bounder gritted his teeth. This was an unexpected check. It increased his suspicions that Foss had something to hide. Why had the man locked his study door? Most of the masters never bothered to do so. He frowned, and then his face cleared.

He remembered an occasion when the French master, Monsieur Charpentier, had been locked in his study by a practical joker, unknown, who had taken away the key.

There had been a gathering of the other masters outside the door of the imprisoned French one, and Prout had suggested that they all tried their keys to see if any of them would work in Monsieur Charpentier's lock. Quelch's key had been found to open the French master's door, and therefore his key would open Quelch's. Silently, the Bounder sped along the passage. The French master had not locked his door, and his key was in the lock on the inside.

Vernon-Smith took it, and went back to Quelch's study.

He inserted the key in the keyhole, and opened the door. He stopped at the entrance.

The moonlight poured in from outside. As he gazed, the Bounder saw it reflected from two small round panes of glass.

He took a step forward.

'Oh, lor'!' said a voice. 'Is that you, Smithy? Oh, dear! Ain't I hungry?'

The Bounder found himself looking at the missing Owl of the Remove, blinking with little eyes behind his round spectacles!

REFUGE IN THE PUNISHMENT ROOM

'OH, lor!'' exclaimed Bunter again. 'I-I say, Smithy, I'm hungry - I'm awfully hungry.'

Vernon-Smith stared at him. The appearance of the missing Owl, behind a locked door in Foss's study, was an utter surprise, but an undoubted fact, however it had come about. He thought quickly. Obviously he could not go on with his projected search for clues, under the eyes of Bunter. Moreover, with prefects on the prowl, it was dangerous to stay talking, where he was.

'Quiet!' he hissed, 'there are pre's about! Shut up - and follow me!'

'Oh! Oh, dear!' The fat Owl lumbered towards the door. As he did so, his eyes fell on the open desk lid. 'Oh - I'd better shut that! He-he- may think he bust the lock himself!' Bunter closed the desk with a slight bang! Being Bunter, he could not do anything else. 'Oh, crikey!'

'Quiet!' Vernon-Smith waved him to silence, and listened. There were no signs of alarm from Wingate or Gwynne. 'Do you want to be caught, and taken to the Head?' he added, in a fierce whisper. 'If you don't - follow me - not a sound - and I'll give you some tuck. Not a word, now!'

'I won't say a word, Smithy!'

Smithy's fierce glance froze the fat Owl into silence.

Quietly, the Bounder led the way to his study in the Remove, followed by Bunter, who seemed to realise the value of silence, if he was to get anything to eat!

In Study No. 4 Vernon-Smith closed the door. He did not switch on the light; the moonlight streaming through the window from outside had to suffice for their needs. A Remove study, at that time of night with prefects on the prowl, was not a safe place in which to be, although much safer than a master's study. Every precaution had still to be taken. The Bounder opened his study cupboard and, bringing out a meat-pie and a cake, handed them to Bunter. The fat Removite grabbed them greedily. 'Oh, thanks, Smithy - I'm starving! Absolutely starving! That beast, Foss-'

'Don't speak too loudly! How long have you been in Quelch's study?'

'Ever since I got away from that other beast, old Prout! Making out that I'd swamped Quelchy and taking me to the Head, when I didn't - I mean, of course I did, but-'

'Shut up!' said Vernon-Smith. 'I know you didn't, although you said you did. You went to Quelch's study. How did you get locked in?'

'It was that beast, Foss. I think he's mad,' said the fat Owl. 'Going round locking up places - his case - and the desk he put it in - and then the door and he drew the curtains - Oh, crikey!'

'You saw all this?' The Bounder's suspicions and his interest quickened.

'Where were you that he didn't see you?'

'Behind the desk-'

The Bounder grunted. Quelch's desk was a big, old-fashioned one, capable of hiding even Bunter.

'I was hours and hours there, Smithy. With nothing to eat,' said the Owl, plaintively. 'He's mad. I wasn't scared, of course - but I daren't move! Mad as a hatter. Counting papers-'

'Counting papers?'

'It sounded like that! Just like you count notes when you've had a lot of money from your father, and want to show it off. And I heard him say, "Nearly eight hundred! Not a bad afternoon's work!" I-I say, have you any ginger-pop, Smithy?'

Normally the Bounder would have taken some action after Bunter's remark about counting notes from his father - but, interested in the Owl's following remarks, he let it go.

'He can't have had eight hundred in notes! You say he locked the desk, Bunter? It was open when I came in. Did you-?'

'Yes - but there was nothing there - nothing at all,' said the Owl, almost tearfully. 'Not even a bun-'

If there was nothing to eat in that desk, that was equivalent to nothing at all in Bunter's opinion. Other things didn't interest him.

'You saw no notes, there?'

'No. If he had any they must have been in his case. That was locked, too, the suspicious beast! Anyone would think he was hiding tarts! I say, Smithy, have you any tarts?'

'Yes. There are some in that bag. Help yourself!'

'Oh, thank you, Smithy! You aren't such a beast, as the fellows make out. I've always said so. I-I say, do you think that beast, Foss, will notice that the lock on his desk is undone?'

'Yes. Can't be helped. He can make what he likes of it. I shouldn't think he'll start inquiries if he's got money there. Only too glad it's still there, but-'

The Bounder was perplexed. Temporary masters did not usually carry or keep in their desks large sums of money - certainly not anything like £800, which the remark overheard by the Owl seemed to indicate. Yet - a sudden idea flashed into his mind! Lantham Races? Vernon-Smith knew that there had been racing in Lantham that afternoon. In fact he knew a good deal more about racing than Mr. Quelch would have approved! Could this new master, Foss, have gone to Lantham Races, and 'made a packet' before coming on to Greyfriars? It was a possibility - but only just a possibility, as the Bounder saw it.

He'd want to keep it dark, of course, which is why he stuck to that Friardale Station story, but - doubt entered the Bounder's mind. Anyone winning such a sum would have had to wager a considerable amount on an 'outsider' and be almost incredibly lucky. He could only have stayed for the first two races, considering the time he arrived here, thought the Bounder. I suppose he couldn't wait too long.

'I was hours and hours there, Smithy.' the plaintive voice of the Owl of the Remove interrupted his thoughts. 'He locked me in. I couldn't get out of the window - because I might have been seen - and couldn't get in the front door - and anyway-'

'Be quiet!' The Bounder looked at Bunter. From the Owl's remarks, he thought he had almost discovered Foss's secret - but was not quite sure. In the meantime, Bunter must remain hidden.

If the authorities got hold of him, all that about the Owl hiding in Foss's study - and being released by Vernon-Smith - would come out. Bunter could not keep a secret! The Bounder, too, was determined to expose Mr. Foss's racing interests - if they existed! But if Bunter mentioned having heard him counting bank-notes, the evidence would disappear and be denied!

He rose to his feet.

'Listen, Bunter!' he said, 'I'll hide you - no - don't speak. Take that bag and pack everything you can find to eat in it. There's still some in the cupboard - and I'll pop downstairs, and get Quelch's key to the Punishment Room.'

'The Punishment Room, Smithy?'

The Bounder grinned as he remembered the conversation in the dormitory.

'Yes, it's comfortable enough - in its way.' The Bounder had once inhabited it! 'Bed and blankets, and you can wash, if you want to!' Many of the Removites had remarked that Bunter never did want to! 'You'll be

safe enough.' The seldom-used Punishment Room was in a lofty, remote corner of the old buildings. 'Keep there until the chap who did drench Quelch owns up. I'll see him about it. Now, pack that bag, while I fetch the key!'

Leaving the Owl of the Remove, the Bounder sped quietly downstairs again to Masters' Passage. There was no sign of any prefects who might still be on the prowl, but he remained wary.

He thought over what Bunter had told him. The Owl could not have made it up.

If Foss was a racing man, he was going to be shown up - not on account of his interest in horse-racing, for which the Bounder had no condemnation, but for the savage punishment he had inflicted to keep his secret.

Vernon-Smith opened the door of Quelch's study with Monsieur Charpentier's key, which he had retained, and looked at the desk, as he entered.

He shook his head.

To be in a master's study at night, with a desk of which the lock had been broken, and in which there was money, was a position Vernon-Smith did not like. It would be a much worse position if the lock of the case, inside the desk, were also broken. The money might be there, but it could remain there. There were other ways of investigation.

Vernon-Smith went to the drawer of Mr. Quelch's desk, in which he knew the key to the Punishment Room was kept. He had seen it taken out before, for his own benefit! Taking it now, he went out, locking the study and returning the key to the inside of the French master's, from which he had taken it.

He returned to his own study. Bunter was still in front of the study cupboard, which now looked remarkably empty, beside a bag, which looked very full.

'I-I haven't taken much, Smithy-'

'No - I see you've left the cupboard door,' said Vernon-Smith. 'Come on! I'll take the bag. And not a sound, if you value your freedom - and this tuck!'

BUNTER'S NEW RESIDENCE

'OH, lor'!!'

Bunter hesitated as he gazed at the Punishment Room. 'Punny', as the Greyfriars men termed it, was not what the house-agents call 'a desirable residence'. In the old days, it was reputed to have been even less so, when delinquents had been kept there for days on bread and water. Bunter was not going to be kept on bread and water. The contents of Vernon-Smith's study cupboard would see to that. It was seldom used now, and this was, probably, the first time in its history that it would hold anyone who had gone there voluntarily.

'Oh, crikey!'

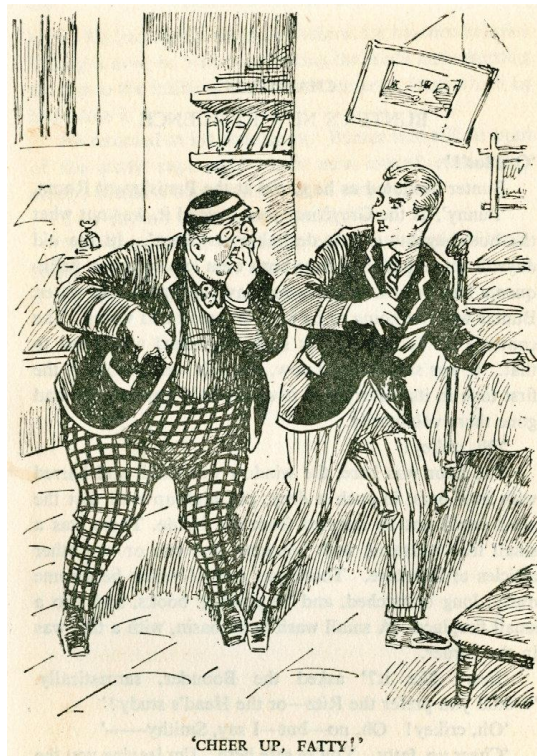
The floor was bare, the window was small and barred with iron bars, in such a deep, old high-up wall that the glass could not be reached from the inside. There was a small iron bedstead, with blankets, and one or two other articles of furniture. There was a shelf which held some dusty, long untouched, and 'improving' books, and also a small fireplace. A small wash-hand basin, with a tap, was in the corner.

'Don't like it?' asked the Bounder, sarcastically. 'Would you prefer the Ritz - or the Head's study?'

'Oh, crikey! Oh, no - but - I say, Smithy-'

'Cheer up, fatty. You're safe here. I'm leaving you the key. Just lock yourself in, and lie doggo. I'll see the chap who did swamp Quelch and try and get him to clear you. There's a candle, but I shouldn't light it. Might attract notice. Plenty of moonlight - and tuck!'

Bunter's face brightened. Never before had he been given the free run of the supplies in the Bounder's cupboard and he had made the most of it! Vernon-Smith had been planning one or two parties, and he had stocked up well. Now he would have to stock up again.



'Don't eat all you've brought up in my bag tonight, Bunter. Pleasant dreams!'

Vernon-Smith nodded to the Owl, and went out of the Punishment Room, closing the door quietly. He was still smarting from the effects of Foss's cane, but he was now feeling happier. He was, he thought, on the track of Foss's secret - and he would see that was a secret no longer. Dr. Locke would certainly be displeased, if he knew that his new temporary master had delayed reporting for duty, because he had spent part of the afternoon on Lantham Racecourse, even if - or, perhaps, particularly if - he had won a large sum of money.

Had he done so? From what Bunter had overheard, it looked uncommonly like it. Vernon-Smith paused, as doubts assailed him. For one moment, he was tempted to return to Mr. Quelch's study, and force the lock of the case inside the desk - but what then?

Supposing he found the money? Could he then go to Dr. Locke or to anyone at all, and say that Mr. Harvard Foss had won £800 at Lantham Races - and that he had discovered that fact by forcing the lock of Mr. Foss's bag on suspicion?

No! He put the temptation from him again. 'Must try and get evidence some other way,' he murmured.

Vernon-Smith continued on his way to the Remove dormitory and entered it quietly. As he did so, a low voice came to him from Wharton's bed.

'Smithy?'

'Oh! So you're still awake?'

'Yes, Smithy, you haven't-?'

'I haven't done anything of what I intended to do. Wharton.' answered the Bounder, quietly. He did not consider it necessary to add that, owing to the unexpected discovery of the missing Bunter, he had done a number of things he had not intended to do! 'So make your mind easy, and go to sleep!'

'I'm glad! Try and forget it, old man.'

'Not an easy thing to do, when you've had what I had from that rat!' said Vernon-Smith. 'I'm not forgetting. I've now got a suspicion of why the fellow lied about arriving at Friardale. Only a suspicion! I'm checking up on it. Thanks for keeping awake on my account, but you need not have bothered.'

The Bounder finished undressing and got into bed.

Harry Wharton looked at him. He was glad that Vernon-Smith had returned without incurring any more trouble. All the beds in the Remove dormitory were now occupied - except that of Bunter. The inexplicable disappearance of the Owl of the Remove still remained a mystery.

SMITHY ON THE TRAIL

VERNON-SMITH looked round him cautiously. What he intended to do needed caution. On one side of the path on which he stood was a thick wood. On the other there was a fence. Behind that fence were the grounds of the Three Fishers, a mile from Greyfriars, and a place strictly out of bounds to all Greyfriars men. Vernon-Smith looked round again, and then, removing a loose board in the fence, slid through the opening. He had been there before!

The Bounder had gone out immediately after school that afternoon, cutting tea, and declining an invitation from Harry Wharton & Co. to join them in cricket-practice on Little Side. In the grounds now of the Three Fishers he went to the dingy side-door of the inn, and pushed it open. He entered the billiard-room. A red-faced and dingy-looking stout man stared as he came in.

'Why, blow me, if it ain't Master Vernon-Smith!' he exclaimed. 'Ain't seen you here for a long time. Come to do business with me again, sir?' The Bounder laughed. He had, indeed, come to do some business with Mr. Joseph Banks, the local bookmaker, with not too good a reputation, though not quite the sort of business that Joe Banks imagined!

'Might, Joe!' he said, non-committally. 'If I can find a real dead cert like some people.'

'There's Lightning running in the Courtfield Stakes next Saturday. 'E should start at 10 to 1 against - but I 'ave 'ad it from a man in the stables-'

The Bounder shook his head.

'Have to put a lot on at 10 to 1 to make anything, Joe,' he said. 'I'd rather back something like that fellow at Lantham yesterday. If anything like that ever comes your way, let me know!'

Vernon-Smith was watching the bookmaker keenly.

Joe Banks looked puzzled.

'Friend of yours make a packet there, sir?'

'Not a friend, but a chap I know. Went away with about eight hundred quid, after backing something in one of the first races. I can't find out the name of his fancy - but you'll know, of course, Joe. Tell me what it was and I'll have something on it the next time it runs. The odds will have shortened, of course.'

The bookmaker shook his head. 'Nothing like that 'appened at Lantham yesterday, sir,' he said. 'First three races there was won by favourites at odds-on prices. Eight 'undred quid!' He whistled, 'Must have bin somewhere else, Master Vernon-Smith. I'd 'ave 'eard of it if it 'ad 'appened at Lantham. These things get round to us in the business. Somebody tryin' to pull your leg. sir?'

'He might have laid it with the tote.'

Joe Banks shook his head. 'No, sir. We'd know if that 'ad 'appened. We 'as to in the business. No one at Lantham yesterday got away with a packet like that, sir.'

Eight 'undred quid! No. sir! Now, if you're interested in Lightning?' Vernon-Smith looked at his watch. 'Crumbs! I must be off! Put a couple of quid on Lightning for me, Joe!' The Bounder had never heard of Lightning before, and thought it most unlikely that he would ever hear of him again, except when he was called upon to pay two pounds to Mr. Joseph Banks because the horse had not acted up to its name!

Nevertheless, he did not wish it to look as if he had merely dropped in to fish for information as to what had happened at Lantham Races yesterday.

Nodding to Joe Banks, he slipped out of the billiard-room, and into the garden. The Bounder had found nothing to confirm his suspicions of Foss. It was in the last degree improbable that, if anyone had made such a successful wager at Lantham, Banks would not have known of it.

The mystery remained, but he was still certain that Foss was concealing some secret. Apart from the lie he had told about the time and place of his arrival, Vernon-Smith had now corroborative evidence - even if it came from Bunter!

Remembering Bunter, he frowned. The fat Owl's evidence might not be of much use, but it would be of still less use if he were found now. He might be expelled, and not in a position to give it.

In any case, what was the present value of his evidence?

That Foss had a large sum of money in his study, for which he could not satisfactorily account? If Bunter made any such statement. Foss would immediately deny it and put the money somewhere else.

This time the Bounder made his way to the other side of the garden bounded by the fence on the tow-path. It was safer to enter the grounds of the Three Fishers one side, and leave it by another. Through the inn grounds was also a short cut to the tow-path and to Greyfriars - though that plea would not aid any breaker of bounds!

Vernon-Smith vaulted over the fence on to the path.

As he landed there came a loud roar and a yell.

"You silly young ass!"

Horace Coker's motor-bike missed Smithy by inches, wobbled wildly and then headed straight for the waters of the Sark!

SMITHY PUTS IT TO COKER!

'OH, crumbs!'

Coker had not expected anyone to jump suddenly in front of him, from the grounds of the Three Fishers, any more than Vernon-Smith had expected to encounter a motor-bicycle on the tow-path.

All cycles and motor vehicles were prohibited the use of that tow-path by a local by-law. Greyfriars cyclists sometimes broke that by-law. Horace Coker had decided to break it that evening, when fetching his machine from the repair-shop, after yesterday's mishap.

Vernon-Smith watched with interest, and a grin on his face. Just at the last moment, when it seemed certain that Horace Coker and his motor-bike would make a terrific splash in the river, the machine sank in deep mud, up to the hubs, before entering the water, and came to halt, snorting loudly. Coker also continued to snort loudly.

'You young idiot! You nearly upset me! Jumping over a fence like that! You've been in the Three Fishers, breaking bounds. I'll give you the thrashing of your life!' Coker puffed and jumped into the mud by the bank, trying to drag his bike out of it. They were now both exceedingly muddy.

'Who said I'd been in the Three Fishers?' asked the Bounder, keeping a wary eye on Coker. 'It's a short cut.

No harm in a chap taking a short cut through the grounds from the common. No reason for you to suggest that I've been doing anything else. You were riding on the tow-path and that's against the law!'

The Bounder was well aware that this was a case of '*suppresso veri, suggesto falsi*', as Mr. Quelch would have described it - but it would do for Coker. In the circumstances, it had to do for Coker!

'If you're trying to teach me the law, you cheeky fag-' Coker made a threatening movement towards Vernon-Smith, and the Bounder backed.

'Pax, Coker! I haven't been drinking in the Three Fishers and I'm sorry about the bike. As a matter of fact you're just the man I wanted to see about a rather important matter. You rather stand out amongst the other seniors!'

Coker paused, pulled his bike a little further out of the mud, and became less warlike. Vernon-Smith winked in the direction of the Sark, and was careful not to let the Fifth-former see that wink. For his own purposes, he wanted a friendly Coker, at the moment, and it was well-known that it was easy to pull Horace Coker's leg, if you did it the right way.

Coker certainly did stand out amongst the other seniors, although Vernon-Smith wisely omitted to say in what way he stood out!

'Jumping out in front of my bike like that, you young ass!'

'Sorry, Coker! Wasn't expecting you - or it. It might have taken a piece out of me, like it did out of Bunter's bike yesterday.'

'You nearly had me in the river-!'

'Yes. Frightfully sorry! The way you avoided it, and kept control was masterly - simply masterly!'

Praise, in the case of Coker, could be laid on with a trowel!

'A man has to keep his wits about him, when there are young fools like you on the road,' said Coker. 'You wanted to see me about something important? Cough it up - and don't keep on jawing!'

'I won't, Coker, but the fact is I'm rather worried about this Bunter business.'

Coker looked suspiciously at Vernon-Smith. 'What's it got to do with you, you young ass?'

'I think things out,' replied the Bounder, mildly. 'I'm afraid the affair may be putting you into danger, and I shouldn't like that. No Greyfriars man would!'

'Putting me into danger? Of all the cheek-'

'You see,' continued the Bounder. 'You stand alone, Coker. You occupy a unique position in the school. No other Greyfriars man is quite like you!' Vernon-Smith had often heard Potter and Greene refer to that circumstance in much less complimentary words. 'It would be a loss if you went-'

'If I went? What do you mean?'

'Well, it's getting about, Coker, that it was you who swamped that water over Quelch, and not that fat ass, Bunter, despite what he said.'

'Getting about?' roared Coker. 'I told those cheeky fags I'd wallop them if they said a word. And they've told you! Upon my word!'

'These things do get out,' said Vernon-Smith. 'It can't be long now before what is being said gets to a master's ears. I don't know how long. That fat chump, Bunter, is hiding somewhere, but they're bound to find him soon. He might have got off before with a walloping from the Head, but now he's run for it, he's bound to be expelled - and if it then comes out that you were the man who drenched Quelchy, it would be a dangerous position for you. The Head would, almost certainly, expel you too!'

'Expel me? I should like to see him expel me-' Coker stopped short. It had dawned upon even Coker that he would *not* like to see the Head expel him - and that he might!

'You'd be a loss to the school, Coker,' continued Vernon-Smith. 'Whereas, if you took the bull by the horns now-'

'What?'

'-and went to the Head and told him that it was all a mistake-'

'And so it was! That ass, Quelch, and that other ass, Wingate, muddled it up between them!'

'I shouldn't put it to the Head that way,' said Vernon-Smith, gravely.

'You could say that it was a mistake and that you meant it for another boy. No need to mention Wingate! And that having heard that someone else was suspected, you felt it your duty to own up. Might offer to pay Quelchy's fees for the hospital. That would please the Head!'

'I-I - of all the cheek - I'll thing it over!' exclaimed Coker. 'In the meantime, not a word! Do you hear?'

'Of course, Coker!'

'And you can tell that fat fag, Bunter, that I'll pay for the repairs to his bike.'

'I will, Coker. You are always generous. The school simply couldn't afford to lose you!'

'I should think not!'

'We shouldn't like to see you in a situation in which even your Aunt Judy couldn't help you!' said Vernon-Smith, watching Coker closely.

Coker's Aunt Judy thought a great deal of her nephew, for some reason no one had ever been able to fathom. It was freely stated that it was only owing to her pressure on the Head that Horace Coker had ever been promoted from the Shell to the Fifth. Coker had remained in the Shell long after he became as much above his form-fellows in physique as he was below them in intelligence. Frank Nugent, who was quite a good artist, had drawn a picture of Coker as a man with a long white beard, still in the Shell.

This had sent the Remove into hysterics and Coker hunting for Nugent with a fives-bat.

However, Coker's Aunt Judy had, shortly afterwards, paid a visit to Dr. Locke. The Head, looking somewhat distraught after she left, had decided

that Coker, useless in the Shell, could really be no more useless in the Fifth.

One way and another Horace Coker owed a great deal to his Aunt Judy, and Vernon-Smith thought this final suggestion might help.

'H'm! I'll think it over, I told you. Now, I'm going back to the school.' Coker tried to start his motor-bike again. Rather miraculously, it responded. 'Climb on the pillion!'

The Bounder backed away. 'I wouldn't presume. Never mind; I'll walk.'

Coker proceeded along the tow-path, on two occasions again missing a plunge into the river by a hairsbreadth. Vernon-Smith watched him out of sight, and then set out on his own return journey to Greyfriars.

If Coker took his advice, that would enable the Owl of the Remove to be put in circulation again, as it were, with the information he had gathered when a prisoner in Foss's study.

On the other hand, the Bounder did not wish Bunter to be at large, prematurely. He realised that the fat Owl could not be kept, indefinitely, hidden in 'Punny', but he wanted him out of Foss's reach, until he knew rather more of what the temporary master had to keep secret.

That he was most anxious to keep something secret Vernon-Smith was certain, and he did not wish it to be hidden more effectively, as it would be if Bunter tattled on release. The Owl's reappearance would certainly lead to an interview with Foss, who was now his form-master, *de facto* as well as *de jure*.

It was a situation which required handling very carefully, and the Bounder was thinking deeply about it, as he walked back on his way to Greyfriars.

INFORMATION WANTED!

'WHARTON?'

'Yes, Wingate?'

The Famous Five had just come back from Little Side, and cricket practice, when the voice of the Captain of the School was heard as they came into the 'quad'.

'Head wants you. And Hurree Singh, Nugent Cherry and Bull.'

'Oh, crumbs! What's up?' exclaimed Bob Cherry. The summoning of juniors to the Headmaster's study was a formidable event. It might mean anything! Wingate 'grinned as he saw the expressions on their faces.

'You aren't being hauled over the coals, as far as I've heard. Inspector Grimes is in with the Head. He wants statements from you about that bank robbery business yesterday.'

'Oh!' The juniors felt relieved. 'Witnesses' statements,' grunted Johnny Bull. 'Well, we did chase after the fellow as we've already told old Grimey.'

'Cut along and tell him some more, ' said Wingate. 'And Bunter is wanted too. Where is he?'

'Echo answers where,' observed Bob Cherry.

'The echofulness is of the last word and not the firstfully, my esteemed chum,' added Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

Wingate grinned. 'Quite right - but if it would answer anything in Bunter's voice. I'd be better pleased. Now cut, and don't keep the Head waiting!'

The Removites obeyed. It was, indeed, not wise for juniors to keep the Head waiting. They hurried along, and Wharton tapped at the door of the Head's study. In answer to Dr. Locke's 'Come in!' he entered.

'Wingate has told us to report to you, sir.'

'Yes, Wharton, Hurree Singh, Cherry, Bull and Nugent are with you, I see. Where is Bunter? He is also wanted.'

'I don't know, sir, Wingate is looking for him.'

The Head frowned and turned to Inspector Grimes, who was sitting in an armchair the other side of his desk.

'That is the foolish boy, who has run away, and is in hiding, Inspector. He is still somewhere in the school - one of his handkerchiefs was picked up in the Remove passage last night. All the boys' handkerchiefs have to be marked with their initials. He cannot be far away.'

'I hope that he will be produced, sir,' answered Inspector Grimes, stolidly. 'It is not only as a witness he is required. There are finger-prints on his bicycle, which we still have in our possession, and also on the first bicycle the man stole, which we have found to belong to Master Courtenay of Highcliffe School. We have identified Master Courtenay's finger-prints, and it is necessary also to identify Master Bunter's. The remaining finger-prints on the metal parts of both bicycles, will be of the utmost assistance in identifying the thief.'

'Quite, Inspector,' said Dr. Locke. 'Every effort is being made to find the boy. He is hiding because he fears expulsion. He poured a bucket of water over a form-master.'

'I trust, sir, that he will not be expelled before I am able to interview him. It would be of assistance to the police if he could remain in this district.'

Dr. Locke pursed his lips. Bunter, in his view, deserved expulsion, not only for pouring water over Mr. Quelch, but for breaking away from Mr. Prout and deliberately absenting himself, as he had done. However, if he were found, as he needs must be, it would scarcely be possible to have a

deferred expulsion, to be put into force as soon as he had answered the inquiries of the police.

'H'm, Mr. Grimes,' said Dr. Locke. 'In the circumstances, I shall not expel him, but inflict some lesser punishment for his behaviour. I shall advise you as soon as it is possible for you to see him. In the meantime, here are these other boys.' He turned towards the Famous Five. 'Inspector Grimes would like to ask you a few more questions. You were foremost in the pursuit of that bank raider. There may be some further details you can give, which will be useful.'

The inspector turned to the boys.

'Give me his description again, please. You had a closer view of him than any others.'

'A little man of slight build,' said Harry Wharton.

'He rode away on Bunter's bike, which seemed to fit him, so he wasn't tall,' added Johnny Bull.

'He had a pasty sort of complexion, with a bushy moustache and eyebrows - and a large red nose,' said Nugent.

'He was holding it, when we first saw him, after the crash with the two bikes,' observed Bob Cherry. 'I suppose he had bumped it!'

The inspector nodded. 'Yes. Now, when you pursued him over Courtfield Common, he eluded you and everyone else in the wood. He did not cross the Sark - that we have ascertained. No boats were missing from their moorings, as would have been the case, of course, if he had used one. Yet he threw away the bicycle, which might have enabled him to escape elsewhere. The possibility is that, having removed a disguise, he mingled with the crowd, which swarmed in soon afterwards.'

There was a chorus of agreement. Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had suggested as much from the beginning.

'You boys will know most of the local people by sight,' continued Mr. Grimes. 'Did you see anyone unknown to you - any stranger - in the crowd?'

'No, we knew them all - except Mr. Foss,' answered Harry Wharton.

'Mr. Foss?'

'A new, temporary master I have engaged in Mr. Quelch's place,' put in Dr. Locke. 'You may rule him out, Inspector. Perhaps, you would care to see him later, as he was also a spectator?'

'Perhaps,' agreed Mr. Grimes, 'though, of course, being a newcomer himself, he would not be able to differentiate between local people and strangers.'

'That is so, Inspector. Is there anything more you wish to ask these boys?'

'Not now, sir,' replied Inspector Grimes. He rose to his feet. 'If anything more should occur to them, which they think might interest me, on this matter, perhaps they will call upon me? And I should, of course, like to see the boy, Bunter, at the earliest possible moment.'

'So should I,' said Dr. Locke, grimly. 'You may rely upon it, Inspector, that he will be produced for your interrogation. He cannot be far away, but, as you know, this is a large and old building, with many rambling passages and rooms, some unused and empty. By moving from one place to another, a determined person could elude pursuit - at least for a time!' The Head sighed. 'I will do my best for you, Inspector. You boys may now go.'

The Famous Five left the Head's study and grinned at each other, and went into the quad.

'Not such a bad visit to the Head's study, after all,' commented Harry Wharton.

'We're important witnesses,' observed Bob Cherry. 'And mustn't be intimidated,' added Nugent. 'Even Bunter!'

'That's so. Grimes has got that fat ass off expulsion anyway,' said Harry Wharton. 'That's something. Fortunate for us, too - and for Coker - as we all know he isn't guilty.'

'There's Coker - and he looks as if he could do with some good fortune,' said Nugent with a chuckle. 'Looks as if he's had trouble with that blessed bike of his - again.'

'The againfulness of the trouble with the ridiculous bike is like a constant dripping which wears away stonefully,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

The juniors grinned. A weary Coker was pushing a bicycle, which also looked as if it were weary. Half-way home it had ceased its previous good behaviour, and refused to move. No doubt some of the water from the Sark had seeped through into a vital part.

Presently a sound of clanking came from the bicycle shed, where Horace Coker was giving - or trying to give - first-aid to his machine.

'Here's Smithy,' said Harry Wharton.

Vernon-Smith sauntered through the gates. It was a still evening with the quiet only broken by clanks from the bicycle shed.

'What's that?' asked the Bounder.

'Coker and his bike,' Bob Cherry grinned. 'He came in just now pushing it.'

'The wretched thing must have broken down. Came in just now, did he?' observed Vernon-Smith. 'That means he hasn't been to the Head's study yet. No good my seeing him any more. He'll probably blame that bike's breakdown on me.'

'Why?' demanded Johnny Bull.

'Because he nearly ran me down on the tow-path and ran into the Sark instead.'

'But why should he be going to the Head's study?' asked Nugent.

'I had a word with him,' said the Bounder. 'Made him see the risk he was running, if Bunter was expelled for drenching Quelch, and the thing came out afterwards - as it probably will. Whereas, if he owns up now - tells the Head he never meant it for Quelch, but meant it for another boy - not mentioning Wingate - he may get off with a jaw.'

'The jawfulness will be terrific, but the esteemed Bunter will not be expelledfully sent from Greyfriars,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'He is wanted by the police!'

'What?'

'We've been to the Head's study to be interviewed by Grimes,' explained Wharton. 'He is checking up to see if we could give him any more details about that bank raider. He also asked us if we saw any strangers hanging about the common afterwards. We didn't - except, of course, Foss, who explained himself. The police think he may have disguised himself, and mixed with the crowd.'

'I have thoughtfully thought so from the beginning,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'And Grimey particularly wants Bunter,' added Bob Cherry, with a chuckle.

'There are different sorts of fingerprints on the two bikes that man stole - the first bike was Courtenay's of Highcliffe, and they've eliminated his fingerprints. Now they want to do the same with Bunter's.'

'And Bunter's eliminated himself, finger-prints and all,' said Frank Nugent.

'And Bunter isn't to be expelled,' added Harry Wharton. 'I suppose the Head realised that you can't call upon a fellow to assist the police, and then expel him, I suppose he'll get off with a flogging - and the chump doesn't even deserve that.'

'Not for the original crime,' said Johnny Bull. 'but breaking away from Prout and hiding somewhere like this - cutting "call-over" and classes - that adds up to something. He's asked for what he'll get!'

'When they find him,' observed Nugent.

'They know the fat ass is in the school somewhere,' said Harry Wharton, 'because he dropped a handkerchief in the Remove passage last night - when I expect he was after someone's tuck. You might have run into him on your own prowl, Smithy.'

'I might have done, but I had other things to do,' replied Vernon-Smith.

'I didn't go out to look for Bunter. That's the prefect's job - and I wish them joy of it!' The Bounder smiled. Without departing from the truth, he had, deliberately, given the impression to the other Removites that he knew no more of Bunter's present whereabouts than they did!

PREFECTS ON THE PROWL

'THE situation is an absurd one,' said Dr. Locke.

Wingate moved restlessly. He was well aware that the situation was an absurd one.

'It is now Friday evening,' continued the Headmaster. 'The boy has been hiding somewhere since Wednesday when he escaped from Mr. Prout. He is obviously on the premises. The discovery by the house-dame of a handkerchief of his, in the Remove passage, proves that he came out of his hiding-place, doubtless in search of provender. Yet between you, you have not been able to discover his whereabouts and apprehend him as I desired.'

Wingate looked at North, Carne looked at Loder, and Faulkner looked at Gwynne and Sykes - in fact they all looked at each other! It was a full muster of prefects in the Head's study.

'It beats me where he can be, sir,' said Wingate. 'We've searched every possible place - the dormitories, the studies, the attics, the cellars. Not the Punishment Room, of course, because that's always kept locked, and there are one or two of the masters' studies also locked. Mr. Foss's and-'

The Head raised his hand.

'Quite, Wingate! The boy, Bunter, would be exceedingly unlikely to take refuge in a master's study - and if he had done so, would certainly have been found. And he could not, as you point out, have got into the Punishment Room. Yet you have not discovered him. I am surprised.'

'He must be dodging from one place to another, sir,' observed Gwynne.

'Indubitably, Gwynne!' said the Headmaster, coldly. 'Now it is essential that Bunter should be produced. The police wish to take his fingerprints. You are aware that it was his bicycle which was stolen by the man who robbed the Courtfield and County Bank on Wednesday. Bunter's fingerprints must be eliminated from others on that bicycle, as a first step towards identifying those of the thief.'

Dr. Locke paused.

'We've been up the last two nights to see if we could catch him raiding for food, sir,' said Wingate. 'We'll do so again tonight.'

'No Wingate, I do not wish you to have a succession of late nights. You may remain out of class tomorrow morning, all of you, and conduct a systematic search for Bunter. Inspector Grimes is calling upon me again at noon. He wishes to see the boy then. See that he is here at that time. You may go.'

The prefects filed out of the Head's study. All that Dr. Locke had said was, undoubtedly, true. The situation was an absurd one. Bunter must be produced.

'Nice job for our Saturday morning,' grunted Loder. 'When I get hold of the fat little beast-'

'You'll take him straight to the Head, Loder,' said Wingate, calmly, 'and that's all!'

Carne laughed. 'That's the chap who's the cause of it,' he said. He nodded his head in the direction of Prout, who was standing by the steps, looking out over the 'quad'. 'He got hold of Bunter, and then lost him-'
'Sure, and he's lost Coker, too, now,' said Gwynne. 'He didn't answer at "call-over".'

Wingate laughed. 'Coker went out with that motor-bike of his. It needed repairs, and he had to push it to the shop in Courtfield for them. Prout told him he could go, but he must be back for "call-over"!'

'If they weren't done, and he had to walk back without his bike, he should still have been in in time,' observed Sykes.

'More likely that he started off on it, and it broke down again,' said North.

The prefects laughed and moved off. They knew Coker's bike! Vernon-Smith, who had been standing nearby, grinned, and then became serious. Coker had, apparently, not yet 'come clean' about Bunter. When his motor-bike needed his attention, it claimed all of it, and got it! Lesser claims - such as an interview with the Head, which might obviate expulsion - could be, and seemed to have been, forgotten.

That was like Coker - but if they did discover Bunter, before Coker owned up, it made things more difficult. Bunter was a pawn in the Bounder's game against Foss, but he did not quite know how he was to 'play' him. It was a fine summer evening. Some of the masters were strolling in the 'quad'. There was Prout, with a frown, caused, doubtless, by Coker. There was little Mr. Harvard Foss. The Bounder scowled as he looked at him. Vernon-Smith wondered what he had made of the desk in his study, of which Bunter had broken the lock. Must have noticed it, he mused. But he hasn't said a thing about it. Daren't he? Vernon-Smith had to admit to himself, however, that it was more likely that Foss thought he had done it himself without noticing. The case inside, containing bank-notes - if it did contain bank-notes - and the study door were alike still locked. Why suppose anything else?

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders and turned to go in. There was nothing he could do at the moment. Later on, he proposed to break dormitory bounds, and see Bunter. The Owl might have remembered something more of Foss's actions, when he thought he was unobserved - something which would give a clue to that secret - a shady secret - which Vernon-Smith was sure he was hiding. And he would take Bunter some more food - though he could hardly have got through his present supplies!

The Bounder came into the Remove passage. Skinner was there with Snoop and Stott. Skinner was holding a newspaper. Vernon-Smith recognised it. It was Prout's copy of the weekly *Courtfield and County Gazette*. Prout was out, looking for Coker, and, in the meantime, Skinner had taken that paper from the letter-rack, doubtless to look for racing news. Vernon-Smith grinned, and then stopped as Skinner's voice came to him.

'Nearly eight hundred pounds? Not bad for an afternoon's work.'

They were almost the words which Bunter had told him he had heard Foss utter. Struck by the coincidence, the Bounder exclaimed. Skinner looked up.

'Hallo, Smithy! Want something?'

'What was that you were saying about nearly eight hundred pounds for an afternoon's work?'

Skinner laughed.

'That's the amount that fellow got away with from the bank in Courtfield last Wednesday.'

THE BOUNDER SEES INSPECTOR GRIMES

'CAN I see Inspector Grimes, please?'

The constable at the desk looked doubtfully at Vernon-Smith.

'I am afraid the inspector is busy at the moment. If you will let me know what I can do for you-'

'I think I have some information about that bank robbery which took place on Wednesday,' interrupted Vernon-Smith. 'Inspector Grimes left word at my school that he wanted to see anyone who might be able to help. I can. He's the man I should see.'

'If you will give me your name and address, and an account of what you think you know-'

'No!' interrupted the Bounder, again. 'I know that's the official, routine way, but I'm not wasting time! If the inspector can't see me now, I'll get on to Scotland Yard. If they're obstructive I'll tell my Headmaster what I know. I don't suppose he'll believe it. By the time anyone does, the fellow I have in mind will be gone! Well - good-bye!' Vernon-Smith turned as if to go, but the constable stayed him.

'Here! You can't go like that, after what you've said!'

'Well - stop me then!'

'You are obstructing the police in the execution of their duties, sir.' The Bounder laughed.

'On the contrary, they're obstructing me in the execution of mine!' Vernon-Smith returned to the chair at the side of the desk. 'I'll sit down here, and wait until you tell Inspector Grimes that I want to see him. If you don't, just arrest me for obstruction or vagrancy or anything that occurs to you!'

The constable gave Vernon-Smith a not-very-pleasant look. He replied with a grin. He was as ruthless as his father, the millionaire, when it came to dealing with anything in the way of an obstructive bureaucracy. He had broken bounds after 'prep' to see the inspector and he was determined to see him.

'I'll find out if Inspector Grimes will see you. Wait here!' The man left the desk, and Vernon-Smith waited. He had no intention of doing anything else.

'The inspector will see you.'

The Bounder was ushered into a smaller room at the side. Mr. Grimes looked up from his desk and motioned to Vernon-Smith to sit down.

'Well. Master Vernon-Smith. I understand that you have some information for me? Please tell me what it is.'

'Yes, Mr. Grimes. Would you be interested to hear of a man who, on the evening after the bank raid last Wednesday, was heard counting and rustling papers as a man might count notes, and saying. "Nearly eight hundred. Not a bad afternoon's work"?''

The inspector sat up, and looked keenly at the Bounder. 'You heard someone say that?'

'Personally, no! But I have talked with the fellow who did.'

'A reliable witness?'

The Bounder thought of the fat Owl, and grinned. He shook his head.

'No! Most unreliable! - but he isn't lying in this. He hasn't the sense!'

'Who is this unreliable witness?'

'Bunter of my form at Greyfriars,' answered the Bounder.

Inspector Grimes stared hard. 'I understand that this boy, Bunter, has been missing since Wednesday afternoon,' he said. 'He had committed an offence, and was heard boasting of it, and ran away to avoid punishment. Dr. Locke asked me, subsequently, to make some inquiries as to whether

this boy had taken a train home. He does not seem to have done so, and there is no word from his father of any unexpected arrival. His bicycle was one of those stolen by the bank raider. We wish to see Master Bunter. I am to be advised if he is found. I have not, so far, been so advised. Yet, you, Master Vernon-Smith, seem to have communicated with him since he disappeared.'

'I have communicated with him,' said Vernon-Smith, coolly. 'He hid first of all in a master's study, where he heard what I have just told you. I saw him later. He subsequently took refuge elsewhere.'

'In what master's study?' asked the inspector.

'Mr. Quelch's, my form-master's.'

'I understood that Mr. Quelch was away ill?'

'He is. It is now occupied by his temporary replacement, Mr. Harvard Foss.'

'Who was the man this boy, Bunter, heard speaking about the £800?'

'Mr. Foss - I must tell you,' added the Bounder, catching sight of the inspector's expression, 'first of all, that I am deeply prejudiced against this man.'

'You are frank at any rate, Master Vernon-Smith,' said Mr. Grimes. 'You will realise that what you have told me, so far, has little, if any evidential, value. If there is no more-'

'There is more.'

'You had better tell me all the details of it, and let me judge,' observed the inspector. There was a certain amount of scepticism in his tone, but with no clue at all to the bank raider's identity, he was prepared to listen.

'Mr. Foss was first seen by some friends of mine - Greyfriars men, whom you have already interviewed - Wharton, Cherry and others,' continued the Bounder. 'They did not know him at first. He was the only stranger who attracted their attention in the crowd which gathered in the wood running down to the Sark from the common.'

'Many people followed the man from Courtfield when he fled,' said Inspector Grimes. 'Your friends could not have been expected to know them all by sight. Mr. Foss might have been the only man they met and did not know. There must, undoubtedly, have been others.'

'Quite so, Mr. Grimes,' agreed the Bounder, 'but he told them that he had arrived by the 3.30 p.m. at Friardale.

That he certainly did not. I was at the station when that train came in. I knew all the people who got out at Friardale. He was not amongst them. Nor did he arrive by the following train. I waited there for that. Yet, when a doubt was cast on his statement that he came to Friardale by the 3.30, he got very angry, and severely punished the fellow who had cast that doubt.'

'Yourself, Master Vernon-Smith?' asked Inspector Grimes, with a quizzical glance.

'Myself, Mr. Grimes. I have already told you that I am prejudiced - but I am now telling facts. He accounted for his being in the wood, by saying that he had heard of the bank raid, and had joined the crowd through interest. An odd thing to happen to a man walking from Friardale Station to Greyfriars. Why should he go on to Courtfield Common? He'd have to pass Greyfriars to get there!'

'Yes, Quite odd!' agreed Mr. Grimes, 'but odd things do happen.'

'Yes, Mr. Grimes. Bunter's bike was found in a thicket in that wood. Well hidden, and discovered quite by accident. The bank raider would have no more use for it, if his destination was quite close.'

The inspector nodded.

'No doubt, if you asked Mr. Foss why he was there, he would say he had business in Courtfield. Any business. He might have had to call on a bank

- his own or someone else's. Of course, a man might have a profitable side-line, besides being a temporary master!'

The inspector smiled, but said nothing.

'He liked being a temporary master. I have heard that he was offered a permanent post at St. Richard's in Richfield, Somerset, when he was there last Christmas term - but refused it. Perhaps,' added the Bounder, 'he couldn't run his profitable side-line with a permanent schoolmastering job.'

'You make out a very plausible case for investigation,' said Inspector Grimes.

'Yes, Inspector. Might I suggest that it would be interesting to find out if there was a similar bank robbery in Richfield last Christmas term? And if Mr. Harvard Foss, the temporary master, arrived about the time of this robbery?'

Inspector Grimes shot a very quizzical glance at the Bounder, and touched a bell. A police sergeant appeared. 'Bank robberies, Simpson. Was there one at Richfield in Somerset? Look up the records.'

Vernon-Smith smiled. This looked as if the inspector thought his suspicions worth consideration. He looked up eagerly as the sergeant reappeared.

'Yes, sir. Richfield & Somerset County Bank held up by a gun-man last October. About £500 taken. Man came up and went away on a bicycle.'

'An ordinary bicycle?' The inspector sat up. 'Yes, sir.'

The Bounder grinned.

'Get me Richfield Police Station, sergeant, and say that I should like to speak to the officer in charge.'

'Yes, sir!' The sergeant vanished. Vernon-Smith smiled at Mr. Grimes, who smiled back, without speaking. Presently, the telephone rang. The inspector took up the receiver.

'Is that Richfield Police Station? This is Inspector Grimes of Courtfield, Kent. We had a bank robbery the other day, rather similar to one in your district last autumn on the Richfield and Somerset County Bank. There was a Mr. Harvard Foss, a temporary master at St. Richard's, who was, I have been told, a witness, and we think he might help us in our inquiries here.'

The Bounder grinned again. He thought he knew exactly how much Mr. Harvard Foss would assist the police in their inquiries!

'Thank you; you'll ring back!'

Mr. Grimes replaced the receiver and turned to look at the Bounder.

'May I wait until he does ring back, Mr. Grimes?'

'Why, certainly, Master Vernon-Smith, "without prejudice." as the lawyers say. You realise, of course, that although the facts you have stated call for inquiry, there is very little evidence.'

'I fancy you would find some in Mr. Foss's desk. Mr. Grimes.'

'Still?'

'Why not? What safer place could he have, as he thinks? I imagine he could not send his profits to await his arrival at some lodging house in London.'

The telephone bell rang again, and the Bounder smiled as he saw the alacrity with which the receiver was removed.

'Yes? Inspector Hilgate from Richfield Police Station? - Mr. Foss did not witness the occurrence? He arrived the same day, just after it happened? He told you, some days later, that he had seen a man with a very prominent nose, riding furiously down the street on a bicycle, as he was coming from the station? He described the man? That was the man who robbed the bank- Yes, that sounds like the man we're after. The bicycle belonged to one of the St. Richard's boys, and was afterwards found

abandoned- Yes, thank you. I will get in touch with Mr. Foss. His evidence may be valuable.'

Inspector Grimes put down the receiver and looked at the Bounder.

'You will have heard enough of that conversation, Master Vernon-Smith, to understand that I must investigate this matter. In the meantime, please say nothing to anyone of what you have told me.'

'Not a word,' said Vernon-Smith, rising. 'It's now in your hands. And if I may say so - good hunting! And now if someone would do me the favour of finding a discreet taxi, I should be obliged. I left school unofficially, to give you this information at once, and I wish to return, equally unofficially, before dorm, without asking any indulgence from Mr. Foss.'

Mr. Grimes grinned. 'I see. I think we can do better than that for you.' He went to the door. 'Sergeant, tell the duty driver to take Master Vernon-Smith to Greyfriars - or as near to it as he may direct. Good night, sir - and thank you for bringing this matter to my notice.'

Vernon-Smith shook hands, and was soon in a police car, speeding back to the school. He dismissed the driver, and made his way over the wall by a convenient tree-trunk, and crossed the 'quad'. As he entered the house, he looked at his watch. It wanted ten minutes to 'dorm'.

He stopped short, suddenly.

'Bunter! I meant to take him something. Still, he can't possibly have got through all he had on Wednesday night. I'll see him tomorrow.'

There was certainly not time, before he had to go with the others to the dormitory, to get and take any supplies to Bunter. He rapidly went over what Bunter had collected on Wednesday night. The Bounder had stocked up for several prospective parties, and after the Owl had finished with it, no Mother Hubbard's could have competed with Vernon-Smith's cupboard for bareness.

'Enough to last him a week.' The Bounder passed along with the other Removites to the dormitory, seeing, as he went, that meek little gentleman, Mr. Harvard Foss, looking at his charges. He was smiling, benevolently. Vernon-Smith wondered how much of the meekness and the smile would remain, did he know of his interview with Inspector Grimes that night!

PROUT ON THE WATCH!

PROUT pursed his lips. When that preposterous, that foolish and utterly absurd boy, Coker, returned, he would, indeed, have something to say to him! It was past nine o'clock now, and the summer evening light was fading.

He had given Coker permission to absent himself, until 'call-over', for the purpose of taking his motor-bicycle to the repair-shop in Courtfield, an establishment which was well acquainted with that machine. Coker had been told that he must be back in time for 'call-over'. Neither Coker nor his motor-bike had been back in time for 'call-over'! And it was now quite late.

Prout had a conscience in these matters. Coker would return sometime, and his form-master felt that it was his duty to wait until he did.

Obviously, Coker had met with no accident or a call would have come through from the police - or a hospital! Equally obviously, something had happened to his motor-bicycle. Something was always happening to that motor-bicycle.

Despite the occasion which called for it, it was really quite pleasant, Prout considered, to be in the 'quad' away from other people - especially people like Hacker! Hacker had smiled when Coker did not answer his name at 'call-over'. Hacker was taking 'call-over' that night. And still more annoyingly, he had gone over to Prout afterwards, and murmured '*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes.*'

The insolence - the unparalleled impertinence! thought Prout, his choler rising again at the memory. Bunter had, certainly, slipped from his grasp, and disappeared - and, well, as Coker's form-master, he was responsible for Coker! But to insinuate that he, Prout, needed guarding too-!

Prout wandered farther into the 'quad' thinking of the iniquities of Hacker. He sat down on a seat in the warm air of the summer night. He was facing the school buildings. There were still lights to be seen from the studies in the Masters' Passage and those of the Sixth form, but the others, such as those in the Fifth-form studies, were out as they should be.

That absurd boy, Coker. Prout almost resolved that he would insist on Coker giving up possession of that unreliable motor-bicycle - undependable, preposterous machine! Then he thought again. Such a prohibition might lead to a visit from Coker's Aunt Judy on behalf of her beloved nephew, Horace, and Prout, certainly, did not desire any such visit. It might not be true, as scandalous rumour had it, that it was only by threatening to smite the Head with her umbrella that she had induced him to promote Horace Coker to the Fifth - but she was a formidable lady, on behalf of causes which came dear to her heart, and for some reason no one could ever understand, Horace Coker was one of them!

Prout decided that he would make his offence plain to Coker himself - when he appeared! In the meantime, he would rest in the warm evening air! Prout dozed for a few minutes - at least, he told himself, when he came to consciousness with a start, that it had been only for a few minutes! Nevertheless, it was now quite dark. He stared across the 'quad' to the school buildings, blinking his eyes.

'Good gracious! That absurd boy, Coker! I may have missed his entry! I must ask Gosling if he has appeared. Good gracious!'

Full consciousness returned to Paul Pontifex Prout with a jerk. Staring across the quadrangle he saw a bright light shining from where no bright light should be. It was in the Fifth-form passage.

'Upon my word! That is from the study occupied by that boy - that Coker! At this hour!' Prout looked at his watch - and gave a start! It was later; much later than he had thought. Those few minutes he had dozed must have been rather more than a few minutes!

'A light there at this hour! Unparalleled!'

At a lumbering trot, Prout began to proceed across the 'quad'. Quite soon, that lumbering trot slowed down to a brisk walk, and the brisk walk, in turn, to a rather less brisk walk, but he kept on, full of wrath and determination! For Coker to return at this hour, and then, instead of going straight to his dormitory, to have the unparalleled audacity to go to his study and turn on the light - he should indeed account for it!

BUNTER'S RAID

'OH, crumbs!'

On this occasion, Bunter's exclamation was not-like most of those he made - quite meaningless. There were actual crumbs on the dusty floor of the Punishment Room; all that remained, in the edible line, within that abode.

Vernon-Smith, when he had given the Owl permission to help himself to all he needed from Study No. 4's cupboard, thought he had taken enough to last him for a week! The Bounder liked to have a well-stocked larder, and his had, undoubtedly, been one before Bunter came. When the Owl left, it was far from well-stocked; it was not stocked at all!

Generally speaking, even Bunter's appetite could not have coped with all those eatables: those pies, and tarts and sweets and tinned stuffs, within a couple of days. However, the times, and Bunter's appetite, were not normal.

After a long and unwelcome fast in the Remove-master's study, he had come within sight and touch of unlimited - or almost unlimited - supplies, and had made the most of them and kept on making it. Those almost unlimited supplies became limited, and then vanished. Later on Friday evening, the Owl of the Remove was looking dolefully at the crumbs, which was all that now remained.

'Oh, crumbs! Oh, crikey!'

Something - or someone's supply of provender - had to be rifled!

All that was left was a tin-opener, those crumbs and a box of matches, which Bunter had taken by mistake, with the other packages from the Bounder's study. Even Bunter could not eat matches and a tin-opener, though he might have managed the crumbs!

It was quite late; the long summer evening was drawing to a close, and it was getting darker. The fat Owl wondered how soon it would be safe for him to venture out in search of supplies. Someone must contribute!

Bunter thought over a list of studies which might yield results, Smithy's? He was rather dependent on Vernon-Smith at the moment, and it might annoy the Bounder if he found that Bunter had helped himself again, without being asked. Safer not to try! Mauly's? Lord Mauleverer's study was always well supplied, though not so ostentatiously as Vernon-Smith's. 'Coker's! He, he, he!'

Coker's study cupboard was bound to be well stocked.

Coker's Aunt Judy, who, for some extraordinary reason, had made Coker her favourite nephew, always saw to that.

Bunter decided to raid Coker's study. The Fifth-form studies were nearer, too, than the Remove ones, and therefore safer for a man who was wanted - but did not wish to appear - in the Head's study!

'He, he, he!'

Bunter cackled and then, cautiously, opened the door of the Punishment Room, carrying with him the bag which had contained the Bounder's supplies. He hoped that it would soon be containing Coker's.

All Greyfriars boys - except Bunter, himself, and the privileged Sixth - would now be in their dormitories. The Owl passed into the Fifth-form passage, without incident, and went along to the study, which Coker shared with Potter and Greene. Fumbling at the door, he found the key in the lock outside. It had not even been turned.

'He, he, he!'

Visions of unlimited tuck were now in his mind's eye. Bunter entered the study and looked round. It was now quite dark. He went to Coker's

cupboard and opened it. It appeared to be well stocked with supplies. but the interior of the cupboard was even darker.

'Oh, lor'!!'

The Owl of the Remove thought rapidly - an unusual exercise for him! He reached out his fat hands and grabbed this and that. A cake, which Coker had intended to share with Potter and Greene tomorrow, went into his bag. There was a paper-bag - which seemed to contain tarts - a bag of biscuits, some meat pies, a soft packet which gave to the touch - Bunter took them all. It was really too dark to see if there was anything else worth taking. Dare he switch on the light?

Bunter decided to do so. There ought not to be anyone outside the house at that hour to interfere with a fellow. He switched on the light. With its aid, he collected another cake and a cheese. Coker's Aunt Judy had been more than usually generous. Then, as the Owl was still looking for more, he heard the exclamation of a voice from the 'quad' below. It came clearly through the open window!

'Upon my word! Preposterous!'

It was that of Prout!

'Oh, lor'!!'

Bunter slid out of Coker's into Hilton's study, hardly daring to breathe. He heard Prout's voice again.

'Coker! Upon my word, Coker, this is unparalleled! I saw your light from the quadrangle. Where are you, Coker? Answer me, immediately!'

Prout had entered Coker's study to find no Coker, as he had expected. He had seen the light from the 'quad' at an hour when no light should have been there. There was no Coker to find - but Bunter might be found, if he remained where he was!

Bunter crept out of Hilton's study, and his eyes fell on the key, still in the lock of Coker's. He tiptoed over and turned it!

Click!

'Coker!' There was the sound of someone trying to open a door which wouldn't open. 'Open this door immediately! You have had the audacity, the impertinence to lock me in? I shall take you to the Headmaster. Open this door at once!'

'He, he, he!'

With a bag full of supplies, the Owl of the Remove hurried upstairs, back to his quarters in 'Punny', leaving Prout to tug ineffectively, but with much eloquence, at Coker's study door!

COKER'S WEARY WALK

HORACE COKER had had a weary evening. It had begun reasonably well. That motor-bicycle of his, after a few expert touches received at the repair-shop, had worked beautifully. There were occasions when it did work beautifully! The Sark water had been eliminated from its system, and a substantial sum paid by Coker for that service.

Coker wheeled his bicycle out on to the Courtfield High Street, and then looked at his watch.

'Plenty of time!'

Prout had given him leave until 'call-over'. Coker having ascertained, as he thought, that there was plenty of time, decided to test his bike. He shot out on to the Lantham Road, narrowly missing a bunch of pedal cyclists, whose remarks were frequent and painful and free, but which Coker, like the idle wind, regarded not. Dismissing them from his mind as incompetent people who had almost upset him, he sped along towards Lantham.

At the other side of Lantham, he looked at his watch again, and was rather surprised to find that the time recorded was still the same. Horace Coker's was not, perhaps, the brightest of intelligences, but even he knew that time did not stand still, even though it might seem to do so sometimes in the Fifth-form room, when Prout was eloquent.

It was not, also, the safest thing to look at a wrist-watch when speeding on a motor-bicycle, and Coker was soon to become aware of that circumstance, as well!

The bike swerved, cut across in front of a car heading towards Redclyffe, and then swerved back to the side of the road, from which it should never have swerved at all! It swerved, in fact, rather too much! Before Coker could do anything about it, it dashed off the road, ploughed through a thicket, and hit a tree-trunk, unseating Coker!

'Ow! Wow!'

Coker was hurled into a briar-patch. His motor-bike coughed and spluttered and then its engine stopped. The peace of the calm, summer night was then unbroken, except for the noise of Horace Coker, extricating himself from the briar-patch.

'Wow!'

Coker looked at his watch again. That had also stopped. Probably some Sark water had got into the works of that, as well. At all events, it was no more a going concern at the moment than was his motor-bike.

Breathing deeply, Coker hauled his bicycle away from the tree, and on to the road, and endeavoured to start its engine again. The engine remained obstinately silent. It became apparent that the only way to get that bike to move would be to push it. Coker, with feelings too deep for words, set out to do so. It was also apparent that it would need yet another visit to the repair-shop!

He was three miles the other side of Lantham. After a long and weary push, Coker managed to get that bicycle to the station, and leave it in the Left Luggage Office. Then he set about getting a train back to Courtfield. One came in, and the tired Coker ensconced himself in a seat. Unfortunately for him, it was not the right train, and he was nearly at Canterbury before he discovered his mistake!

It was quite a long time before he could get back to Courtfield, and an even longer one before he stood outside the gates of Greyfriars. They were, of course, shut. Coker pulled the gate-bell.

There was no response. Gosling, the gate-porter, was probably asleep. In any case he was unlikely to hurry himself. He never did hurry, although it must be admitted that, had he known it was Coker who was sounding the bell, he might have moved. Coker, amply supplied with funds by his Aunt Judy, was one of those who tipped well. Gosling was always polite to those who tipped him well. At the moment, however, unfortunately for himself, and unfortunately also for Coker, he did not know who was ringing that bell.

Coker, after waiting a futile five minutes, gave it up at last, and sought for admission over the wall. There were such places where illicit entry could be made. Carne of the Sixth knew of them. So did Price of the Fifth and Vernon-Smith of the Remove. So did a few others. Coker, however, was not amongst them. He made a leap at last, grabbed the top of the wall, scrambled over and fell heavily on the other side.

'Wow. Oh, crikey!'

Horace Coker sat up and rubbed himself, staring across the 'quad'. The school buildings on the other side were now, mostly, in darkness. One light, however, shone from a window, which Coker, after some time, made out to be coming from the Fifth-form passage and, after some further time, from his own study!

'That ass, Potter! That chump, Greene! Without me being there to look after them, they've gone away and left the light on!'

Coker got to his feet and walked across the quadrangle.

It would not be possible to give Potter and Greene his opinion tonight of such carelessness, but, on the morrow, they would certainly hear of it. It was a bit hard on a fellow when he had to be the constant guide of lesser intellects, even on such trivial matters.

Coker went up to the Fifth-form passage and to his study door. He did not notice that the key was in the lock. He just turned the handle and went forward. Unfortunately the study door, being locked, did not also go forward! Coker's nose, however, went forward until it encountered the study door.

'Ow! Wow! The utter asses!' Coker's bellow resounded along the Fifth-form passage. Then a voice cut into the noise, from inside the study.

'Coker, release me immediately!'

It was the voice of Prout.

A GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT

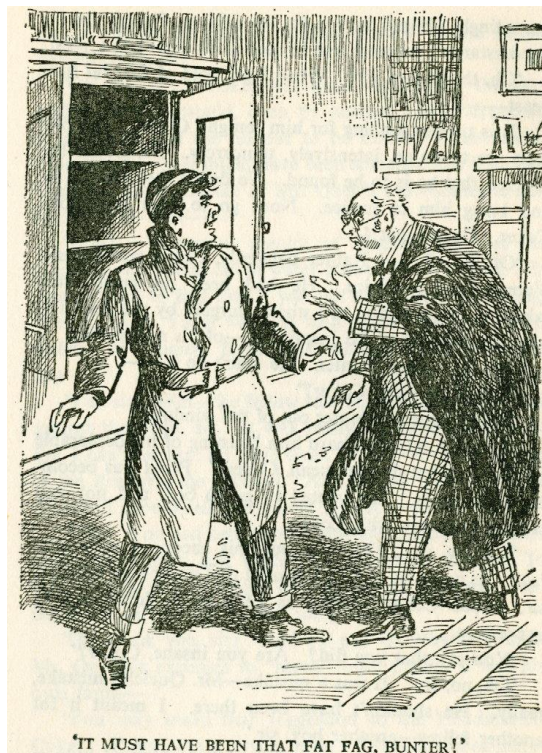
COKER held his anguished nose, and blinked at his study door. The voice of his form-master, from inside his study, had astonished him. Of course, he had expected old Prout to be waxy about his late return, but hardly anticipated finding him in his - Coker's-study, having locked himself in. It did not occur to Coker that anyone else might have locked Prout in. The bump Coker had given that door with his nose had jerked the key from the key-hole, and, at the moment, it lay unobserved on the passage floor. 'Coker! Do you hear me? Obey me immediately! Unlock this door without further delay!' The voice of Prout boomed from the inside. 'I shall take you, Coker, to your Headmaster, for this unparalleled impertinence!' 'Oh, here, I say, sir!' The reference to the Head stirred Coker. 'I can't help being late, sir. My bike broke down again, and I had to walk miles-' 'Unlock this door, and release me at once!' 'Oh, yes, sir, if you want to come out-' 'I most certainly do want to come out! This insufferable insolence of yours! - Unlock this door!' 'Oh, yes, sir.' It dawned on Coker that Prout wanted to leave his study, though it was still not clear what mysterious objective had caused him to enter it. 'But you've got the key, sir, haven't you? When you locked yourself in-' 'I did not lock myself in,' boomed the voice of Prout. 'You, Coker, had the preposterous impertinence - the unheard of audacity to lock this door after my entry-' 'I didn't!' bellowed Coker. 'I came up here because I saw a light. I thought those asses Potter and Greene-' 'Never mind Potter and Greene!' roared the exasperated Prout, 'let me out immediately.' 'I didn't know you had shut yourself in, sir. I banged my nose on the door, trying to open it - Wow!' Coker touched his nose gingerly, as it gave him a pang. 'I did not shut myself in, Coker! Am I to understand that it was not you who did so?' Prout, though always pompous, and now thoroughly exasperated, was, nevertheless, just. 'Me? Oh, no! I don't mind you using our study, of course, sir,' added Coker. After all, he was late, and it was necessary to placate Prout. 'Honoured, in fact, sir but-' 'Is the key in the lock outside, Coker?' asked Prout, a weariness creeping into his voice. 'The key, sir? No, sir.' 'Then the miscreant, who imprisoned me here, has taken it away. You must break down the door, Coker. Fetch Gosling with his tools.' Coker had already had one try that night at fetching Gosling without his tools. Another try might be equally ineffective, with or without them. Still, the study door must be opened somehow, if Prout demanded it. Coker looked at the door. It had been constructed in the days when such things were made to last. It looked too big a proposition, even for the burly Coker, to break down that door. It would be necessary at least, to try to fetch Gosling with his tools. 'Have you gone to fetch Gosling yet, Coker?' 'No, sir.' 'Upon my word, you absurd boy, why not? Do you wish me to remain incarcerated here all night?' roared Prout. 'Oh!' Coker's eyes suddenly saw the key on the floor. 'Here's the key, sir. I've found it!'

'Oh! Excellent!' In Prout's eyes, Coker immediately became less absurd. 'Kindly unlock the door without delay, Coker.'

Horace Coker inserted the key in the lock, and threw open the study-door. He saw his form-master looking at him; a Prout who was endeavouring to combine justice with not too much mercy, remembering that Coker had released him, but that had it not been for Coker's absence, in the first place, he would not have been imprisoned at all!

Coker's gaze wandered away from Prout. It came to his open cupboard door. The cupboard beyond the door was empty - very empty indeed. That morning it had been packed with the contents of a hamper which had come from his Aunt Judy. Wherever the contents of that hamper might now be packed, it was, certainly, not within Coker's study cupboard.

'Gone!' roared Coker, 'All my tuck!' His eyes turned on Prout. It was not to be expected that his form-master would raid a study-cupboard-but there was no one else about, and Prout had been locked inside!



'Coker!' Prout had observed the gaze, and turned purple at it. 'Do you actually assume that I - that I have purloined your comestibles?'

'I - no, sir - but you were locked in with them - and they've gone - all my Aunt Judy's tuck-'

'Preposterous!'

'Bunter!' roared Coker, as a sudden light dawned on him. Light did dawn, occasionally, even upon Coker.

'What, what?'

'It must have been that fat fag, Bunter-'

Prout considered. Coker, for once, was probably right. The situation was one which he might have described as unparalleled - but it would appear so. And it would offer an explanation - not a satisfactory explanation, but - never-the-less - an explanation of recent happenings.

It was obviously the correct thing to rouse the prefects, and begin a hunt for the missing Bunter but was it expedient? The full circumstances would emerge. One of them would be that he, Prout, had been locked in

Coker's study by Bunter, and rescued by Coker! He could almost hear Hacker murmuring again '*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes*'. Prout coloured furiously.

It was an occasion for an arrangement!

'I am sure you are right, Coker,' he said, mildly. 'It was, undoubtedly, that absurd boy of the Remove, who eluded my pursuit after having purloined the contents of your cupboard - and locked me in your study! I am exceedingly obliged to you for my release, Coker. In the circumstances, no more will be said about your late arrival.'

'Oh, thank you, sir! When I get hold of that fat little beast-!'

'It is useless looking for him tonight, Coker. The prefects are to do so, intensively, tomorrow. Dr. Locke has ordered that he is to be found. No doubt they will do so, and bring him to justice. Now, go to your dormitory, Coker. Good night!'

'Oh, sir - I-' Rather belatedly, Coker remembered Vernon-Smith's advice. He had been prevented from taking it the previous two nights, largely by the activities - to say nothing of the inactivities - of his motor-bike.

'I-I say, sir - about Bunter. He didn't do it-'

'Didn't do what, Coker?'

'Didn't pour that water out of the window.'

'What? I actually heard him boasting of his deplorable conduct. What do you mean, Coker?' Prout was becoming testy again. He wanted to go to bed, and not stay talking nonsense with Coker.

'I know, sir. That was only his cheek - cheeky little fag! As a matter of fact, I poured that water - by mistake, sir,' added Coker, hastily, as he saw his form-master's expression.

'You say that you did? Are you insane, Coker?'

'Oh, no, sir! It was a mistake - Mr. Quelch's mistake, really. He shouldn't have been there. I meant it for another fellow - another boy, sir.'

'Coker! Such unparalleled stupidity! You might have caught anyone by such a childish prank!' roared Prout. 'Myself, perhaps?'

'Oh, no, sir!' Coker was quite shocked by the suggestion that he would, even by accident, have drenched anyone who had the honour to be Coker's form-master. 'Not you, sir- It might have been someone else if he had made the same mistake as Mr. Quelch did - someone like Mr. Hacker - but-' 'H'm!' A mental picture of Hacker being at the receiving end of that fall of water crossed Prout's mind. He was shocked to find that it was not altogether displeasing. 'Yes, Coker! Yet it was you who poured out that water, instead of Bunter, from that window - you, a senior boy-'

'Yes, sir. Win - the fellow said something - very much against the Fifth, sir. It was really a protest by me, sir. But I can't let that fat little beast Bunter - I mean Bunter of the Remove - be accused. And, as my form-master, I thought I should tell you before I went to the Head.'

'H'm! You had better come with me to the Headmaster tomorrow, Coker, and make your statement to him. In view of your action tonight in releasing me, and your confession, I will do what I can for you.'

'Oh, thank you, sir! And I'll pay Quelch's - I mean Mr. Quelch's expenses in "sanny" even though it was his own fault-'

'You may make that suggestion to the Headmaster, Coker.' Prout gave a terrific yawn. 'Good gracious me, it is quite late! Go to bed at once, Coker!'

BUNTER COOKS THE SAUSAGES

'PRIME!'

The raid upon Coker's study the previous night had been a great success for Bunter. Coker's Aunt Judy had sent nearly everything she could think of to please her dear nephew, Horace, and they had certainly pleased William George Bunter.

Bunter had had an extensive supper and an extensive breakfast, and was now considering the problem of his lunch. Quantities of biscuits, cakes and tarts had disappeared, and for once - though, probably not for long - Bunter had had enough - or almost enough - of biscuits, cakes and tarts. Though not, of course, of eating in general!

It had been a hurried raid the night before, and he had grabbed everything he could lay his hands on, and pushed it into Vernon-Smith's bag. Amongst them had been that soft packet of unknown contents, which he had touched. He had just discovered that it contained sausages.

Bunter looked at the sausages. He might have had almost enough, for the time being, of biscuits, cakes and tarts - but he could still find room for sausages.

The problem was, of course, how to cook them. Even Bunter could not eat sausages raw. In order to make them eatable they must no longer remain raw, but how was that to be done?

The Owl gave the problem some attention. Whilst in lesser matters, such as the instruction given him in class by Mr. Quelch or M. Charpentier, Bunter always paid as little attention as possible, to a really serious matter, like the cooking of sausages, he was prepared to give much. Bunter looked at the box of matches he had inadvertently taken from Vernon-Smith's study, and then at the 'improving' but dusty books which formed part of the sparse furniture of the Punishment Room. Then he turned to the small fire-place.

'He, he, he!'

It looked as if no fire had been lit in it for many years!

Well - one was going to be lit there now!

Bunter stuffed crumpled empty paper bags into the grate, and added torn-out leaves from the 'improving' books. No one had made any use of those books for a long time, and they were now being made use of in a way which whoever had placed them in the Punishment Room had, certainly, not foreseen.

There was, of course, neither coal nor kindling wood in the room, but Bunter's fat brain was getting unaccustomed exercise under the stress of his position. Those sausages must be cooked, if he intended to eat them - and he did intend to eat them. The Owl seized a dilapidated wooden chair and proceeded to make it more dilapidated by breaking off its legs. Bunter broke three of the legs in half and, putting them on to the paper, applied a match. Flames leapt up, and began to send smoke up the chimney. Some of the smoke eddied back.

'Oh, lor'!'

Bunter coughed.

It was likely enough that that chimney had not been swept since the days of Queen Victoria, and to the soot of the years had been added many abandoned birds' nests. Still, most of the smoke went up.

Bunter seized the fourth leg of the broken chair, and draped the sausages over it. There was no other way they could be cooked. Presently the end of the string touched the flames. The flames leaped along the fat!

'Ow! Oh, crikey! Oh, dear!'

The hot fire reached the Owl's fingers and he dropped the sausages. They fell into the fire. Bunter made a frantic effort to rescue them with the chair-leg, and only succeeded in stirring up flaming pieces of paper, which went up the chimney. Presently a lump of flaming soot fell on the sausages!

'Oh, dear! Oh, lor'!'

The hapless Owl gazed upon the ruin. More soot dropped, and a sullen roar indicated that the chimney was on fire!

Below, in the 'quad' a crowd of fellows looked at the volumes of smoke pouring from the chimney. Amongst them were the prefects who had been searching for Bunter. 'Some ass has set a chimney on fire!'

'Who on earth's lighted a fire in this weather?'

'Where is it?'

'That's the Punishment Room chimney,' exclaimed Wingate, suddenly,

'Who-?'

Carne gave a roar.

'I'll bet it's that fat little beast Bunter. We've been looking for him all the morning!'

'And he's to be taken to the Head in another five minutes,' said Gwynne.

'Come on,' said North. 'Can't think how he got into the Punishment Room-but we'd better look after that fire, anyway. Mustn't let it spread. It's dangerous.'

He led the way and the other prefects tramped after him. They had, certainly, had the morning off from class, but had, so far, found no Bunter, and were expecting the iciest of receptions from Dr. Locke, when they turned up, Bunterless, so to speak. Now it looked as if, at the eleventh hour, they had tracked him down.

'Poor old Bunter,' said Bob Cherry. 'If it's Bunter-'

'They'll march him straight off to the Head,' observed Johnny Bull, 'and about time too!'

'Can't! The Head's engaged,' said Nugent. 'Prout's with him now. He went in with Coker.'

'Coker missed "call-over" last night,' remarked Harry Wharton.

'Prout wouldn't have him up before the Head for that,' said Redwing.

'He'd deal with it himself.'

'They were both looking pretty solemn,' observed Tom Brown.

'Unparalleled solemnity on Prout's part,' said Vernon-Smith.

The juniors laughed. 'I wonder-'

'What do you wonder, Smithy?' asked Bob Cherry.

'Many things,' replied the Bounder, with a laugh. Inwardly, he was wondering whether Coker had, at last, made his confession to the Head - and what the result would be!

There was the tramping of many feet coming from above.

'Ow! I say, leggo, Wingate! I didn't swamp Quelchy. When I said I did, I meant I didn't!'

'Come on!' said the voice of Loder. 'You can tell that to the Head before he gets out his birch.'

'Ow!'

Apparently the Owl had been found at last and was being brought downstairs.

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders. If Coker had, though at the eleventh hour, cleared Bunter, the Head would probably not birch him, although, as many in the Remove had been quick to point out, Bunter, even if acquitted of the original sin, had added so many more, evading retribution, that he might be birched after all! The Bounder, hard though his nature was, felt some pity for the hapless Owl, whose stupidities had come home to roost.

'Ow! Leggo!'

Bunter's voice still uttered voluble protests.

'There's old Grimey's car,' said Bob Cherry. 'He's come again to get Bunter's finger-prints, and at last here's Bunter for him, finger-prints and all.'

'I wonder which they'll do first - birch Bunter or take his finger-prints,' said Skinner, laughing.

'Shut up, Skinner!'

'Yes, shut up,' added Lord Mauleverer. 'Not the thing to kick a man when he's down you know.'

'Quite the thing, though, to kick him when he's up,' continued Johnny Bull.

There was a sudden howl from Skinner.

Johnny Bull had put his principle into practice!

SEVERAL INTERVIEWS WITH THE HEAD

'I HAVE little time to spare, Mr. Prout,' said Dr. Locke, coldly. 'Inspector Grimes has an appointment with me at noon. Mr. Foss will also be present. And the prefects have instructions to find the boy, Bunter, and bring him to me on doing so. However, if you have something of particular importance to relate I am at your service, Mr. Prout.' From his tone of voice, it would appear that the Head had grave doubts as to the importance of anything Mr. Prout wished to relate, especially if it were connected with Coker, whom the Fifth-form master had, somewhat mysteriously, brought with him.

'Indeed I have, sir,' said Mr. Prout. 'An unparalleled happening has occurred connected with this boy, Bunter - and with Coker, here, of my form. I ask you, sir, to treat Coker with tolerance - yes, sir, with tolerance! His conduct, sir, has been crass, but redeemed, if I may say so, by a confession, when another boy is accused - I will not say unjustly, but through a misapprehension-'

'What boy and of what is he accused, Mr. Prout?' asked Dr. Locke, interrupting him. There were occasions when Prout's eloquence showed signs of going on for ever, like the little brook.

'Bunter, sir, of pouring that water over Mr. Quelch,' said Prout, brought down to earth. 'It appears that he is not guilty.'

'Not guilty?' exclaimed the Head. 'You, yourself, Mr. Prout actually heard him boasting of having committed this outrage!'

'A desire, sir, to gain prestige in the eyes of his form-fellows, it would seem. He did not know that a master - myself, sir - was within earshot.'

'Indeed? And who is the culprit?'

'Coker, sir, who, on hearing that another boy was falsely if self-accused, came nobly and immediately-'

'Coker?' The Head's voice rose in wrath. 'Coker! A senior boy guilty of such outrageous conduct?' Despite Prout's eloquence, Dr. Locke did not seem to find anything noble in Coker's conduct. 'Upon my word!'

'He came to me immediately another boy was accused, sir.'

'It was known on Wednesday that Bunter was supposed to be guilty of this occurrence, Mr. Prout. It is now Saturday morning. I do not find anything immediate in that.'

'I didn't hear that fat little - I mean that Bunter was thought to have done it until some time afterwards, sir,' put in Coker, speaking the literal truth, and not stating how long 'some time afterwards' had been.

'I don't take much notice of junior affairs, as a general rule, sir, but hearing that he had claimed the credit for having done it-'

'The credit!' ejaculated Dr. Locke.

'It was an accident, sir,' added Coker, hastily. 'I meant it for-for another boy.' Even Coker had sufficient sense not to let the Headmaster know that he had meant that water for the Captain of the School. 'I don't want to mention his name-'

'You are a senior boy, Coker!' exclaimed the Head. 'And you behave in this childish, this ridiculous and reprehensible manner. Had I found out the truth about this matter without your confession, I should have expelled you. Your crass stupidity has sent Mr. Quelch into hospital. I hardly know how to deal with you-'

The Headmaster's eloquence was interrupted by a tap at his study door. He uttered an exclamation of annoyance.

'Come in!'

The face of Trotter, the page, appeared round the edge of the door.

'Inspector Grimes has arrived, sir.'

'Oh! Show him in, Trotter - and inform Mr. Foss that I should like to see him.'

As the door closed behind Trotter, the Head turned to Prout and Coker.

'Mr. Prout, I shall leave the punishment of this boy in your hands. Let it be exemplary that he may be cured of any desire to repeat such outrageous stupidity.'

'Yes, sir,' said Prout.

'You may go with Mr. Prout, Coker - and at once.' This was tantamount to saying that Mr. Prout should go with Coker - and at once - though the Fifth-form master did not see it! Nevertheless, it was plain to him that the Head had had enough of the interview. Outside the study door, Prout turned to Coker.

'Coker you will write a "book"!'

'Oh, crikey!'

A 'book' was a tremendous 'impot'. It would take all Coker's spare time for many days.

'Yes, Coker, and you may consider yourself fortunate, indeed, at that-' Prout broke off, as he suddenly saw Hacker - that impertinent fellow, Hacker, who had dared to remind him that the flying years slipped by, and had uttered that gibe - that impertinent gibe - '*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes*'. He wished that it had been Hacker who had received that flood of water, instead of Quelch. Prout remembered Coker's observation of the previous night. His mood softened.

'Coker?'

'Yes, sir?'

'I do not wish to be too hard upon you. You have, after all, admitted your delinquency, in order to save another boy from being punished for it. Your conduct was inexcusable, but - nevertheless - you might, instead of Mr. Quelch, have poured that water over me - or Mr. Hacker - Yes, or Mr. Hacker. All the same - I rescind my sentence of a "book".'

'Oh, thank you, sir.'

'You will take, instead - five hundred lines, Coker!'

'Thanks awfully, sir.' Coker beamed. Boys awarded five hundred lines did not usually beam, but compared to a whole 'book' it was a light punishment. So Coker beamed.

'You-you're a sportsman, sir.'

'I endeavour to live up to that reputation, Coker,' said Prout, majestically. 'When I was in the "Rockies"-' Coker stirred, uneasily, but did not move. It was possible that he might, not for the first time, have to listen to an account of Prout's exploits in the 'Rockies' in the old days. After all, one could not have an 'impot' reduced from a 'book' to five hundred lines for nothing! At that moment, however, there came an interruption!

Hacker, the 'Acid Drop', came in sight.

'Ah, my dear Prout. I am glad to see that those to whom you stood guardian are now in your custody again.'

'I fail to understand you, Hacker,' said Prout, frigidly. 'The boy, Bunter, of whom you took charge last Wednesday, has now, I am told, been apprehended, and is on the way to the Headmaster at last!'

The 'at last' was uttered in a tone which conveyed the impression that the delay was all Prout's fault.

'Indeed, Hacker?'

'Yes. He was hiding in the Punishment Room at the top of the building. Had you gone a little higher in your search you might have found him earlier. I should have stood by you to spur you on with the call

"Excelsior"!

A gleam came into Prout's eyes.

'Surely, my dear Hacker, you are not proposing to offer me the translation of the word "excelsior" as "higher"?'

Hacker stared.

'Naturally, Prout! Are you unacquainted with the well-known poem by Longfellow?'

'Pooh! Longfellow,' said Prout, disdainfully. 'He may have been an excellent poet, but there were deficiencies in his knowledge of Latin - as is the case with many people,' added Prout, with a meaning stare. 'The correct translation of "excelsior" Hacker, is not "higher" but "taller", a fact unknown to the poet Longfellow, and also, I am surprised to discover, by you! Really, Hacker-!'

'Nonsense, Prout!'

'No, my dear Hacker - merely the correct translation! Had Longfellow been accurate he would have rendered "higher" as "ad excelsiora". He was not. His error is undiscerned by the ignorant to this day!'

Prout smiled. Hacker turned away abruptly, and left the scene. A beaming Prout looked at Coker who had been listening. Coker knew even less of the niceties of the Latin tongue than did Hacker - in fact, very much less - but he could see that somehow, in some way. Prout had scored and was very pleased about it.

'Coker, my dear boy, you will let me have that three hundred lines - I think I said three hundred lines - as soon as you possibly can, please?'

'Oh, yes, sir! Thank you, sir!' A beaming Horace Coker left a beaming Paul Pontifex Prout. Hacker, somewhere out of sight, was not beaming at all!

INSPECTOR GRIMES ON THE TRAIL

'I REGRET to inform you, Mr. Grimes,' said Dr. Locke, 'that I cannot yet produce the boy, Bunter, in order that you may take his finger-prints. He is still in hiding. However, the prefects are now in search of him, and I have no doubt he will soon be produced. I am sorry that you have had a fruitless journey!'

'Oh, no, Dr. Locke,' replied the inspector, 'not fruitless! As I told you on the telephone this morning, I should like to see Mr. Foss. He arrived on the scene of that bank raider's disappearance, and came the other way from Friardale. He may have seen some person or incident en route, which could be helpful to us. Something not noticed at the time. If I could ask him a few questions-?'

'By all means, Mr. Grimes. I am sure he will be only too pleased to assist you, if he can. I have already sent for him. Ah!'

There was a tap on the study door. 'Come in!'

The mild, benevolent face of Mr. Harvard Foss looked round the edge of the door. This seemed to be the customary method of entry of Mr. Harvard Foss into rooms, rather as though he expected to have something thrown at him, if he came in too far or too fast! Not, of course, that that was to be expected in the Head's study. Still Mr. Foss was - or appeared to be - Mr. Foss!

'You sent for me, sir?'

'Oh, yes! Come in, please, Mr. Foss,' said Dr. Locke. 'Inspector Grimes has come here, primarily to see the boy, Bunter, but as, unfortunately, he has not yet been found-'

'Dear me! Dear me!' Mr. Foss shook his head. 'Deplorable! And I feel culpable, too, as he is a boy of my form. Though I think the boy can have seen little of value to help Inspector Grimes in his search for that miscreant.'

'People often see things of which they do not realise the value,' observed the inspector. 'You, yourself, perhaps, Mr. Foss? If I might ask you a few questions-?'

'Indeed, I shall be most pleased to help, but I fear that I can be of little use.'

'We shall see, Mr. Foss,' said Inspector Grimes. 'You arrived here on Wednesday, did you not, from Friardale, by the train which got to that station at 3.30 in the afternoon?'

'Yes. Yes, I did.'

'And walked from Friardale?'

'Yes, Mr. Grimes. I am a simple man, and travel lightly. I had but one suit-case to carry. A walk, to my mind, is the best way of seeing the country - the birds - the wayside flowers-'

The Headmaster beamed at Mr. Foss. This was a man after his own heart!

'Indeed, Mr. Foss, you echo my own views,' he said. 'The modern lust for speed gives no time for observation.'

'A peaceful walk in the English countryside is, if I may say so, the highest form of pleasure, Dr. Locke.'

'Yes, Mr. Foss. As a young man, before this age of petrol-'

'Those were the days,' said Mr. Grimes, who felt that it was time he came into the conversation again. 'You saw no one on your walk from Friardale, Mr. Foss?'

'One or two indeterminate persons, Inspector, of whom I fear I took little notice.'

'Yet, I suppose it would - in fact, it must have been - one of those who told you that they were hunting for a bank raider on Courtfield Common? Otherwise, you would have turned in at the gates of Greyfriars without proceeding there?'

Mr. Foss turned his head, sharply. His expression, the inspector observed, was rather more alert.

'Dear me! How absent-minded, I am! I said "good-day", in the old country fashion, to one of them, as he passed me, and he said, "They're hunting for a bank raider on the common up there", and pointed and added "If you want to see the fun"!' Mr. Foss put on a pained look.

'Fun, indeed! However, "*mea culpa*". Idle curiosity induced me to keep on.'

'Neither this person, nor any others of those you passed had any special characteristic to make them noteworthy, I suppose?' asked Mr. Grimes.

'None of them, for instance, had a prominent nose, similar to the man you saw in Richfield last autumn?'

A startled gleam came into the mild-looking eyes, which the inspector did not fail to notice.

'Dear me! Good gracious, no! I had forgotten all about that person. Do you think that it is the same man who has committed the robbery here?'

'It would seem possible from the similarity of his methods and description,' said Mr. Grimes.

'Oh, dear! I must be a bird of ill-omen!' Mr. Foss gave a little cackle.

'But I saw no one this time - no one at all, with any such prominent feature.'

'It may have been a false nose which he afterwards discarded on both occasions,' observed the inspector.

'On both occasions?' observed Dr. Locke, who had been listening with great interest. 'Have you then been involved as a witness in such an occurrence previously, Mr. Foss?'

'As a witness? Dear me, no!' The little man cackled again. 'I seem, on both occasions, to have arrived too late to be of use. I am afraid I cannot help you, Mr. Grimes.'

'Unfortunately, Mr. Foss,' said the inspector thoughtfully. In his pocket was a search-warrant, with which he had armed himself, after his conversation with Vernon-Smith the previous night. Mr. Grimes was wondering whether the time had not now come to use it, in respect of Mr. Foss's study!

At that moment, however, his reflections - and the peace of the Headmaster's study - were alike destined to be interrupted! There was a loud noise in the passage outside - a most unseemly noise in the vicinity of any such august abode!

'Yaroooh! Leggo! Beasts! I never swamped Quelch!'

'Come on, Bunter. Keep your explanations for the Head.'

It was the voice of Wingate.

There was a tap on the door, and it opened to show Wingate, with a firm grasp on a struggling Owl of the Remove.

'Here he is, sir! You told us to bring him to you immediately we found him. He was hiding in the Punishment Room. He must have got hold of a key to it, somewhere. We spotted him, because he set the chimney on fire!'

'Good gracious, Wingate!'

'Ow! I didn't swamp Quelchy - I mean Mr. Quelch, sir! Oh, lor!'

'Be quiet, Bunter. I shall talk to you later about that matter, and your subsequent conduct. I have learned that, despite your statement, you are not guilty of that offence. Now, Inspector Grimes wishes to ask you a few questions about the man who stole your bicycle on Wednesday. Thank you, Wingate! You may now leave this boy with me.'

'If you will excuse me sir-?' Mr. Foss rose to his feet, as Wingate left. 'I had, perhaps, better go now, so as not to be in the way. I have some papers to check-'

'No, Mr. Foss!' It was Inspector Grimes who spoke. 'I shall be obliged if you will remain. There may be some further questions that I shall desire to ask you now that this boy, who is, I understand in your form, is present. Please stay!'

'Oh, very well.'

Out of the corner of his eye, the inspector was looking at Mr. Foss. It was not imagination, he thought, that Mr. Foss had seemed to lose something of that ineffective urbanity which was - or appeared to be - so characteristic of him!

BUNTER'S FIND AND COKER'S CATCH

'BUNTER!'

'Ow! I never did it, sir. When I said I did that - that was only a figure of speech, sir - I never-'

'Compose yourself, Bunter,' said the Head. 'I have already informed you that it is now known that you were not guilty of pouring that water over Mr. Quelch, despite your statement which led Mr. Prout to suppose you were. As to your subsequent absence, I must consider that later. At present, Mr. Grimes wishes to take your finger-prints.'

'Ow! I never robbed the bank,' squealed the Owl. 'Another chap took my bike. I couldn't help it!'

'Bunter, really!' exclaimed Dr. Locke. 'No one is supposing that you robbed the bank, you foolish boy! The taking of your finger-prints is merely a matter of police routine, in order to eliminate yours from others on the metal parts of your bicycle.'

'Oh, is it, sir? I-I- never broke the lock of Mr. Quelch's desk, either!' There was a suppressed exclamation from Mr. Foss, which did not escape the inspector's attention.

'Broke the lock on Mr. Quelch's desk? What do you mean, Bunter?' exclaimed the Head. 'Excuse me, Mr. Grimes. I must first calm this foolish boy who apparently thinks that your presence here means that he is to be accused of all sorts of absurd crimes! What do you mean, Bunter?'

'I was only looking for some tuck, sir,' said the Owl, plaintively. 'I'd been shut in there for hours, with nothing to eat. And I'd missed my tea-'

'Where were you shut in for hours, Bunter?'

'In Quelch's - I mean Mr. Quelch's study, sir. I-I was behind the desk when Mr. Prout brought Mr. Foss in - but I never touched Mr. Foss's papers - the ones he counted - I swear I didn't.'

'Mr. Foss, can you throw any light upon this absurd boy's utterances?' asked Dr. Locke, turning to the temporary master. 'He seems to have commenced hiding from us in Mr. Quelch's study - now yours - where, I imagine, he found Mr. Quelch's key to the Punishment Room, to which he, subsequently, went.'

Mr. Foss turned pale under the Headmaster's glance, and a still more searching one from Inspector Grimes.

'I cannot understand what he is talking about, sir,' he said. 'The boy was most certainly not in my study at any time - Counting papers? He is raving-'

'I'm not!' exclaimed Bunter, indignantly. 'I was behind the desk for hours and hours - with nothing to eat-'

'Was it there that you first hid, Master Bunter?' asked Inspector Grimes.

'In Mr. Quelch's study?'

'Yes. Old Prout - I mean Mr. Prout - was after me - and I knew no one was there - and then he came in with Mr. Foss - and I had to stay there for hours and hours. I missed tea-'

'This boy was most certainly not in Mr. Quelch's study, sir, when Mr. Prout showed it to me as the one I should occupy while here,' said Mr. Foss. 'Mr. Prout will confirm that. May I suggest that this boy should see a doctor? He seems unhinged.'

'I-I ain't unhinged,' squealed the Owl, indignantly. 'I was there - with nothing to eat. I had to break open your desk - I thought there must be some tuck there when you drew the blinds - and locked everything - and-' 'You broke open my desk - Mr. Quelch's desk?' exclaimed Mr. Foss, huskily. 'Then you were the person who - I must go and see what damage has been done! Excuse me, Dr. Locke?'

'Certainly, Mr. Foss.'

'I should prefer Mr. Foss to remain here,' put in Mr. Grimes, sharply. 'He - as this boy's form-master - may be able to give me information on some essential matters.'

'I fail to see, Inspector-'

'Nevertheless, kindly remain here, Mr. Foss.'

'Really, Mr. Grimes,' said Dr. Locke. 'While I always wish to give every assistance to the law, this does seem rather outside the scope of your duties, if I may say so! You came here to take the finger-prints of this boy, Bunter, and I have produced him for you. You can, surely take them now, and interview Mr. Foss later, if you consider it necessary to do so?' concluded the Head in a tone which indicated that he had grave doubts as to its being necessary to do so.

'I would rather deal with these matters in this way now, sir,' replied the inspector, stolidly.

'Very well! Then you, of course, give me no choice, Inspector!' said the Head, tartly. 'Pray proceed! I suggest that you, first of all, take this boy's finger-prints, in order that he may go and clean himself. He has, apparently, not been able to wash himself for some days. Why, there is soot on your face, Bunter. How did that come there?'

Dr. Locke was becoming annoyed with the inspector, who seemed now to be interfering in matters which did not concern him. It was time to remind him that his present surroundings were, primarily, for the administration of the business of the school, of which even an inquiry as to how soot came upon a Remove boy's face formed a part, if a small one.

'Soot? Oh, dear! Oh, lor'! That must be when Coker's sausages fell in the fire!' Bunter thrust a fat hand into his trousers-pocket, apparently in search of a handkerchief, but brought it out empty. His fist dislodged a small object from the pocket, which fell on the floor. 'Oh, sir, I've lost my handkerchief!'

'What is that which dropped on the floor, Bunter?' Bunter blinked his little eyes at it through his round spectacles.

'Oh, crikey! That must be what popped out of Quelch's - I mean, Mr. Quelch's desk, sir. I never meant to take it. I was looking for some tuck - and then Smithy came in - I mean, Smithy didn't come in - I'm not a sneak, sir - I-'

'One moment!' Inspector Grimes took the object from Bunter. 'This is a false nose of an exaggerated type - and it came out of the desk in Mr. Quelch's study-?'

He turned to gaze upon Mr. Foss. That gentleman, who had been growing paler and paler, suddenly turned and dashed for the door. Opening it, he sprang outside. 'Mr. Foss!' exclaimed Dr. Locke.

The inspector was after Mr. Foss like lightning, but as he shot through the doorway, there came a crash and a yell.

The yell was in the voice of Horace Coker.

'Ow ! You clumsy ass! '

Inspector Grimes just saved himself from falling over the squirming heap outside the door of the Head's study. At the bottom of the heap was Mr. Harvard Foss, on top of it was Coker of the Fifth.

Mr. Grimes skilfully dived down amidst the squirming heap. There was a click and Mr. Foss's wrists were fastened with a pair of handcuffs!

Coker stared.

'Here, what are you up to? I was coming along to tell the Head that I'd pay for Quelch's hospital exes - and this chap collided with me. I'm not giving him in charge for assault!'

There were some laughs in a gathering crowd brought together by the uproar. Coker was always Coker.

'Mr. Grimes!' It was the voice of Dr. Locke. 'What does this mean?'

'This is the man who robbed the Courtfield and County Bank on Wednesday,' answered the inspector. He pulled the slight figure of Mr. Harvard Foss to his feet, and addressed him. 'You need say nothing now, but anything you do say may be used in evidence.'

'Mr. Foss, the bank robber?' exclaimed Dr. Locke. 'Incredible!'

'So I should have said at first, sir,' replied Mr. Grimes. 'But acting on information received-'

He paused. Amongst the crowd he caught sight of Vernon-Smith. The Bounder had expected something to happen when Mr. Grimes came that day, and he had been on the watch for it. It had happened!

'Thank you, Master Vernon-Smith!'

Vernon-Smith nodded. He did not look at the captive. He had no pity for Mr. Harvard Foss who had robbed a bank, wounded an innocent cashier, and had brutally ill-used Vernon-Smith himself, but he was not the sort to gloat over a fallen enemy. He shrugged his shoulders and left.

BUNTER CLAIMS A REWARD

'I SAY, you fellows-'

'Shut up, Bunter!'

'Beast!'

The Removites were in no mood to listen to Bunter.

Mr. Harvard Foss had just departed, in the charge of Inspector Grimes, in a police car, bound for Courtfield Police Station, and his late pupils were discussing the astounding discovery.

'So Smithy was right, and he didn't come by the 3.30 at Friardale,' said Nugent. 'He was the beaky nosed chap who pinched Bunter's bike for the bank raid.'

'My pater paid £80 for that bike!'

'Shut up, Bunter!' said Tom Brown. 'Old Grimey thanked you, Smithy. Did you put him on the trail?'

'I did!' The Bounder grinned. 'I knew that chap had a secret to keep, and things began to add up. Old Grimey added some more. This isn't the fellow's first bank robbery. It's pretty certain that he did the one near St. Rich's last autumn. I don't know if there'll be any evidence as to that in his desk - but there's pretty sure to be plenty about this!'

'Nice profitable side-line for a temporary master,' commented Bob Cherry, 'while it lasted!'

'The cracked pitcher has gone once too often wellfully, as your English proverb says,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Yes, Inky,' said Harry Wharton, 'but he might have got away if it hadn't been for Coker coming along to the Head's study, just in time to collide with him!'

'Fancy Coker coming in useful!' remarked Frank Nugent.

'Wonders will never cease!' observed Bob Cherry. 'Coker can claim the reward the bank are offering for the recovery of the money - if he likes,' said Vernon-Smith. 'Ought to split it with you,' remarked Redwing.

'I say you fellows, it's mine!' squeaked Bunter. 'I've been trying to tell you. Don't you fellows go trying to pinch my reward and give it to Coker! It belongs to me!'

'You fat ass!'

'Didn't I pop into Quelchy's study and shadow that man like Herlock Shomes - I mean Sherlock Holmes?'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I was surreptitious of him, from the first.'

'You were what?'

'Surrep-suspicious of him,' said the Owl. 'He pulled the wool over the eyes of you fellows all right, but when it came to me, it was a very different matter. I'm deep, you know.'

'Only measured sideways,' said Peter Todd.

'Beast! I followed him into Quelchy's study-'

'Followed him?' exclaimed Johnny Bull. 'You spoofing humbug, you did nothing of the sort. You squirmed away from Prout, when he was taking you to the Head, and that was the first place of refuge you found!'

'That was only cameraflage on my part.'

'What? You chump!' exclaimed Frank Nugent. 'Do you mean *camouflage*?'

'That's what I said, Nugent-cammyflage. I planned the whole thing - getting Prout to chase me, so that I could hide in Quelch's study and listen.'

'You can listen all right,' observed Johnny Bull. 'There can't be many keyholes in Greyfriars which haven't had your fat ear stuck against them one time or another.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You can laugh!'

'We can and do,' said Bob Cherry. 'So will Inspector Grimes when you claim that reward - unless he pinches you for being an accessory before, during and after the fact!'

'Ow! Rotters! What would have happened, I should like to know, if I hadn't heard that beast counting notes and talking about eight hundred pounds-'

'That's true enough,' observed Vernon-Smith. 'I knew Bunter hadn't the sense to make up anything like that-'

'Oh, really, Smithy!'

'So there seemed to be something in it. I thought at first that Foss must have gone to Lantham Races on his way, and made a packet-'

'You would,' said Johnny Bull.

'And did!' agreed Vernon-Smith, 'so I made inquiries amongst my disreputable acquaintances, of whom you may have heard, Bull-'

Johnny Bull grunted.

'-but it wasn't so. And then I heard the amount of the sum which had been stolen from the bank.'

'And put two and two together,' observed Harry Wharton, laughing.

'Yes, and then told Grimey. He found out something about Foss's previous movements as a temporary beak at S10 Rich's, which made him most suspicious. I knew he'd act, but I had to keep Bunter hidden in the meantime.'

'Blessed, if I see why,' said Johnny Bull. 'He's never any use, hidden or shown!'

'Yah! Beast!'

'If they'd got hold of him before he'd been cleared of swamping Quelchy with that bucket of water,' continued the Bounder, 'Foss would have been brought into it as his temporary form-master. The fat ass couldn't have kept secret about being in the study, and over-hearing. Then Foss would have taken alarm, and destroyed the evidence.'

'H'm! Wonder he didn't anyway,' observed Tom Brown.

'You don't destroy eight hundred quid - and the tools of your trade, which got it - before you have to,' replied the Bounder.

'One of the tools of that trade being the false nose,' remarked Bob Cherry, grinning.

'If I hadn't taken that away, and produced it at the cyclinglogical moment,' said Bunter, 'where would we all be?'

'Fan me!' exclaimed Peter Todd. 'He must mean psychological moment! Well, if it hadn't been produced in the Head's study, under old Grimey's eyes, I suppose we'd still all be under Foss's mild tuition, the bank eight hundred quid short, and the police short of one bank raider! I suppose you're the real person entitled to any reward that's given, Smithy, but this fat ass had done something - though only by making one blunder after another. I think you might slip him a tenner, Smithy-'

'I shall demand the lot,' said Bunter. 'The bank owes it to me.'

'Ask Quelchy for it,' suggested Skinner. 'I hear he's probably coming back today. Got better quicker than was expected. Nice quiet week-end at the school, before he begins again with us. He's the man who ought to have that reward. If he hadn't been swamped with water, the police wouldn't have got their bank robber.'

'That's so,' said Wibley. 'So it's really Quelchy's.'

'If he hadn't been swamped with water, there wouldn't have been any temporary beak to commit a bank robbery,' observed Peter Todd.

'Not here,' remarked Lord Mauleverer, 'but there had been elsewhere by all accounts. Fellow not tracked at all, if this hadn't happened.'

'Better give the reward to the cottage hospital in Courtfield which looked after Quelchy,' suggested Tom Brown, eyeing Bunter.

'It's mine!' howled the Owl. 'If I hadn't swamped Quelchy-'

'You utter ass!' exclaimed Wharton. 'Are you saying that again? You didn't. It was Coker.'

'It was me!'

'Good afternoon, my boys!' said a quiet voice behind them.

The Removites turned to behold Henry Samuel Quelch. 'Oh! We're pleased to see you again, sir,' said Harry Wharton.

'Oh, lor'! I never-' exclaimed Bunter.

'I know that you did not pour that water over me, Bunter,' observed Mr. Quelch. 'I also know that you boasted of having done so. The Headmaster has informed me over the telephone of certain recent happenings here. In view of their outcome, he has decided to declare an amnesty in respect of any offences which arose in consequence of them. I advise you to make no false claims, Bunter.'

'Oh, lor'!'

'You will be rewarded by the bank for your part in a criminal's detection.'

'Oh, I say!' The fat Owl beamed, as visions of unlimited tuck floated before his eyes.

'The money will be handed to your father to take care of.'

'Oh, crikey!'

Mr. Quelch passed on his way towards Masters' Passage.

<p>The next book in THE BILLY BUNTER SERIES will be BUNTER THE SPORTSMAN!</p>
