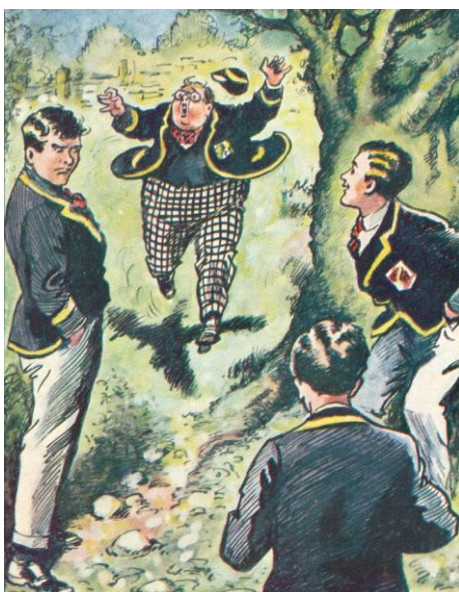


BUNTER THE SPORTSMAN



FRANK RICHARDS



'IT'S ODD HOW FELLOWS IN DISTRESS MAKE A
BEE-LINE FOR COKER.'

BUNTER THE SPORTSMAN

By
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Illustrated by
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CHAPTER 1

TO GO OR NOT TO GO

'A JOY-RIDE?'

'Just that!' Vernon-Smith nodded.

'At midnight?' exclaimed Harry Wharton.

'Precisely.'

The Bounder of Greyfriars laughed. Harry Wharton and Co. stared. The Famous Five had finished 'prep' and congregated in No. 1 Study when Vernon-Smith sauntered in to join them - and make this startling proposition!

At midnight, the Removites would be in their dormitory and fast asleep. That was expected and almost invariably occurred. No one could order them all to be asleep, if for any reasons some of them couldn't - but in the dormitory they were certainly all expected to be. To be out, taking a joy-ride in a car, at the 'witching hour' of midnight, was an idea which would have occurred to few of them. It had, apparently, occurred to Herbert Vernon-Smith.

'You utter ass!' said Bob Cherry.

'Going to ask Quelchy for permission?' observed Frank Nugent.

The Bounder laughed.

'Scarcely! I don't want to trouble the old bean-'

'He'd trouble you, if you did,' said Johnny Bull.

'Possibly!' agreed Vernon-Smith, airily. 'School-masters can be narrow-minded. I won't bother him. It's easy - and safe as houses! No need to get the wind up. Will you fellows come? There's room in the car for half-a-dozen - or more!'

'No one here's got the wind-up about that or anything else,' said Harry Wharton, 'but breaking out at midnight to play the giddy ox - that's the limit!'

'Over it!' observed Bob Cherry. 'It'd be the sack, if we were spotted. Don't be such a howling ass!'

'I'm not going to be spotted,' said Vernon-Smith. 'We don't step into the car just outside the gates. The car will be waiting down the road in Friardale Lane!'

'Of all the potty stunts!' observed Johnny Bull. 'Of course, if any of you have cold feet-'

'The cold-feetfulness is not terrific,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, 'but the fatheadfulness of the esteemed Smithy is great.'

'No takers from this study, Smithy,' added Harry Wharton. 'Nor from any other I should think.'

'That's where you're wrong,' replied the Bounder. 'Well, Mauly and I will just have to go alone-'

'Mauly?'

It was a chorus!

The faces in Study No. 1 became grave. What the Bounder chose to do was, after all, his own business, but it was rather a different matter if he had persuaded Lord Mauleverer to join him in this reckless adventure. It was not like Mauly to join up with Vernon-Smith in this kind of thing.

'Mauly won't come!' said Harry Wharton.

'Yes, he will,' retorted the Bounder. 'He's promised to - and you know he always keeps his promises. Stickler for that. You won't talk him out of it!'

'Pretty rotten thing to have talked him into it,' observed Johnny Bull.

'You must have tricked him, somehow.'

'Bow-wow!' retorted the Bounder, cheerfully. 'Sorry you chaps won't join us for a pleasant evening run in the moonlight. Your loss! Not mine or Mauly's.' He turned and left the study. The remaining occupants looked at each other.

'Rather a lark in a way,' said Bob Cherry, 'but-'

'But me no butfulness, as the esteemed Shakespeare said,' added Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'No go!' said Harry Wharton. 'Sounds innocent, however the beaks would look at it - but-'

'Nothing at that hour would sound innocent to them, if they knew it was Smithy's idea,' observed Frank Nugent. 'Not even if Mauly's with him.'

'We must pull him out of it,' stated Wharton, decisively. 'Mauly hasn't been up before the Head yet - and he isn't going to begin now. Come on!' The Famous Five trooped out of Study No. 1. Harry Wharton, the first to emerge, bumped into a fat figure. 'Ow! I say, you fellows-'

'Don't!' observed Johnny Bull.

'Look here-'

'The view isn't good enough,' said Bob Cherry. 'You're a blot on the landscape, Bunter. Remove yourself. We're going to see Mauly.'

'He, he, he!'

'What's funny about that?' demanded Johnny Bull. Bunter cackled again. He seemed to find it amusing that they were on their way to see Mauleverer. Bull looked suspiciously at the fat Owl. Had he been listening at the keyhole of Study No.1, when Vernon-Smith was talking to them just now?

'He, he, he!'

However, there was no time to waste on Bunter.

Wharton continued to lead the way to Study No. 12, in the Remove passage, and opened the door. Lord Mauleverer looked up from an extremely comfortable armchair, in which he was reclining, and raised his eyebrows, slightly, as the Five trooped in, one after another. He smiled, amiably, nevertheless.

'Come in,' he invited.

'We've come,' replied Bob Cherry. 'Sort of deputation?'

'The deputationfulness is terrific, my esteemed Mauly,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Yes,' added Nugent. 'It's to ask you not to be a chump.'

'We've just heard from Smithy,' began Harry Wharton.

'Oh!' Lord Mauleverer looked worried. 'Yes. Beastly bore! Bein' energetic that time of night. No help for it, though.'

'Isn't there?' grunted Johnny Bull. 'Then you'll just have to find some.'

'Look here, Mauly,' began Harry Wharton again. 'It isn't good enough.'

There'll be the most awful row, if you're spotted.'

'Just a harmless run, Smithy says,' observed his lordship. 'Wouldn't have taken it on, if it had been anything else, you know.'

'What do you suppose the Head would think if he knew you'd broken bounds at midnight to go with Smithy, you ass?' demanded Johnny Bull. 'Chap with his reputation? Just a harmless run?' Johnny Bull snorted.

'Couldn't be anythin' else at that hour, could it?' said Lord Mauleverer, benignly. 'No horse-racin' at midnight that I've heard of. Pubs closed too - even if Smithy wanted to take me into 'em. Beastly bore I admit, and a nuisance, but that's the worst of it.'

'It won't be if you're caught,' said Harry Wharton, 'and if you don't like the idea, why go?'

'Fathead!' added Bob Cherry.

'Told Smithy, I would,' replied Lord Mauleverer. 'He said he was gettin' up a motor-run soon and would I join him? Told him I'd be pleased.'

Sounded restful. Asked if he could rely on my not lettin' him down. Said,

of course. Also when was it. Then he said tonight at midnight. Sooner than I'd expected, naturally, but-

'It was a trapfulness,' said Hurree Singh.

'You idiot,' observed Bob Cherry. 'You were got into it under false pretences. That doesn't bind you.'

'No pretences,' said his lordship. 'Motor-run and soon.'

Just that - when I asked Smithy if he couldn't make it some other time - told me no. All arranged. Hoped I wasn't goin' back on my word. Said I wasn't of course. I'm just restin' now, as I won't be havin' so much sleep as usual tonight. So, if you fellows wouldn't mind pushin' off-?' Lord Mauleverer clasped his hands and closed his eyes peacefully. Taking hold of Johnny Bull, who showed signs of wishing to disturb his lordship violently, Harry Wharton led the others outside Study No. 12 and closed the door.

'Look here,' began Johnny Bull, loudly. 'Are we going to stand for this? Smithy will be heading that car for some rotten night-club somewhere-'

'Mauly wouldn't go in with him,' said Bob Cherry.

'Unless Smithy spoofed him some more in some other way,' said Frank Nugent.

'I don't think Smithy is going as far as that,' said Harry Wharton, 'or trying to. Just out for a lark - but it's a rather dangerous one. If you fellows wouldn't mind keeping awake in the dorm rather late too, tonight-'

'What?'

'We might be able to change Mauly's mind by sitting on him.'

Bob Cherry laughed.

'Good!' he observed. 'Neither Smithy nor Mauly could turn off five of us - and Smithy daren't even try to. It would make too much row.'

The Famous Five returned to Study No. 1, chuckling.

Vernon-Smith's midnight motor-run was not going according to plan, if they could help it - and they felt they could.

CHAPTER 2

BUNTER WANTS AN ALARM-CLOCK

'I SAY, you fellows-'

Bunter had placed his fat person in the way of the Famous Five as they went along the Remove passage.

'Don't!' observed Johnny Bull.

'The speech may be silvery, but the silence is the goldenfulness,' added Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Can you lend me-?'

'No!'

'-an alarm-clock?'

'What?'

The fat Owl of the Remove was a persistent borrower of great power. His applications had been widespread; it was said that he had even once managed to borrow a small sum from Fisher T. Fish, which was equivalent to accomplishing one of the harder labours of Hercules! So far, however, his requests had usually been limited to coin of the realm. This was a new departure.

'An alarm-clock? What on earth do you want that for?' demanded Harry Wharton.

It was really quite a mystery. Bunter was usually unwilling to get up at rising-bell, and it was impossible to imagine that he desired to get up earlier.

'Well - I sleep pretty soundly you know-'

'We do!' Nugent observed.

'Beast! Having a good conscience and all that sort of thing. But I might not wake at midnight.'

'Do you want to wake at midnight?' demanded Frank Nugent.

'No - not exactly at midnight!' Bunter looked cautious, 'but I might you know, and-and I-I thought of getting up early for some cricket practice, you see-'

'Fan me!' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'Cricket practice at midnight,' said Harry Wharton. 'You fat ass!'

'When I said midnight I-I meant before rising-bell.'

'Nothing like expressing yourself clearly,' said Nugent, gravely.

'So, if one of you fellows will lend me an alarm-clock-'

'You'll set it for midnight, so that you can get up before rising-bell for cricket practice?' said Bob Cherry.

'Exactly, old chap.'

'You ass!' added Harry Wharton. 'I don't know what idea you have in your fat mind, but if you set off an alarm-clock in the dormitory at midnight, you'll wake everyone - and probably bring up Quelch.'

'Oh, lor!'' Bunter blinked in dismay. 'I-I hadn't thought of that. I'll put it under my pillow. If-if one of you fellows will lend me one-'

'Alarm-clocks aren't part of school equipment,' said Johnny Bull. 'We haven't one to lend you - and it would be of no use to you, if we had. Come on you fellows!'

'I-I say-'

'I have an alarm-clock,' said Bob Cherry.

'I say, old chap, you aren't such a beast as the other beasts! You'll lend it to me?'

'Yes, if you don't mind fetching it!'

'You ass, Bob!' exclaimed Johnny Bull. 'I didn't know you had such a thing, but if you lend it to this fat chump, and he sets it at midnight for some reason, he'll wake the entire dormitory.'

'Suit Smithy, tonight, perhaps,' said Harry Wharton, 'but-'
'I say, you chaps, don't tell Smithy I've got one!' exclaimed the fat Owl. 'I don't want him to know I'm joining him - I mean that I've accepted his invitation until - if you fellows think I'm going with his party I'm not - see. It's just because I want - some early cricket practice - I'll just run along to your study, Cherry, and get it.'
'So that's why you want an alarm-clock, is it?' exclaimed Wharton.
'I thought he had his fat ear glued to your study keyhole,' said Johnny Bull.
'You utter ass. Smithy may be a fool to think of such a thing, but he isn't fool enough to take you with him,' said Bob Cherry. 'It's no use your trying to wake up at midnight with anyone's alarm-dock. I'll lend you mine, of course-'
'Oh, thanks!'
'You chump, Bob,' said Frank Nugent.
'Because I've promised to,' continued Bob Cherry, 'if you fetched it. It's on the second shelf in a cupboard in my room.'
'Your study?'
'No, my bedroom.'
'What?'
'At home.'
'You silly ass!' roared Bunter. The other Removites chuckled. 'That's about a hundred miles away!'
'More or less,' agreed Bob. cheerfully, 'but you can borrow it, if you like to fetch it-'
'Beast!'
'Oh, and there's one thing more - it won't work!
That's why it's in the cupboard - but you won't mind that, will you?'
'Yah!'
Apparently the offer of that alarm-clock was of no use to Bunter!

CHAPTER 3

SOME DISTURBANCE AT MIDNIGHT

HARRY WHARTON rubbed his eyes.

It was dark in the Remove dormitory. Only the sound of steady breathing from many sleepers broke the silence.

Wharton was sleepy. It had required an effort of willpower to keep awake until midnight. He was determined, however, to do so - and so was Johnny Bull. Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent and Hurree Singh had dozed off but were ready to turn out promptly if they were wanted as they expected to be! It was nearly midnight now. The third quarter after eleven had chimed from the clock tower. Presently Harry Wharton heard a faint sound, as of someone moving cautiously. He sat up in bed, now wide awake.

'Wake up, Mauly!' The Bounder's voice, in a low tone, came through the darkness.

'Oh!' There was a sound of a yawn. 'Gad!' It would appear that Lord Mauleverer had been awakened and was not pleased at being so. 'Oh! All right. I say-'

'Quiet, you ass! Don't wake the whole form!'

There were stirrings in the darkness. They came, Harry Wharton guessed, from the beds of the other members of the Famous Five. He smiled. Lord Mauleverer was not used to embarking on enterprises which it was necessary to keep quiet from the beaks! He had not kept quiet at all.

'Get up, Mauly, you ass!'

'Oh, Yaas! Wow!'

A howl from Lord Mauleverer echoed through the dormitory.

'I say, you fellows, what - oh, lor', is it midnight?'

An alarm-clockless Bunter had gone to sleep. Nevertheless, determined to join that midnight expedition of Vernon-Smith's he had gone to sleep in his clothes. It was very likely that he would have continued to sleep in them had it not been for Lord Mauleverer's howl.

'Mauly, you utter idiot!' hissed the Bounder. 'Do you want to wake everyone? Come along - and be quiet!'

'Ow! Can't! I'm bein' sat upon!'

'What?'

'Mauly's being sat upon,' replied Harry Wharton's voice, quietly, 'by five of us - and he'll continue being sat upon until you give up that fatheaded idea of yours-'

'You silly, meddling fool!'

'The same to you,' replied Bob Cherry's voice cheerfully. 'Coming to meddle with us and turn us off Mauly's bed?'

'That would make a row which might wake Quelch.' said Nugent.

'You could ask the esteemed Quelch to join the excellent midnight motor-run,' added the voice of Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

There was the sound of chuckles in the darkness.

Several more of the juniors were awake now.

'Or you could give up being a fool, and take your clothes off and get back to bed while you've got the chance,' added Johnny Bull.

There was enough light coming through the windows to show that the Bounder was dressed, although no one had observed that the Owl of the Remove, also fully dressed, was lingering by the dormitory door.

'Chuck it, Smithy, old man,' came the conciliatory tones of Bob Cherry.

'You can see it's no go now. Much better to admit it, and go to bed.'

Vernon-Smith breathed hard. He knew that Bob Cherry and the rest of the Famous Five were right. Yet he could not bring himself to admit it. In

the words of Ovid, he could justly have told himself 'I see the better, and I approve it; I follow the worst'.

'Mauly-give those fools the slip and make a rush for it. I'm waiting by the door.'

A smothered gurgle came in reply. It might have been more than a smothered gurgle had Bob Cherry's hand not intervened over Lord Mauleverer's mouth.

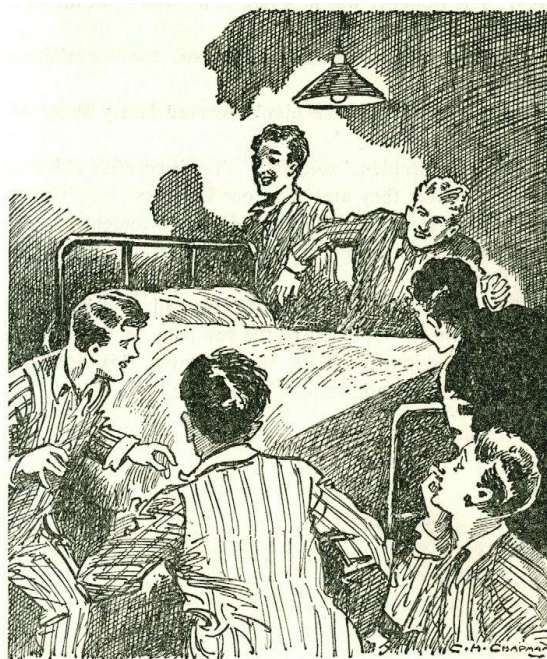
'Hold him, you chaps!' It was Johnny Bull speaking from the neighbourhood of Lord Mauleverer's bed. The bed was creaking wildly. His lordship was, evidently, making a last effort to keep his promise. The Bounder listened. Was he managing to get away?

He saw a form close by his in the darkness, and turned and grabbed a sleeved arm.

'Oh, good! So you've got away? Come on - follow me - and not a word.'

Vernon-Smith pulled his companion after him, never for one moment doubting that Lord Mauleverer had escaped from his captors and was now accompanying him. The fact that the dim figure in the darkness, whom he was guiding by a sleeve-hold, was that of Bunter, the Owl of the Remove, did not, naturally, occur to him.

In the Remove dormitory Lord Mauleverer had given up the struggle. It had dawned upon him that, even if he escaped from his bed, he could not have made for the door and joined the Bounder for that midnight excursion, clad in nothing but pyjamas! The Famous Five had been determined not to let him get up, and would be still more determined not to stand by, peacefully, while he clothed himself. True, Smithy had suggested that he turned in ready dressed - an idea which Bunter overheard and followed - but Lord Mauleverer had been too fastidious to do that.



THE FLASH OF AN ELECTRIC TORCH SHONE ON VERNON-SMITH'S BED. IT WAS EMPTY!

'It's no go, Smithy,' came the voice of Bob Cherry again. 'Pax all round now and back to bed? What about it?'

There was no reply.

'What about you, Mauly?'

'We don't mind sitting on you all night, if you don't agree,' added Johnny Bull.

'Oh, gad! All right! Pax! Sorry Smithy. Case of *force majeure!*'

'Has that ass gone out of dorm?' exclaimed Harry Wharton, as there was still no reply. 'Let's see!' The flash of an electric torch, discreetly held, shone on the Remove doorway, and then on Vernon-Smith's bed. It was empty!

'The ass!'

The torch-light flickered over the length of the dormitory. The Bounder was nowhere to be seen - but the light disclosed another empty bed.

'Bunter! Has that fat idiot gone, too?' exclaimed Johnny Bull.

'Smithy wouldn't take him,' observed Harry Wharton, in perplexity, 'but-'

'Not our problem,' said Bull. 'Can't go after either of them, wherever they are. Not our business - ours was to keep Mauly from making a fool of himself tonight. We've done that! I'm turning in now. You fellows had better do the same!'

The Yorkshire junior made for his bed, resolutely, and climbed into it. The rest of the company looked at each other and grinned. Then they followed his example. There was really nothing else to be done.

CHAPTER 4

A MISTAKE IN THE DARK

'QUIET! Keep hold of me!'

The Bounder whispered the word in the lowest of whispers. He and his companion were now in the pitch darkness of the dormitory landing. He headed for the top of the stairs. Vernon-Smith had gone out that way in the darkness before. A hand grasped his coat-sleeve. Still unconscious of whose hand it was, he began to descend the stairs.

It was necessary to be very cautious. Most of Greyfriars was, undoubtedly, in bed and asleep, but some of the masters might be working late. Mr. Quelch frequently did on that monumental work of his, *The History of Greyfriars*. Prefects did sometimes. However, all seemed quiet. Apparently no one had been aroused by any recent noises from the Remove dormitory. Leading his companion, who, he still thought, was Lord Mauleverer, Vernon-Smith arrived on the ground floor.

'Not a sound, Mauly, old man!' he whispered again. Bunter suppressed a chuckle. He was not very intelligent, as Mr. Quelch had frequently remarked, but he was intelligent enough to know that silence was now essential. It was not only necessary to remain unobserved by the authorities, but also by Vernon-Smith. Observation by the latter would come soon enough, and the Owl of the Remove could not help feeling that the Bounder might have forgotten his invitation to join that midnight party. He might, too, be quite annoyed when he found that he had not been followed by Mauleverer, as he seemed to think.

Once outside, Bunter had no doubt that he would be able to attach himself to Vernon-Smith's party. Smithy simply could not risk making a row about a case of mistaken identity, in the vicinity of the school at that hour. A little tact - the Owl of the Remove prided himself on his tact - and Smithy would have to put up with him. He, in his turn, was prepared to put up with Smithy, and still more with the grub with which Smithy would, undoubtedly, have provisioned the party.

'Wait a moment!'

They were in utter darkness, and not a sound could be heard.

'Oh-!'

'Quiet!'

Bunter decided to remain quiet. It was unlike his usual practice, and rather difficult for him, but he realised that if Smithy found out who he was now, he might simply leave him, and go back to the dormitory! The Owl positively quivered at the idea of having to return alone in the dark! He might - in fact, almost certainly would - bump into something, and make a noise, which would waken Quelchy!

Vernon-Smith took hold of his sleeve.

'Ow!'

'Quiet, you ass! There's a window open here. Come along!'

Bunter followed as his sleeve was pulled. A breeze on his fat face told him that he was near an open window, but the night outside was so dark that he could see nothing. Vernon-Smith spoke in a low tone just by him.

'I'm getting out first. Then you follow me. Then go over to those trees by the gate and wait for me. I have to stay and shut this window. And don't speak a word!'

Vernon-Smith slipped through the window. Bunter hesitated. Dropping out of a window, even a ground-floor window, in the darkness was a considerably greater task for the Owl of the Remove than it was for Smithy! However, there was no help for it. It must be done, if that

midnight feed was to materialise. He slithered through the window and sat down with a bump.

'Ow!

'Quiet, you idiot! Do you want to rouse the beaks? Push over to those trees-quick. Get up that oak by the wall. Car's waiting down the road on the left. Get on, Mauly, for goodness' sake!'

Bunter scrambled to his feet and went across the quad. He knew that oak by the wall. He knew that Smithy, and other such kindred spirits, had negotiated it many times. Bunter had never negotiated it, and he doubted if he could. Gasping, he tried to find footholds and handholds.

'Oh,lor!'

There was a low laugh behind him.

'Easy to see you've never broken bounds at midnight before, Mauly! Put your foot here!' The Owl of the Remove felt his trousers-leg held and guided to a foothold. 'Pull yourself up by that branch. Now swing yourself over the wall, and jump!'

A smothered gasp came from the fat Owl, as he landed on the turf bordering Friardale Lane. Then he scrambled out of the way. Smithy would be coming over, and he did not want Smithy to drop upon him. There were the lights of a car down the road, as the Bounder had said. Bunter ambled towards them. There would certainly be some awkward observations made about the case of mistaken identity very shortly, and it would be better that they should be made in the presence of the chauffeur. Vernon-Smith would be less likely to resort to any rough measures if the chauffeur were there.

The gleam of headlights came through the dark from a handsome Rolls-Royce. Bunter heard a voice before him.

'You, sir?'

'Yes, Johnson! We'll get going.' The Bounder, at Bunter's side now, opened the door of the car. 'Hop in, Mauly! - why? - what? - You fat ass, what are you doing here?'

Vernon-Smith gazed at Bunter's face, revealed in the car's lights. He stared at him with almost unbelieving eyes. Up to that moment, he had not doubted that it was Lord Mauleverer who was his companion. Now, he saw Bunter - and no signs of Mauleverer!

'I-I say,' gasped the Owl of the Remove, 'Mauly couldn't come you know - but I managed it. Rely on me, old fellow!'

'You?' Vernon-Smith's voice hissed through the darkness. 'Was it you who was with me all the time? You fat fool! I-' Bunter's little eyes blinked in alarm, as the Bounder clenched his fists.

NOT ACCORDING TO PLAN

'I-I SAY, Smithy-'

Bunter was beginning to doubt the wisdom of accepting the invitation he had never had for that midnight party. Vernon-Smith looked almost dangerous. Bunter was quite alarmed.

'You fat fool - shut up!'

The Bounder glared at the fat Owl. Johnson, the chauffeur of the hired car, watched in silence. Vernon-Smith was strongly tempted to boot the fat Removite along Friardale Lane, but he realised that for his own sake, it would not do.

Bunter would not be likely to take any such treatment, placidly. He would, undoubtedly, yell loudly - and they were much too near Greyfriars for any midnight yelling. The porter's lodge was close; noises, such as a booted Bunter would utter, might even wake Gosling, the gate-porter. Belated and delayed callers at the gates of Greyfriars, who had vainly rung the night bell, had been heard to declare that the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus, the Sleeping Beauty and Rip van Winkle could, none of them, compete with Gosling, for soundness of sleep. However, he did wake sometimes. The Bounder decided not to boot Bunter along Friardale Lane. Vernon-Smith was tempted, at the very least, to tell Bunter to go back to the Remove dormitory - but could he? The wall was the first difficulty - Bunter could not climb it unaided. Then the entry into the school by the window, and the journey in the darkness upstairs - the fat Owl would certainly make some noise, which might bring someone, probably a master, on the scene to discover that he was out of bounds. He would be escorted back to the dormitory, where the discovery would also be made that Vernon-Smith, too, was out of bounds.

Lord Mauleverer - or Harry Wharton and Co. acting for him - had let him down. Vernon-Smith realised that he must either go on his own - or with Bunter. There was also no 'catch' in taking a midnight run all on his own - the Removites would laugh loudly when they heard of that! Better make the best of a bad job and take Bunter.

'You fat ass!' he growled. 'You idiot-'

'I say. Smithy-'

'Get in the car!'

Bunter's face brightened up. He was to have that midnight joy-ride after all - and, what was more to the point, another supper. Smithy would almost certainly have something good to eat in that car!

'Oh, thank you, Smithy! You'll find me much better company than Mauly. He's stodgy, you know. Not go-ahead as we are! I'm a sportsman - Ow!' He stopped as the Bounder pushed him into the car.

'There's a basket beside you, with some tuck in it. Get eating and shut up!'

It was difficult to get Bunter to shut up, but the prospect of eating usually did it.

'Get going, Johnson. Anywhere! Other side of Wapshot. Let her rip!'

The Bounder sat back with tight lips, as the car sped forward. He glanced at Bunter once or twice. Bunter looked at nothing but the hamper beside him. He made inroads deep into it and became very busy.

The sky had now cleared and it was a glorious summer's night. A drive at high speed through the deserted moonlit countryside would, in ordinary circumstances, have been enjoyable enough - but the circumstances were not ordinary. Vernon-Smith did not seem to be enjoying them. He glanced at Bunter again.

'Faster, Johnson!'

'Yes, sir.'

The car leaped forward. It had been doing sixty miles an hour; it now touched seventy. Bunter finished eating, temporarily perhaps, but for the moment, he had had enough. He was feeling sleepy, too, but as he looked up and saw the pace at which the car was going, sleepiness was driven out by alarm.

'I-I say, Smithy-'

'Don't - I don't want to talk to you.'

The Owl's peculiar status as a guest may not have entitled him to the usual courtesies from a host. In any case, he wasn't getting them!

'I-I say - ain't We going too fast?'

'No! We may be presently.'

'Oh, lor'!'

It was, as a matter of fact, dangerous driving in a winding lane. The Bounder laughed. It was exhilarating, to one of his temperament, to take risks, especially at an hour when he should have been asleep in the Remove dormitory. Insisting on a speed which frightened Bunter also gave him a chance to get square with the fat Owl.

'Oh, crikey! Oh, I say, stop!'

'Try and touch eighty, Johnson!'

'Very good, sir.'

The car touched eighty! Johnson seemed to have that confidence in his own complete control of the car, which all drivers at high speeds have - until something happens to shake it!

'Ow! Oh,lor'. Stoppit!'

The Bounder's anger had left him now; he was enjoying Bunter's fright. The road surface of the lane was not meant for such a speed. The car bumped and jolted. Bunter was also bumped and jolted. The Bounder, of course, felt the bumps and jolts as well, but he did not seem to mind. The Owl of the Remove minded very much.

'Smithy! You beast! Stop!'

'No!'

But a stop was coming - and it came suddenly! The car was racing along, when Johnson suddenly applied his brakes. Ahead of them, almost across the narrow lane, was a heavy wooden gate!

It should have been closing the entrance to a field but someone - a careless farm - hand or a careless trespasser - had omitted to fasten it. It had swung across the lane.

Crash!

The next moment the end of the world seemed to have come to Bunter. That sudden jamming of the brakes on a rough road at high speed had done it; the car skidded wildly, and ran up a grassy bank and turned over on its side. Before the two Removites knew what was happening they were sprawling together in a heap, and the car was at a standstill.

'Ow! Help!'

Vernon-Smith struggled up, gasping. One of the doors of the car was above his head. He pushed at it and as he did so, it opened. The face of Johnson looked down at him. He seemed uninjured.

'You all right, sir?'

'Yes. Help me out!'

With a hand from the chauffeur, the Bounder climbed out and landed in the road. The yells of Bunter came from inside the car!

'Help! Ow! My neck's broken! Oh, crikey! Beast! Landing a chap in this!

Help, you rotter!'

Vernon-Smith stared down savagely into the car. It was likely enough that the Owl of the Remove had received damages in such a crash, though judging from his noisy complaints, he would seem not to be severely hurt.

Although he was not without concern for Bunter, he was extremely concerned at the possible consequences to himself of an injury to the fat Owl. If he were hurt enough to need medical attention, there would be no prospect of hiding this midnight escapade. It would be known at the school, and there would be a grim interview with the Head to follow.

'You fat idiot! Are you hurt?'

'Oh, yes! I'm killed - I mean nearly killed. All my bones are broken.

Yaroooooh! My legs-'

'Get on your feet, you ass, and we'll help you out!'

'I can't - Oh, dear! Oh, lor'! I've trod on the cake-'

'Come out - or stay where you are and be blown to you!' snapped Vernon-Smith.

'Ow! I think I can get out. Help me, you beast!' Bunter had found that he could struggle to his feet.

Treading on the remaining contents of the hamper, which had spilled in the smash, the fat Owl held up his arms to the door above him. Vernon-Smith took hold of one of them and Johnson the other. With a great heave they brought out Billy Bunter. Jam and clotted cream from crushed jam-tarts and cream puffs smeared his trousers, and, in fact, a considerable area of the fat Removite. That hamper had, apparently, cushioned the shock to him when the car turned over. Thanks to that and his own good fortune, the fat Owl was uninjured, but jammy, sticky, frightened and many miles from Greyfriars.

CHAPTER 6

STRANDED!

'OH, lor'! Oh, dear! I've broken my spinal column - and both legs - and my arm. Ow! You beast, Smithy! Ow!'

The complaints of William George Bunter were frequent and painful and free, as he sat on a grassy bank and groaned, but Vernon-Smith took no notice of them. It was apparent that the Owl of the Remove had received no serious injury. He had been shaken and had received a number of bumps and bruises. The Bounder, too, had received a number of bumps and bruises, but, unlike Bunter, refrained from complaining about them. The three occupants of the car had been lucky to escape without any serious injury. The car itself had not been so lucky.

Vernon-Smith watched the chauffeur anxiously. Johnson's expression, as he examined the car, was not promising. It looked as if that good Rolls-Royce car was no longer a going concern. And the Bounder knew that they must have covered about twenty miles, before the crash.

Twenty miles from the school, at nearly one o'clock in the morning, was a disturbing situation, even to the Bounder. At such an hour, in such a remote locality, there was little, if any, prospect of getting a lift back to Greyfriars. Vernon-Smith was tough and hardy, but a walk of twenty miles was a dismaying thing to consider - and as for Bunter! He looked at the fat Owl, sitting on the grass bank and still rubbing and complaining. How long would it take Bunter to cover twenty miles, if he could cover them at all?

The chauffeur looked round at Vernon-Smith. 'No good, sir!'

'You can't shift her?'

'No, sir!' The chauffeur shook his head. 'No good if we did. I'm afraid. She's crocked properly. I shall have to get help from the garage and get her towed in tomorrow!'

'Tomorrow?' exclaimed the Bounder. 'There must be a call-box somewhere! You could phone 'em and say there's a breakdown, and will they send another car?' The chauffeur shook his head.

'I don't know any place where I could phone nearer than Wapshot, sir - unless there's a private house nearby, and we could knock them up. No good anyway, the garage will be closed for the night; we're short-staffed. I was to take this car back to my home, and return it in the morning. I live in Courtfield.'

'What on earth am I going to do tonight, then?'

The man could not answer. The car was crocked - a circumstance for which a heavy bill would, in due course, no doubt be rendered to Vernon-Smith. In the meantime, that was that, and he had no suggestion to offer.

'How far have we come?' demanded the Bounder.

'Twenty miles by road. I'd say, sir. If you walked back across country it'd be about eight from here.' Johnson evidently desired to be helpful. The Bounder looked as if he might be good for a substantial tip. 'Of course, if you stayed here, sir, until I can get to a telephone and let me tell the police, they might send a police car to take you-'

'No!' The Bounder shook his head vigorously. To call for the assistance of a police car to take them back to the school at that time of the night would be giving the affair a publicity which could easily come to the ears of Dr. Locke. The police would take the number of the wrecked car - and possibly, his name, and Bunter's as witnesses!

Vernon-Smith remained deep in thought. If they were to get back to Greyfriars, they must walk those eight miles across country. Most of the route he knew well, and by the light of the moon, which was now high, it

would be reasonably easy going by the field-paths and through the woods. What, however, about Bunter?

Bunter must come with him, or any hope of tonight's enterprise remaining unknown to the school authorities would be gone. Yet the very mention of an eight-mile walk back to the school was enough to make Bunter howl with alarm.

'You fat ass!' he murmured, gritting his teeth. 'I - say, Smithy. Ow, I've broken both arms! Tell that man to put the car the right way up, and let's get back. Ow! All the tuck's spoiled!'

'Fool! '

The Bounder glared at the fat Owl. Bunter had no right to be there; he hadn't been invited - and had it not been for a desire to frighten him by the speed of the car, there would have been no accident. There would have been no eight miles to walk back across country. Vernon-Smith smiled grimly. Bunter had retribution coming to him!

'Car's cracked!' he said. 'We've got to walk back. Come on! No time to lose!'

'Walk!' Bunter sat up, and temporarily ceased his complaints. 'Get the car going-'

'Car can't go,' said the Bounder. 'Didn't you hear me say it was crocked? We're leaving you now, Johnson. Do what you think best about the car! I'll be hearing from the garage. Come on, Bunter!'

'Walk back to Greyfriars? Ow!' The Owl seemed, at last, to have got it into his fat head that the car wasn't going to take them back because it couldn't. 'I can't walk. It's miles and miles, Smithy!'

'About eight! Come on!'

'Eight miles? Ow, you rotter! Inviting a chap out and expecting him to walk home. Eight miles! Oh, lor'. I can't! I won't!'

'Like to camp here for the night?' inquired the Bounder, unpleasantly.

'Ow! Get another car! At Bunter Court,' continued the Owl, indignantly, 'when a guest's car breaks down, we get another for him!'

'You aren't at Bunter Court now - and never were, as it doesn't exist,' retorted Vernon-Smith. He had heard of that palatial establishment before; it was neither the time nor the place to hear of it again. In fact there was no time or place for him or any other Greyfriars man to hear about Bunter Court! 'There's no other car to be had, you fat idiot! Care to wait here for the Head's to pick you up in the morning? It could do the round trip for you - take you to the Head - wait outside while he's flogging and sacking you - and drive you back to the station on the way to Bunter Villa.'

'Ow! Beast!'

'It's that or coming along with me now.' Vernon-Smith swung round, and began to walk away.

He proceeded slowly at first and then looked back. It was no use going back to the school without Bunter. He saw that the fat Owl had, apparently, realised that there was no help for it, for he had scrambled to his feet, and was coming after him. Vernon-Smith waited, impatiently.

'Come on!'

'Beast! Oh, dear! I say, Smithy, old chap-'

'Don't! Save your breath for the walk!'

Bunter gasped and groaned and trotted on. Deeply and bitterly was he regretting, at that moment, that he had ever accepted that invitation of the Bounder's - which hadn't been given to him - to come to a midnight party! It was hard on a sporty fellow like himself.

BUNTER HAS HAD ENOUGH!

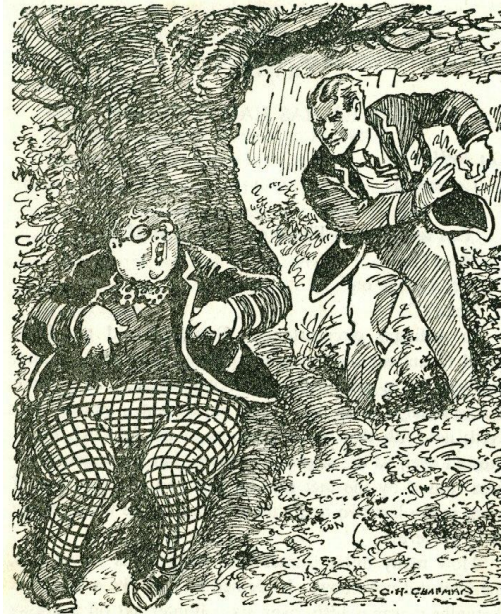
'OH, lor'!!'
 'Come on!'
 'I can't.'
 'You fat chump - I'll go on without you.'
 'Beast!'
 'Get a move on.'
 'Shan't!'

In ordinary circumstances, Bunter would not have dared to answer the angry Bounder in that way. These, however, were not ordinary circumstances. They were extraordinary ones, and most unpleasant. Bunter was tired; not with that usual tiredness of the fat Owl, which showed itself at the slightest exertion, but a genuine tiredness caused by the fact that he had had to exert himself more in the last two hours than he had in the whole of the last two terms.

How many miles Bunter had dragged his weary legs, the Owl did not know. It seemed to him like a hundred. Actually it was a little over six.

Bunter sat on a grassy bank and leaned against a tree.

Vernon-Smith eyed him savagely. The Bounder, himself, was tired, but he was as hard as nails; it was not his way to give in. It was intensely exasperating to him thus to be burdened with Bunter, but there was no help for it.



BUNTER SAT ON A GRASSY BANK AND LEANED AGAINST A TREE.
 VERNON-SMITH EYED HIM SAVAGELY

He felt like 'booting' him, but could see that even that would not have shifted the hapless Owl in his present condition; he really was 'done'.
 'Oh, you fat fool!'

Vernon-Smith looked at his wrist-watch. Even if the joy-ride had taken place according to schedule, he had intended to be back inside Greyfriars soon after one o'clock. Now, it was three, and they were still more than two miles from the school. He glanced at Bunter again. At this rate - Bunter's rate of progress - it looked as if the early summer dawn would be lighting the sky by the time they reached Greyfriars.

The Bounder gritted his teeth. He must wait. To go back without Bunter was futile; it meant discovery of the reckless midnight adventure. It was a warm night. Bunter, leaning against the tree, was almost asleep. It was certain that, if left, he would sleep till morning, and long past rising-bell at Greyfriars. He must move presently, and go on - but it seemed hopeless to get him to do so without a rest. Vernon-Smith decided that he must be given that rest - but it would be the shortest possible! 'Bunter! You can rest for quarter of an hour!'

The only answer was a loud snore. Bunter was asleep. Vernon-Smith leaned on a tree-trunk, his hand in his pockets, and scowled at the moonlit landscape. He was badly in need of rest and sleep himself. The scene before him was a beautiful one, but the Bounder was in no mood to appreciate its beauty.

The gleam of the Sark under the moon was before his eyes. On the other side were woods and, at a little distance beyond them, was the bulk of a large building, which he knew to be Hogben Grange, the residence of Sir Julius Hogben, a governor of the school.

A little further away he could see the old tower of Greyfriars, outlined against the night sky - so near and yet so far!

They had been some miles the other side of Wapshot when the car smash had occurred. The enforced walk back had brought Vernon-Smith and Bunter within sight of the school, but with two miles to walk to get to it. It would be necessary to go nearly to Courtfield, before coming to a bridge which could be crossed.

Vernon-Smith gritted his teeth, as he gazed at Greyfriars, a bare half-mile away, with the Sark in between! Then his interest quickened, and he leaned forward.

'A boat?'

He walked to the bank of the river. Yes - it was indeed a boat, tied up on the other side, and with two oars in it. What a rowing-boat was doing at that time of night, away from any boat-house, and secured to an overhanging branch, the Bounder did not stop to inquire. If he could get hold of it, and save that two-mile walk-

Rapidly he slipped off his clothes and waded into the Sark. The water was cold, but by no means unpleasant on a summer's night. He climbed out, unfastened the boat and, getting in again, paddled silently across. Superficially drying himself with a handkerchief, he swiftly got into his clothes again, and sped to the sleeping Bunter.

'Here! Wake up, fatty!' He shook the sleeping Owl, violently.

'Ow! Leggo! T'ain't rising-bell-'

'If you don't wake up and get going, you'll never hear another,' said the Bounder, grimly. 'Wake up!' He shook the fat Removite again. 'I've got a boat to cross the river - and save you walking miles and miles-'

'Ow! Leggo! Stop shaking me!'

'Get to your feet now - quick - and we'll be back in the dorm and you in your bed in fifteen minutes - and - I'll stand you the best feed you ever had-'

'Oh, lor'! Really, Smithy!' The fat Owl stumbled to his feet and swayed, as he was still heavy with sleep. 'Where-?'

'Tomorrow night - no-tonight.' The Bounder remembered that it was the early morning of another day. 'Come on!' Half leading and half pushing, he brought Bunter to the brink of the Sark, and the boat. 'Get in - quick - but careful - and I'll row across.' Bunter stumbled and sat down heavily in the boat with a bump which threatened to sink it.

'Ow!'

'Shut up!'

The Bounder took the oars and rowed quickly across.

He was feeling much more cheerful. The finding - and borrowing - of that boat had been like discovering corn in Egypt. It had saved him two miles round the long bend in the Sark and nearly to Courtfield and back - with the additional labour of pushing Bunter along them!

The bows of the boat touched the opposite bank and he sprang on to the towpath.

'Jump out, fatty - or crawl out, if you don't feel like jumping - but hurry up!' He hauled the fat Removite on to the bank. Bunter gasped and staggered.

'Push along Oak Lane, old fat man!' The Bounder was comparatively good-humoured, now that the end of his troubles seemed in sight. 'I'll follow you as soon as I've tied up this boat. Don't sit down and rest or you'll go to sleep again! '

'Oh, lor!' Oh, dear! I'd rather wait for you, Smithy-'

'Don't! Get going! I'll be with you in a jiffy!' Vernon-Smith waved to the fat Owl, who groaned and turned to stumble along the lane. To the right were the grounds surrounding the 'Three Fishers', a hostelry strictly out of bounds to all Greyfriars men, but which Smithy, nevertheless, knew well. To his left was the Popper Court Estate and beyond that the grounds of Hogben Grange.

The Bounder turned to fasten up the boat, as he had found it. It was curious who could have left it there at that time of night, but apart from the fact that it was 'the right thing to do' he wished no inquiries about lost boats so near the school.

As he held the rope in his hand to tie the first knot in it, there came the sound of a shot.

'What?'

His first thought was of poachers - but it was an odd time of year for the escapades of poachers, who, moreover, did not usually use firearms so near a house. If he was not mistaken, that sound came from the vicinity of Hogben Grange!

'Not my business, anyway,' he muttered to himself.

As he turned again to secure the boat, there came another sound - that of running feet - along Oak Lane. Someone was approaching him!

There was no time to go after Bunter and warn him to take cover and keep quiet; he would run into whoever was coming. There was no time to secure the boat! Dropping the rope, Vernon-Smith made for the nearest clump of trees. As he did so, he saw the boat eddy away from the bank and get into the current.

Vernon-Smith peered from the trees.

He saw a sharp-featured man running, and limping as he ran. It was no one known to Smithy, or by whom Smithy could be known, but he did not look the type to be encountered in any lonely spot late at night. He came down to where the boat had been, then stopped and uttered a curse.

Apparently it had been his boat and he had come to resume possession of it - but that boat was now adrift well on the way to Courtfield, and would, probably, end in Pegg Bay, or broken in pieces on the Shoulder. The man shrugged. Then he turned, and limped back along Oak Lane.

Simultaneously, the Bounder became aware of the sound of numerous voices from the direction of the estate of Hogben Grange, and that the house itself, as he could see through the trees, was showing many lights from its windows.

A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

THE Bounder thought quickly. The many lights in the windows of Hogben Grange, at that hour in the morning when the place would, usually, be in darkness - the shot he had heard, and the man who had made for where the boat had been - it looked as if a burglary had occurred, or been attempted, at the Grange. Apparently the man had not encountered Bunter along Oak Lane; why, Vernon-Smith could not understand.

Now the man had gone back along the lane towards, it would seem, people who would capture him, if the sound of those voices, coming nearer, indicated anything. That was mysterious, but the position, as Vernon-Smith realised, was highly dangerous for himself.

If Bunter were seen by people who would know him as a Greyfriars boy - and there might be many such in the Grange, so near the school - that was disaster. Getting back himself would only delay retribution for a few hours.

'Might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb,' murmured Vernon-Smith, and sped up Oak Lane. He would get hold of the fat Owl, and hide with him, if there were any chance of doing so. He wished that he had not sent Bunter up the lane, but it was too late now to wish that!

'What?'

Smithy had turned a corner, silently, and halted at a surprising sight. The Owl was lying on his back against a tree-trunk on the edge of the lane, fast asleep. Bending over him was the limping man, apparently rifling Bunter's pockets. As the Bounder stopped, the man straightened himself, and turned and went on again up the lane. The sound of voices was now quite near. Vernon-Smith repressed a desire to go after him. It would be most unwise to be seen by anyone who might be coming. The man might have robbed Bunter, but Vernon-Smith doubted that possibility. To the best of his knowledge, the Owl's sole wealth, at that moment, consisted of a French penny, but even if he had been robbed of more, now was not the time to seek redress for it.

'Ha! Good gracious! He's here! Seize him, James, Tom! Now, you rascal!' It was the voice of Sir Julius Hogben, the owner of Hogben Grange, and a governor of Greyfriars.

'What does this assault mean, sir?' This, Smithy supposed, was the voice of the limping man. 'How dare you tell your servants to lay hands on me? I'll have the law on you!'

'You'll have the law?-'

Vernon-Smith ignored the dispute, which seemed to be developing, and sped towards Bunter. What it meant he did not know, but it offered a few minutes' respite. He knelt beside the fat Owl and, pressing one hand over his mouth, shook him with the other.

'Oooch! Grooch!'

'Quiet! Not a sound! Wake up - and come quick!' hissed Vernon-Smith in a whisper. With one hand still over Bunter's mouth, he urged him to the shelter of the trees behind them. Just within the wood was a hollow filled with muddy water. Smithy stopped on its edge.

Bunter squirmed loose from his restraining hands.

'I-I say, Smithy. I'm tired! Oh, lor!'

'Shut up!'

They could still hear the voices in Oak Lane.

'This is the man who broke in. Sir Julius. See - he's been winged!'

'I have certainly been hit by a charge from someone's gun.' It was the limping man speaking again. 'Even if I were trespassing, you had no right to shoot at me-'

'Trespassing? *Inside* my house - and my ruby gone?'

'We'll search him, sir.'

'You have no right to search me. However, as you seem to have lost something - and as I wish to show you that I have nothing to do with any theft in your house - you may do so, here and now.'

'I certainly will - James-'

The voices died into silence. Evidently the suspected man was being searched. Vernon-Smith chafed with impatience. With ten uninterrupted minutes, he could be back with Bunter in the Remove dormitory - but he dared not move yet, and risk their being seen by Sir Julius Hogben! He heard a grunt.

'You have thrown it away, you villain - or handed it to a confederate!'

'I know nothing of any jewel, which you say has been stolen. Would anyone take the trouble to steal it only to throw it away? And I have no confederate. And now I must go.'

'You will remain here until the arrival of the police from Courtfield. My house has been broken into, and a valuable jewel - an heirloom - stolen. You were seen running away from the vicinity. James - Tom - take this fellow back to the house, and keep him securely. I will follow you.' There was a sound of retreating footsteps. Evidently James and Tom, servants of Sir Julius Hogben, had gone - but was Sir Julius still there? As the Bounder listened intently, Bunter squirmed from his grasp, and got his mouth free from the restraining hand.

'I say. Smithy-'

'Quiet, you fool!'

'Who's there?' It was the staccato voice of Sir Julius. 'Upon my word!' He had heard them, and was coming nearer.

All seemed lost, but Vernon-Smith still had nerve enough for a desperate move. As Sir Julius approached, he pulled out his handkerchief, tied it across his face, and swiftly turned Bunter to face the other way.

'Oh, lor!'

Sir Julius turned at the sound. The old baronet did not lack pluck. Discovering two people whom he thought must be accomplices of the man who had robbed his house, he shot out a hand, and grabbed Bunter by the jacket collar. Almost simultaneously the Bounder's fist landed on Sir Julius's jaw. As he staggered, Vernon-Smith gave him a push. There was a tearing sound from Bunter's collar, and Sir Julius fell into the muddy hollow.

'You scoundrel! James - Tom-'

Vernon-Smith acted quickly. James and Tom might be too far away to have heard Sir Julius call, but they might not be! It was now or never, if he was to escape the consequences of that night's escapade. He grabbed Bunter's arm, and pulled him on to the roadway, and then to the cover of trees the other side.

'You fat idiot - come on! It's our last chance. And if you don't want to see the Head in the morning - keep quiet!'

Stumbling and gasping, the fat Owl allowed himself to be hurried along. Presently they came to the wall encircling the old Priory ruins. Vernon-Smith climbed over and hauled Bunter after him. Then he made for the cloisters. They were now in the grounds of Greyfriars. It had been a narrow squeak - a very narrow squeak indeed - but Vernon-Smith felt satisfied.

'Here, Bunter - we get in by this window. You'll be safe in the dorm now in a few minutes.'

'I say, Smithy, I'm awfully hungry.'

'Breakfast soon,' replied the Bounder, cheerfully. 'Now - in with you! I'll take your hand, and lead the way. Not a sound, and say nothing to anyone about the breakdown, or about those people in the lane. You had a nice run, and that's that! If anything gets out about this, it's the Head's birch, and the sack!'

BUNTER KEEPS A SECRET

HARRY WHARTON opened his eyes. The Remove dormitory was becoming lighter with the early summer dawn, but it was still fairly dark, and he could see little. Some noises had awakened him.

While he lay still, he heard a fierce whisper. 'You fat ass! Keep quiet!' 'I say, Smithy, I bumped into a chair in the darkness. I've hurt my leg. Ow!'

'Shut up!'

'Beast!'

'So you two are back again,' said Harry Wharton, quietly.

'Oh, lor!' Wharton's awake!'

'So will the whole school be, if you aren't quieter, you fat chump!'

'Had a good time?' asked Bob Cherry. Bunter's bumping into the chair, and his subsequent complaints had wakened others besides Harry Wharton.

'Oh! Oh, yes - rather! Oh, dear! Oh, lor!'

'Bunter doesn't sound as if he's enjoyed it,' said the voice of Frank Nugent.

'Oh, I say, Franky, old chap, have you some chocolate or a piece of toffee? I'm famished!'

'Didn't Smithy feed you?' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'Of course, I fed him!' observed the Bounder, tersely, 'but you know the fat Owl can be hungry immediately after any meal.'

'Beast! I've had to walk miles and miles since that smash-and run from all those people, and-'

'Some evening,' came from Harold Skinner's bed. 'What miles and miles? What smash? What people?'

'What's happened, Smithy?' asked Harry Wharton, who had just looked at the luminous dial of his wrist-watch. 'It's past four o'clock!'

'The car broke down,' replied the Bounder, suppressing his intense annoyance. At this rate, if Bunter kept on, the whole of that night's adventures might soon be known - or so much as to be very dangerous.

'Bunter bumped into the rest of the tuck - spread it over his outside, instead of his inside, as usual-'

'Oh, really, Smithy!'

'But I'm going to stand him a good feed tonight - if he doesn't keep on cackling-'

'Oh, thanks, Smithy. I won't say a word about any of it.'

'But what's that about walking miles and miles and running away from people?' exclaimed Harold Skinner.

'No business of yours, Skinner, and you'd better not make it so unless you want your features altered!' said the Bounder. 'We had to walk a bit after the breakdown, if it interests you - and as the thing has to be kept from people, when we-we ran into a late party, we ran a few yards to avoid them-'

'A few yards! We ran all the way from where you hit that chap to the Cloisters, Smithy, Wow! Beast!'

'That's enough from you, Bunter.' said Vernon-Smith, retreating from Bunter's bed-side, after dealing the fat Owl a hefty smack on the ear.

'Wow!'

'What chap did you hit, Smithy?' asked Harold Skinner.

'The answer will be one called Skinner, if you don't shut up!' said the Bounder. 'We've had a long walk back, after a breakdown - and Bunter's imagining things-'

'Beast!'

'And I'm rather tired of them. If he wants to have to imagine the feed I'm going to stand him tonight, he'll keep on. If he wants that feed, he'll shut up and let me get to sleep.'

'I guess that sounds like bribery and corruption.' observed Fisher T. Fish, who had also been awakened.

'If anyone ought to know what those are, you should. Fishy,' retorted the Bounder, 'and if you want to know a bit more here and now, you'll keep on chattering. The same goes for you, Skinner.'

'I say, Smithy, you aren't nearly such a beast as I've always thought. If you'd stand me something of that feast now - I'm frightfully hungry-'

The Bounder made no reply. He climbed into bed and turned his face away.

Bunter, after a grunt, and a rubbing of the ear where Smithy's smack had landed, also rolled into his bed. He was frightfully hungry, but

overriding even that feeling, he was frightfully tired. He felt that he could not have walked many more miles, if he had gone down to Cherry Place in Dorset to fetch Bob Cherry's alarm-clock. It would be a long time, the Owl of the Remove reflected, before he would consent to be Vernon-Smith's guest again, at any midnight party.

BUNTER THE SLUMBEROUS

'BUNTER!'

Latin was the order of the day in the Remove form-room. Every Removite was supposed to be giving his attention to the proceedings of Aeneas and, of course, of Mr. Quelch. There was no doubt that attention wandered as it was wont to do on such occasions, but, under Mr. Quelch's gimlet eye, it did not usually wander far. However, in the case of one member of the form, it had, on this occasion, wandered away altogether. Billy Bunter was asleep.

Harry Wharton had just finished construing '*accipit in Teucros animum mentemque benignam*' - but although the Phoenician queen might have a gentle mind and a gracious purpose towards the Teucrians, it was exceedingly unlikely that the Remove master would develop them towards Bunter if he did not answer!

'Bunter! Continue.'

'Wow!'

Vernon-Smith had managed to give the Owl of the Remove a surreptitious kick.

'Proceed, Bunter, immediately. Line 305-'

'Beast!'

'What?'

'Oh, lor'! Oh, I say!' Dimly Bunter realised that he had applied that epithet to Henry Samuel Quelch! 'I-I didn't - oh, crikey! I didn't mean' - Bunter stopped and gave a prodigious yawn.

'Bunter!' Quelch, although strict, was just. Indeed, he was sometimes too just for the peace of mind of the Remove. He realised that the term 'beast', to whomsoever it might have been directed, had not been applied by Bunter to him. Moreover, he had observed that prodigious yawn, which was followed by another. 'Bunter! What is the matter with you?'

'Ow! Oh, dear! I think I've got sleepy sickness, sir.' There were subdued murmurs and grins in the Remove.

Vernon-Smith scowled. Most of those present knew that Bunter and Vernon-Smith had had very little sleep the previous night, owing to a midnight excursion, which had gone wrong. The hardy Bounder showed few effects from that escapade. Bunter, far from hardy, showed a good many.

'Nonsense, Bunter! Sleeping sickness is a tropical disease, which you are exceedingly unlikely to have caught. Nevertheless-'

Quelch paused. It was not the first time that Bunter had gone to sleep in class, but this time he did seem hardly able to keep awake, even under the form-master's strictures. Moreover, Quelch, at breakfast time, had observed that Bunter was sleepy. It was unheard of for Bunter to be sleepy in the presence of anything to eat.

'Did you have a bad night, Bunter?' he asked, more mildly. There was a kindly side to Quelch's nature, although many Removites denied its existence.

'Oh, no. sir! I mean yes. I had to walk miles and miles.'

The Bounder gritted his teeth and several Removites cast covert glances at him. At this rate, it would not be long before the secret of that midnight ride came out!

'It is evident, Bunter, that your sleep has been disturbed by nightmares. In view of your pernicious habit of eating comestibles, such as sweets and pastries, until a late hour. I do not wonder at it. You had better report to Mrs. Kebble-'

'Ow! Oh, crikey!' The sleepy Owl gasped. Reporting to the house-dame meant going into 'sanny', and although being in 'sanny' was preferable to being in the form-room construing Virgil, under Quelch's eye, it had its drawbacks.

The diet was wholesome but plain and suitable for invalids, but most unsuitable for a fellow like Bunter, who felt that he had to keep up his strength by a series of constant snacks!

'Oh, lor' sir, if I could just go and rest a bit-?'

'Very well, Bunter. You are excused class for the rest of the morning.'

The Owl jumped up with an alacrity which made Quelch glance at him with suspicion. 'It is a half-holiday today. See that you rest so that you are in a proper condition to attend to your form-work tomorrow. If you are not-'

The Remove master left the sentence unfinished, but it was evident that, if Bunter was not fit for form-work on the morrow, the 'sanny' would engulf him until he was.

'Oh! Oh, thank you, sir.' The fat Owl stumbled out of the form-room. Vernon-Smith watched him go, with some relief. Owing to Quelch having taken Bunter's remarks about walking miles and miles to be nothing but an account of a nightmare, the moment of danger had passed-for the time being.

Bunter was not the safest repository of any secret, and too many others already knew a little about that one. It was now not only the midnight excursion Vernon-Smith had to conceal, but the striking of Sir Julius Hogben, a governor of the school. True, the Owl of the Remove did not realise that that had happened, but he knew that Smithy had hit someone. If he talked any more, and people put two and two together-

'Vernon-Smith!'

It was his turn to construe. He went on where Bunter should have begun- 'At pius Aeneas, per noctem plurima volvens' - The Bounder grinned faintly as he construed. If Quelch only knew how he and Bunter had revolved through the night!

Fortunately, he didn't yet. Vernon-Smith was aware of some other grins around him, as the coincidence of the 'construe' struck some of the Removites. Quelch, puzzled by the grins, looked up, sharply. As a rule, the Remove did not find much amusement in construing the Aeneid. However, there seemed no offence he could take hold of, so he let the matter rest. At that moment, the Owl of the Remove was entering Lord Mauleverer's study. He intended to go on to his own to rest, but even though he felt badly in need of a rest, he proposed to have it on a full stomach and not on an empty one. He had only managed to secure enough breakfast for two that morning, and was still hungry.

He knew that Mauleverer's study cupboard would, undoubtedly, be well stocked. So it was, but that happy state of affairs ceased to be soon after the fat Removite had entered the study.

'Prime!' Bunter sleepily munched a jam-tart as he reclined in Lord Mauleverer's armchair. He could have gone to sleep very comfortably in that armchair - but not wisely against a rifled cupboard with some of its contents still unconsumed! Lord Mauleverer tolerated a great deal from Bunter - much too much most of the fellows said - but there were limits!

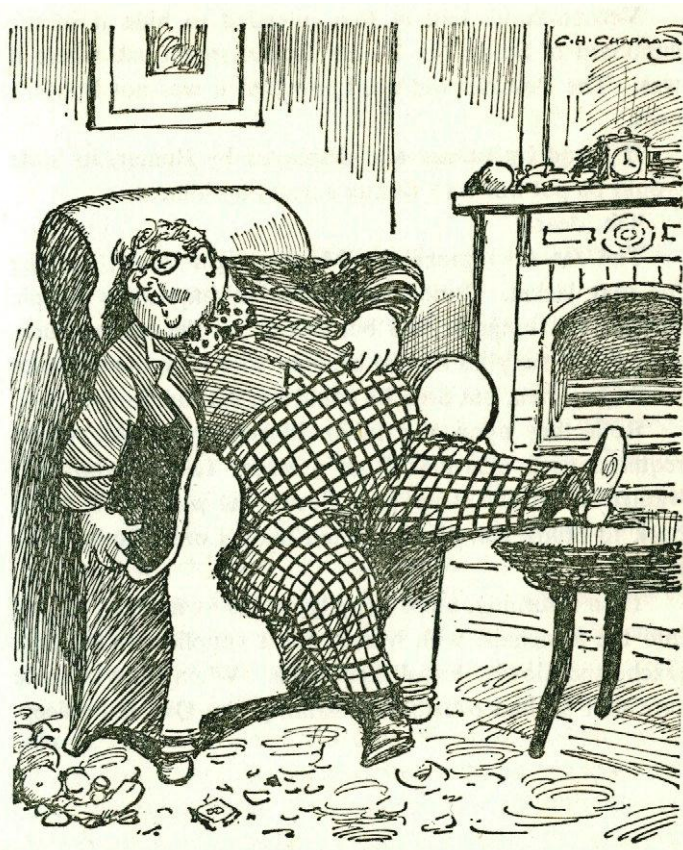
'Oh, lor'!'

Across the Owl's sleepy mind, considering Mauleverer's possible reactions, there floated a thought.

'Mauly's jacket!'

Bunter was not usually tidy in his appearance. Mr. Quelch and others had frequently made caustic remarks on that point. When, however, he went forth on special occasions, where he thought he might have to consort

with people of wealth and position, the fat Owl took more care. One of his first resources was to borrow from someone else's wardrobe. Lord Mauleverer was the easiest prey. His lordship had a great many articles of clothing, and was quite likely not to miss anything temporarily borrowed. Moreover, when he found, perhaps, that a jacket or a pair of trousers had been slit up the back, he was unlikely to summon up enough energy to boot the Owl along the Remove passage as others would. Before now, Bunter had found that it was necessary to slit garments to make them fit; a well-built fellow like himself was hard-put to it to get into clothes worn by skinny chaps. Last night, considering that he might meet people of consequence in Smithy's company, he had borrowed one of Mauly's jackets.



QUITE SURE THAT HE HAD OVERLOOKED NOTHING,
THE OWL FELL ASLEEP

It would be unwise to go to sleep in Mauly's armchair, when not only the contents of Mauly's cupboard, but one of his jackets was missing. It would be better, thought Bunter, to seek the sanctuary of his own study, where he might doze peacefully until dinner time.

With a sigh, the fat Owl heaved himself, sleepily, out of Mauly's armchair, and proceeded to Study No. 7. As he entered it, his eyes fell on something rolled up on the table. 'Oh, dear! Mauly's jacket! ' It was the jacket he had 'borrowed' from Mauly, now in his own study. The Owl prodded it, and wondered how it had come there. It did not occur to him that Vernon-Smith, seeing it by his bed-side, where he had wearily thrown it earlier that morning, and noticing its dishevelled state, had taken it to Bunter's study. It was covered with jam and squashed cream buns after Bunter had fallen upon the unfinished feast in the car crash.

If found in the dormitory by one of the maids, she would, probably, have taken it to the house-dame, who might, in turn, have reported its condition to Mr. Quelch. The form master would, certainly, have wanted to know how it had come to be in such a condition during the night.

Vernon-Smith had at first intended to hide it in the cupboard of Study No. 7 - but Bunter might ask where it was. The Bounder did not know that it was not Bunter's own.

If found by Bunter and displayed by Bunter, its state would be put down to Bunter's usual untidiness.

'Oh, dear!'

The fat Owl groaned. Mauly might come, looking for that jacket. Bunter was used to inquisitive people looking for things he had borrowed. In the case of tuck, such as the supplies he had brought with him, the evidence would be eaten, but even he could not eat that jacket.

Reflecting upon the bitter injustice of Fate, which required such exertions from a weary fellow, who only wanted to eat and sleep, he collected the jacket and, going back to Study No. 12, deposited it on Lord Mauleverer's table.

Then returning, more happily, to his own study, he fell into the armchair, with Mauleverer's supplies within easy reach, and slowly demolished them. When he was quite sure that he had overlooked nothing, the Owl fell asleep.

LORD MAULEVERER FINDS HIS JACKET

'OH gad!'

Vernon-Smith looked into Study No. 12, as he heard that remark coming from its interior.

As it was a half-holiday, most of the Remove were out of doors. There was a match against the Fourth on Little Side, and for those who did not want to watch it, there were other pleasant ways of passing a summer afternoon, such as boating on the Sark. Only a few of the Remove were indoors; Bunter was fast asleep in Peter Todd's armchair, and Fisher T. Fish was casting up his accounts in a frantic search for a missing penny. Vernon-Smith, too, was disposed to remain indoors.

He prided himself on his endurance, and had he been in the Remove 'eleven' or any other place in the public eye, would have steeled himself to show no signs of weariness, after a very scanty night's sleep. He was not, however, in the 'eleven' on this occasion and so, with no one to observe him, had intended to slip along to his study and take that rest of which he, undoubtedly, felt the need. He was on his way to Study No. 4, when he heard that observation coming from Study No. 12.

As the Bounder entered, Lord Mauleverer was to be seen gazing, in pained surprise, at a jacket, which Vernon-Smith recognised as the one Bunter had worn the night before, and which he had left in Study No. 7. Now it was in Study No. 12!

'What's the matter, Mauly?'

'Someone's been messin' about with one of my jackets,' replied his lordship. 'All smeared with jam and cream and crumbs!'

The Bounder grinned.

'Well, with clues like those, Mauly, you don't have far to look!'

'Bit torn out of it, too-'

'What?'

The Bounder remembered that tearing sound from Bunter's collar, as it had been wrenched from Sir Julius Hogben's grasp, when he had hit him on the jaw.

'Piece right out of it,' continued Lord Mauleverer. 'Might get it invisibly mended - or a spare bit from Huntsman's in Savile Row, where I bought it. Odd thing to happen even to a jacket Bunter borrowed. Rather a rough party last night, Smithy?'

'There wasn't a party at all,' said Vernon-Smith. 'Just a run in the car. We had a bit of a crash - that's where all the stuff got on the jacket. Bunter fell in the foodstuffs he hadn't eaten! Didn't know he was wearing anything of yours, Mauly, but I'll pay for cleaning and repairs in the circs. We had to walk back-'

'Bunter wouldn't like that,' observed Mauleverer. 'Didn't know he was joinin' your party, Smithy!'

'Neither did I until he'd done so,' replied the Bounder. 'I thought I was leading you downstairs in the darkness - and when I found it was that fat ass - well, I decided to make the best of it.'

'H'm! All bein' well that ended well, what?' commented Lord Mauleverer.

'Heard Skinner talkin' - he got it from Gosling, who got it from Tozer - burglary at Hogben Grange last night. Gang of 'em! Got hold of the Hogben ruby. Sir Julius found two of 'em, but was knocked into a ditch. Good thing you didn't run into that. Tore a piece off the collar of one of the fellers who punched him. Might be a clue, what?'

Lord Mauleverer looked at his jacket again.

'We didn't burgle Hogben Grange last night. Mauly,' said Vernon-Smith, laughing, 'and I haven't got the Hogben ruby.'

'Never supposed you did,' replied Mauleverer. 'Just a quiet run in the moonlight. And a walk back. You must have passed Hogben Grange, comin' back, I should say. Lucky it wasn't the same time as the burglars got away. You might have got mixed up with the people lookin' for them. That would have been awkward, what?'

Vernon-Smith looked at Lord Mauleverer. His lazy lordship was commonly supposed by the Remove to be a bit of an ass, but Vernon-Smith was well aware that there was a lot of sound sense behind that lackadaisical exterior.

P.C. Tozer of the local constabulary had talked to his friend, William Gosling, the gate-porter, in a tactless way which his superiors would, certainly, not have approved. Skinner had overheard. Harold Skinner often overheard other people's conversations. The information had come to Lord Mauleverer, who had put two and two together, and added the sum correctly in a way the Bounder did not like.

'Better not surmise anything, Mauly,' he said, quietly. 'Might be dangerous for Bunter and myself. As you said, people could think that we'd got mixed up with the people looking for those burglars, and we don't want any inquiries about last night. Wouldn't do if news of my little run in a car got to Quelchy's ears!'

'No,' said Mauly. 'Better just get this jacket cleaned and repaired. I'll take it to Chunkley's dry-cleanin' department some time. Not today. Too hot to walk to Courtfield. I'll just sit here and meditate a bit.'

Lord Mauleverer dropped the jacket over a chair and, proceeding to an armchair, settled peacefully within it. The Bounder grinned. He had an idea that Mauly's meditations would not be profound or prolonged, but would soon end in a doze. Anyway the matter of the jacket seemed to be settled satisfactorily.

'O.K. Mauly,' he said, turning to the door. 'You're a good sort.' Lord Mauleverer smiled sleepily, and the Bounder closed the door behind him.

BUNTER MISSES HIS DINNER

'OH, crikey!'

Bunter stared disaster in the face. He had missed dinner!

Esconced in Peter Todd's armchair, with the late contents of Mauly's cupboard now forming part of his own contents, the Owl of the Remove had slept on and on. Eventually waking, he had looked at his watch to discover that it was now past one!

'Oh, dear! Oh, lor!'

It was, in Bunter's opinion, an unmitigated disaster.

The thought of that lost dinner haunted him. He would now never partake of it! It was true he was not actually hungry - Lord Mauleverer's cupboard had seen to that - but tea time was a long way off. Moreover, unless someone stood him treat or cashed a postal order he was expecting, it would be tea in Hall. That meal would be adequate for anyone with an ordinary appetite, but it was not lavish - and Bunter's was not an ordinary appetite.

The Owl remembered that the Bounder had promised him a feed that evening. That feed, however, was a long time ahead - longer than tea in Hall. Something had to be done!

Bunter groaned.

That beast Quelch must have noticed his absence from dinner. His gimlet eyes missed nothing. He might have sent someone to wake him. That beast, Toddy - he must have come to the study - and Dutton - neither of them had wakened him in time for dinner. Selfish - that's what they were!

'Beasts!'

It was hard, Bunter felt, to have to live in a world full of beasts. Old Quelch had acted as if he'd thought that Bunter did not need any dinner. As a matter of fact, that was what Quelch had thought! Observing Bunter's unusual absence, he had decided to let the fat Removite sleep without disturbing him. It had been a kindly thought, which the dinnerless Owl utterly failed to appreciate.

Yes, he must somehow obtain supplies to meet this desperate emergency! Mauly?

As a matter of fact, Lord Mauleverer had not yet opened his cupboard door, and was, therefore, ignorant of the depredations committed by the fat Owl upon its contents. Not knowing this, Bunter considered it inexpedient to pay another visit to Study No. 12. Besides he had really left very little that was worth taking!

Smithy?

The Owl shook his head sorrowfully. Smithy's cupboard would, undoubtedly, be well stocked, but if he was going to have a spread from Vernon-Smith that evening, it would be tactless to raid his study in the afternoon. Coker?

The Owl's face brightened. If Coker was out, all would be well - at least for Bunter. Coker's study was usually a place overflowing, metaphorically, with milk and honey, owing to the fact that, for some reason no one had ever been able to explain, Horace Coker was his Aunt Judy's favourite nephew.

Aunt Judy kept her dear nephew, Horace, always well supplied. Many Greyfriars men had been heard to state that they would, willingly, trade a couple of their own aunts, with an uncle or two thrown in, for Coker's Aunt Judy. Bunter had seen a hamper go up to the Fifth Form passage yesterday. Quelch might - and did - make many caustic remarks about his

knowledge of Latin and other matters, but the Owl's knowledge of other people's hampers was extensive and peculiar.

Bunter wandered out of his study and went along to the Fifth Form passage. Arriving there, he opened the door, and peered cautiously into the study which belonged to Coker, Potter and Greene. It was empty!

'He, he, he!'

Another moment, and he was at the cupboard door, and had opened it. Then he frowned. It was not as well stocked as the Owl had hoped.

Coker of the Fifth had decided that, on a sunny afternoon like this, a picnic on the Sark would suit him fine. That being that, it had also to suit Potter and Greene fine.

They had had misgivings. Going on to the river with Coker might mean going into the river with Coker! Coker would probably take the oars. He had often said that no one could teach him anything about rowing, and Potter and Greene had often thought that was only too true!

Still, as Coker - and Coker's Aunt Judy - were standing the picnic, and it really was a very fine day, they decided to go with him and hope for the best. It was, at any rate, less tiring than arguing with Coker. So they had gone and their study remained empty until the arrival of Bunter.

'Stingy!' The Owl looked at the contents, and snorted. There were no cakes in the cupboard and no jam-tarts and no sweets, these being, at that moment, together with a cold chicken and some other eatables, in a boat on the Sark. However, there was a pork pie and a packet of biscuits. The pie was quite a large one, as Coker's aunt had considered that her dear, generous nephew, Horace, would, naturally, wish to share it with his friends.

That had, in fact, been Coker's plan for supper. Bunter had other and more immediate plans for it.

He began filling in time - and himself - by eating the biscuits, while he looked at that pie. It was most inconsiderate of Coker not to have provided a greater variety of fare - Bunter was sure that Coker's aunt's hamper must have contained much more - but he was used to selfish people, who never thought of his requirements in such matters! However, there was the pork pie!

It would, the Owl reflected, just about make up for his missing dinner. Coker's study, though, was not a very safe place in which to linger, especially when eating Coker's pie.

It would be unwise to remain there with it. When anyone at Greyfriars missed anything eatable, Bunter was the first thought in connexion with such a disappearance. The Owl had frequently suffered from these unworthy suspicions. Cramming the last of the biscuits into his mouth, he took hold of the pie, and left Coker's study, on his way to his own. He paused. An idea had entered his fat brain.

'He, he, he!'

There was still tea to be considered. Bunter's foresight was, usually, scanty, but not in such an important matter as this. Owing to the selfishness of Coker, Potter and Greene, he had been unable to get hold of any jam-tarts or cake. However, a man of brains could circumvent such deplorable conduct.

His sister, Bessie, and the other girls would be pleased, if he turned up for tea with the contribution of a pork pie - or half a pork pie. Half of it he must eat, as soon as he arrived in some safe place, in order to make up for his missing dinner; the 'making-up' had not yet been sufficient for Bunter. Bessie would welcome the remainder. Whether she would also welcome her brother was doubtful. Still, if he arrived with a pie - or, at least, half a pie - or almost half a pie - the other girls could hardly refrain from inviting him to stay for tea.

He brushed a few crumbs off his jacket, leaving a great many more.

Mauly?

Mauly couldn't refuse to lend him another jacket, especially if he didn't bother to go through the formality of actually asking for the loan. It would be unkind to worry Mauly on a hot afternoon - and a waste of time. The sooner he reached a quiet place where he could eat half that pie - or, perhaps about three-quarters of it - the better.

LORD MAULEVERER LOSES ANOTHER JACKET

'OUTRAGEOUS, Quelch!' It was the booming voice of Paul Pontifex Prout, the Fifth-form master, coming from a group of trees in the quad, behind which the Owl of the Remove was sitting, eating Coker's pie. 'Hogben Grange burgled last night, Quelch - the Hogben ruby, a priceless heirloom stolen - Sir Julius assaulted by the miscreants - knocked into a ditch - Disgraceful!'

'Indeed, Prout?' It was the voice of Quelch, who had been button-holed on his way to take a walk on this sunny half-holiday. Unfortunately he had seen the Fifth-form master too late to evade him. 'I have not heard-' Bunter grinned and listened. It was an affair which did not concern him, so naturally he was interested. The fat Owl saw no connexion between what Prout was talking about, and anything that had happened on last night's escapade. He had been too sleepy then to pay much attention to anything. In any case, it would be unwise to move now, with that pie, Quelch might want to know where he had obtained it. Bunter was used to such inquisitiveness.

'I heard of it from Gosling, Quelch,' continued Prout. He was apparently informed by Constable Tozer, who is, I understand, a friend of his. They caught a man well-known to the police as 'Gentleman Charlie' - a preposterous designation - pooh! - but were unable to detain him, owing to lack of evidence. He has the effrontery to deny that he had anything to do with the burglary, though he admits trespassing on the Hogben estate at the time, and he is actually continuing to reside in this neighbourhood at the 'Cross Keys'! He was peppered with a shot-gun, I understand, and states he is resting after his injury and will probably sue Sir Julius for damages!'

'Really, Prout. Tozer seems to have been informative.' There was a touch of sarcasm in the Remove master's reply, which escaped Prout's notice. 'He certainly was, Quelch. It is deplorable that a constable should so far forget himself as to gossip in this fashion - to disclose, in fact, what may very well be official secrets. Utterly deplorable. That is how information gets to the ears of those who should not be concerned with it!'

'I quite agree, Prout - and now, if you will excuse me-'

'This modern tendency to gossip, Quelch-'

'I have noticed it, Prout.'

'The Hogben ruby, given to an ancestor of Sir Julius by the Rajah of Seringapatam in the eighteenth century - gone! Outrageous! No doubt its whereabouts in the Grange were disclosed to the thief by some idle tittle-tattle.'

'Very probably, Prout!'

'People will talk about what does not concern them!'

'They will and do, Prout. And now-'

'Nothing is safe in these times, Quelch - nothing. I have also heard that one of the boats has been abstracted from our boat-house. So Blundell of my form tells me. This crime-wave-deplorable! Unparalleled!'

'I can see no connexion between the loss of the Hogben ruby, and a boat from the boat-house,' observed Quelch. 'On a fine afternoon like this, the boat is, undoubtedly, in the possession of some boy, who has taken it on the Sark-'

'No, Quelch! It was there last night, when the boat-house was locked, and was not there this morning, when the lock was found to be broken.'

'H'm!' It looked to Quelch as if there might be something in what Prout said - but, possibly, not much. There were some boys who, wanting a boat and forgetting first to get the key, were capable of breaking a lock. Quelch could have mentioned several in Prout's own form, who were capable of such conduct - Coker came first to his mind. However, it was as well not to mention that to Prout. Prout would be certain to mention other things - and keep on mentioning them. Quelch really desired to continue his walk and enjoy the summer sunshine, and felt that he could do so better in a completely Proutless atmosphere, so to speak.

'H'm! Most certainly a suspicious circumstance, Prout. I trust you have reported the matter to the police; although, of course, their resources must be severely strained at the moment, in the matter of the Hogben ruby. And now, I must leave you, Prout, if you will excuse me?' Mr. Quelch bowed and left rather hurriedly, giving the Fifth-form master no time to say whether he would excuse him or not.

'Deplorable!' the Owl of the Remove heard Prout exclaim. It was not certain whether this referred to the loss of the Hogben ruby, the missing boat, or the Remove master's abrupt departure!

Bunter heard a snort and then a tramping of feet, and looked cautiously round the elm trees. Quelch was disappearing through the gates, and Prout was heading for the front entrance to the school.

'Old donkeys!' Bunter hid what was left of the pie under his jacket, which was, as a matter of fact, Mauleverer's jacket. He then proceeded, as Quelch had done, towards the gates. There were safer places than the quadrangle, he hoped, in which a fellow might eat his pie in peace. The Owl peeped out cautiously. Friardale Lane seemed deserted. He would go out, and climb over the stile into the woods the other side. Once in them, he would resume his activities on Coker's pie, and then take it - or what remained - to Cliff House for tea.

The Cliff House girls would be pleased to see him.

Girls were always pleased when a well-dressed and elegant fellow dropped in casually to tea. Before emerging into the open with that pie, Bunter had peered cautiously into Lord Mauleverer's study to find him asleep in the armchair. He had then again equipped himself from Mauly's wardrobe. Another jacket had been borrowed - it had only taken a second or two to slit it up the back to make it fit. With that and one of Mauly's best hats and an elegant tie, the Owl had emerged, considering that he could not fail to create an impression at Cliff House. As he now ambled along Friardale Lane towards the stile, he wondered if he might not create that excellent impression without the presentation of any pie at all!

After all, a pork pie was a pork pie. The girls probably wouldn't appreciate it anyway, except, of course, his sister Bessie, who was always greedy and didn't count, in her brother's opinion. He would consider the matter when he got to the wood and started on the pie again.

'My lord?'

Bunter swung round in surprise to see an elegant-looking gentleman raising his hat to him in a most deferential fashion.

BUNTER LOSES A PIE

'MY lord?'

Billy Bunter continued to look at the man, who thus addressed him, in surprise. However, the surprised expression on his fat face soon gave way to a smile - which some people would have called a smirk. He felt glad that Mauly had 'lent' him that jacket, hat and tie. The clothes did but add, of course, to his natural air of nobility - but it was gratifying to be taken for a nobleman.

He had felt that a well-dressed fellow like himself could hardly fail to make an impression at Cliff House, particularly when accompanied by the remainder of a pie. He had hardly expected to make any impression on anyone before he got there.

Bunter stared at this pleasant stranger, and tried to look patronising.

'Oh, yes?'

It was not in the Owl's nature to deny that he was a lord or say that he should not be so addressed.

'I must ask your lordship's pardon. I represent *Country and County*. We are publishing a series of interviews with eminent public schoolboys-'

'Oh, ah! yes!'

Bunter's eyes blinked at a camera the man held. 'With your permission, I should like to take your photograph, Lord Mauleverer.'

The Owl stared. It was not, apparently, his aristocratic appearance which had led to his being taken for a peer of the realm; he had been mistaken for Lord Mauleverer.

The Owl had no objection to letting the man think he was a nobleman - but could he claim to be Lord Mauleverer?

Bunter had a conscience - of sorts, even though it might be as Wibley, the amateur actor of the Remove, had once described it in Shakespearian terms - 'A poor thing, but mine own.' It was a flexible conscience, which could be stretched to almost any extent - but it had its limits. Bunter decided that he could not claim to be Lord Mauleverer - at least, not in so many words.

'I-I - don't use my title on all occasions,' he replied, looking at the man. 'I prefer to go about - about infra dig.'

'What?' The man stared and then laughed. 'Your lordship jokes. You wish to be incognito? I understand - but, for this special article - you are the first to be interviewed - I trust your lordship will not refuse to allow me to take your photograph? I should be honoured. Where we are now is, perhaps, rather too public? If I might presume to ask you to accompany me to the stile up the lane - we could then get on to the footpath and into the wood. I might take you there. I have in mind the caption "An eminent Greyfriars boy in the rural surroundings of the school".'

Bunter almost purred. A photograph of himself with such a description in *Country and County*. He thought of the feelings of the other Remove fellows, when they saw it. Of course, if it was also stated that the photograph was one of Lord Mauleverer it would be awkward. It could, though, be said to be a mistake of the newspaperman's. Bunter told himself that he hadn't actually *said* that he was Lord Mauleverer. If the man chose to make a mistake-

It would not do to appear too agreeable. The Owl tried to put on the air of a great man worried by the trivial requirements of unimportant people.

'H'm! I have rather an important appointment this afternoon.' Bunter hugged the paper bag containing the rest of Coker's pie. 'I should like to oblige you, of course, my good fellow, but-' The Owl paused.

'I understand, my lord. However, perhaps, after I have taken the photograph, you will avail yourself of the offer of my car, which is quite near at hand. I shall be only too pleased to convey your lordship to wherever your lordship wishes to go.'

Bunter smiled. If he was driven up to Cliff House in a car, even Bessie could hardly refuse to give him tea. He looked at Coker's pie. If he arrived in a car, it might indeed not be necessary to keep any of that pie for Bessie and her friends. Girls were greedy and such a gift might only encourage them in their greediness.

Some of that pie had already disappeared. He had eaten a piece of it - quite a substantial piece - in the seclusion of that seat behind the elms in the quad. He could eat the rest in this fellow's car on the way to Cliff House.

Bunter looked again at the man, who bowed towards him most deferentially.

'I don't mind if I do. Bit of a bore really, but I always like to encourage men who are industrious in their jobs. You have a good car, I presume - the kind a fellow would care to be seen in?'

'Indeed so, I assure your lordship - a Bentley-'

'A Bentley? Oh, crumbs! I mean, not bad. Not quite what I'm accustomed to, of course,' added the Owl, his eyes glistening at the thought of rolling up to the gates of Cliff House in a Bentley.

'Naturally so, your lordship,' said the man, looking at Bunter rather queerly.

'They must pay you fellows quite well to enable you to run Bentleys.'

'Yes, indeed - my lord. If we might now proceed to the woodland setting in order that your lordship's activities may not be held up-?'

'Oh, yes, quite! Lead on!'

The man bowed, and stepped out and Bunter followed.

They arrived at the stile, and the man climbed over it and held out his hand to assist Bunter from the other side.

'You ought really to have helped me over first,' Bunter snorted indignantly, with the air, as he imagined, of an affronted aristocrat receiving impertinence from an underling. 'More becoming your position, you know!'

'I ask a thousand pardons from your lordship-'

'Granted!' said Bunter, who was almost beginning to feel that he was 'his lordship'. He was prepared to be tolerant to people of the lower orders, who would show him a proper respect.

'Certainly, your lordship. Allow me-'

'Ow! Don't pull me over, fathead!' Bunter swayed getting over the stile, and nearly came down flat. 'Ow! Beast! Clumsy! I've a good mind-'

'Your lordship, please excuse me-'

The Owl grunted. It was his own fault that he had nearly fallen over the stile, but he was not disposed to blame himself - certainly not when there was anyone else in reach who could be blamed. 'I've a good mind not to let you take my photograph at all - but I'm a generous-minded chap.

Now lead on. I have a pie to eat-'

'What?'

'Go on - and don't cackle!'

The man led the way along the footpath, and then turned aside into a small wood, with the Owl following. He looked round; they were out of sight of the road. There was no one else in sight. His deferential manner dropped like a mask.

'Now then, you fat little beast-'

'What?'

The Owl recoiled as the 'photographer' came towards him.

'Off with that jacket - sharp - and don't argue - or I'll clump your lordship's silly head! You a lord!' The man laughed. 'You, with your presumptuous manners. Off with the jacket, Lord Mauleverer or-'

'Ow!' Bunter squealed as the man advanced towards him. 'Keep off! I ain't a lord - I'm not Lord Mauleverer - I'm not. Oh, lor'! Oh, dear! I'm Bunter!'

'What?' The man stopped. 'You told me that you were Lord Mauleverer-'

'I-I didn't!' howled the frightened Owl. 'You did - and-and I didn't like to contradict you -I-I-' Bunter plucked up a little courage. 'Look here, I-I'll report you to Country and-and-Country - if you behave like this. Keep off!'

The man broke into a harsh laugh. 'Report away - they may be pleased to hear from you - they won't from me - you fat fool. So you're not Lord Mauleverer? I could hardly believe that you were a peer of the realm, when you behaved like a purse-proud young upstart. Off with that jacket!'

'Ow!'

'Sharp-or I'll pull it off, and you may get hurt.'

The terrified Owl pulled off the jacket. The man seized it, and looked at the name tab. Then he turned upon the fat Owl with a look which made his flesh creep.

'So you're not Lord Mauleverer? His name's in the jacket-'

'Ow! It's Mauly's. He-he lent it to me. Oh, lor'-'

'You're wearing another boy's jacket? Is that one of your school customs?'

'Ow! Oh, dear! Yes - I-I often have jackets lent to me,' gasped the Owl.

He gazed at Mauleverer's jacket in the man's hands. At his feet was the bag containing the remains of Coker's pie, which had fallen, unheeded, when the jacket had been pulled from him. 'I-I'm a popular chap - I-I say, can't we go to your car now? Oh, dear! Or take that photograph?'

The 'photographer' laughed. 'You fat fool! If you aren't Lord Mauleverer-?'

'I'm not - I'm Bunter. Oh, lor'-'

'Were you wearing Lord Mauleverer's jacket last night - when you were out late?'

'Ow! Oh, dear! Smithy said not to say a word - It's a secret. Yes, Mauly lent me his jacket - Ow!'

The man gave Bunter a push which sat him on the grass, on top of Coker's pie. Then, without another word, he turned back the way he had come, and disappeared, carrying Mauleverer's jacket with him.

BUNTER AND THE CRIME WAVE

'BUNTER!'

It was the voice of Henry Samuel Quelch. Quelch had been conversing with Prout - or, more accurately, Prout had been conversing with Quelch, the Remove master merely being able to get in a remark or two in vain attempts to stem Prout's flow. Prout, having encountered Quelch as he was entering the school, had been eloquent on the subject of the crime wave, the delinquencies of the police, what he would have done had Scotland Yard asked his advice, and much more. It was really a relief when the appearance of Bunter required Quelch to break into the discourse to address his pupil.

'Oh lor'!' The fat Owl jumped.

'Where is your jacket, Bunter? Why are you not wearing it?'

Within the school precincts, the Greyfriars boys were supposed to be properly dressed. Some latitude was, of course, allowed to cricketers, for instance, proceeding to and from Big Side and Little Side, and it was not necessary for waistcoats to be worn always, on hot summer days. Nevertheless, it was not the correct thing to appear in the school without a jacket.

'Answer me, Bunter! Where is your jacket?'

'Oh, dear! It-it's been pinched, sir.'

'Are you informing me, Bunter, that someone pinched the jacket you were wearing? If anyone did perform such an irrational action, that does not explain why you are not wearing it now!'

'Oh, dear!'

The Owl realised that Quelch required a translation of his statement. There was nothing in the works of Publius Vergilius Maro and other Latin writers in which Henry Samuel Quelch would require any help in translating. Apparently, however, there were phrases in the vernacular as used by Bunter, which were obscure to him.

'He-he snaffled, it, sir.'

'He did *what*?'

Bunter tried again.

'He-he took it, sir. Pinched it - took it away. Oh, lor'! '

Quelch stared. 'Are you informing me, Bunter, that some person has stolen your jacket? When and where?' The form master's tone was sceptical. It seemed a most unlikely occurrence. He knew that Bunter would not hesitate in giving an excuse for not wearing a jacket when he should have done so, and the fact that that excuse might be untruthful and improbable wouldn't weigh with him.

'Unparalleled!' observed Prout. 'Upon my word, Quelch, the neighbourhood seems to be enmeshed in a wave of crime, consisting in thefts of articles of diminishing value. First the Hogben ruby, then a boat - and now a Remove boy's jacket. Not since I was in the Rockies-'

'Bunter!' Quelch cut in sharply. When Prout began to talk about the days when he was in the Rockies, it was necessary to cut in sharply! 'When and where was your Jacket stolen - if that is, indeed, the case?'

'Oh, dear! In the wood beyond the stile, sir. He-he was going to take my photo, sir. He took me for Mauly.'

'He took you for what?'

The Owl realised that another translation was required.

For Mauleverer, sir. He wanted to take my photo - I mean, Mauly's - Mauleverer's photo - for a - for a magazine, Sir - and then we went along

to-to a Woodland setting he said - and then the beast pinched my jacket. Oh, lor'!'

Mr. Quelch breathed hard. How much truth there might be in this statement of Bunter's, he did not know. There might be little, but there was, possibly, some. However, if he told Bunter not to talk nonsense, but go away immediately and get properly dressed, Bunter would go and cease talking nonsense, but Prout would stay and begin to talk it again. It was a hard choice.

'H'm, Bunter! You say that this person mistook you for Mauleverer. You would, of course, immediately disillusion him?'

The Owl looked blank. Quelch saw that some translation was now required from him. He also observed with irritation that some boys were loitering in the vicinity, having become interested in the scene!

'I trust, Bunter, that you at once told this person that you were not Mauleverer?'

'Oh, crikey - yessir - I mean-'

'Then how did it come about that you accompanied this man some way, in order to have your photograph taken?'

'He-he - asked me, sir,' stammered the Owl, 'as another-another extinguished person-'

There was a cackle from the gathering crowd in the entrance hall. Mr. Quelch swept it with a freezing glance. 'Can it be possible, Bunter, that you are endeavouring to say "distinguished"?''

'Yessir. That's it, sir. He thought I was distinguished - and being extinguished - I mean distinguished, as well as Mauly - as Mauleverer, he wanted to take my photo - the beast - and then he pinched Mauly's jacket - my jacket. My jacket - oh, dear! And my pie-'

'A most extraordinary occurrence, my dear Quelch,' boomed the voice of Prout. 'To descend to such petty pilferage after stealing the Hogben ruby-'

'There are no grounds whatever, Prout,' snapped Quelch, 'for supposing that there is any connexion between the loss of the Hogben ruby, and this boy's jacket.' Quelch had much sympathy with Sir Julius Hogben in the loss of his famous ruby, but he did not want to hear any more from Prout on the subject. Indeed, he was beginning to feel that if Prout had been stolen instead of the ruby he could have viewed the circumstance with equanimity.

'Possibly, Quelch!' The Fifth-form master had discerned the impatience in Quelch's utterance, and had reacted. Prout did not like people to be impatient when he was talking, although they frequently became so. 'The loss of the Hogben ruby is authenticated by the police inquiries, but this boy's story - it may be, as you seem to think, merely an excuse for wandering about in a disreputable state in which no boy of any form in this school - even a junior one - should be allowed to appear. Doubtless, he has not lost his jacket--'

'But I have, sir,' howled the Owl, observing the gathering signs of wrath in Quelch's countenance. That wrath, though Bunter did not realise it, was, primarily, because of Prout's remarks and implications. 'I did, sir - and my pie. Oh, dear! A pork pie! He pushed me on to it, sir, and crushed it into the mud. I couldn't eat it - and I was so hungry - missing dinner - and it's too late now to get to Cliff House. I was invited to tea. Oh, lor'!' Bunter, looking round, saw Coker's face appear in the doorway. 'I-I say - it wasn't Coker's pie-'

'What has Coker of my form to do with this matter, Bunter?' boomed Prout. He also caught sight of Coker. 'Coker-'

Coker of the Fifth came forward. On closer inspection, he was observed to be in a parlous state. He was covered with mud and water-weed, which seemed to be competing for areas of Coker upon which they could settle.

It was evident that Potter and Greene's misgivings, that going on the Sark with Coker might mean going into it, had been realised, as far, anyway, as Coker himself was concerned.

Potter and Greene had landed, safely, with the cold chicken and some other things in the meadows behind Friardale village, thankful that they had not been shipwrecked by Coker en route. Coker had then stood up, nonchalantly, in the boat to toss them the cake. Potter had caught that cake, just as Coker overbalanced in the recoil, and went into the Sark with a loud splash on the other side of the boat.

Potter and Greene had helped Coker out with the boat-hook, manfully repressing their merriment while they did so. Coker had brought an appreciable quantity of Sark mud and water-weed out of the river with him. Some of that, but not much, he managed to get rid of on the spot, while Potter and Greene removed themselves and the cold chicken, to a safe distance.

They advised Coker to go back to the school and change, while they got on with the preparation of the picnic. Horace Coker was not one to take advice from anyone, and much less to act upon it, but his present state of mud and dampness was such, on this occasion, that he actually did so. With a few parting words to Potter and Greene on their clumsiness in a boat, he left, hoping to proceed to his study without any inquisitive beholders. He didn't. There was a burst of laughter from the other boys in the entrance hall as they saw the state of Coker, and even Bunter, temporarily, forgot his woes and losses.

'He, he, he! Oh, crumbs! Look at Coker! He, he, he!'

'You fat little tick!' Coker made a threatening move towards the Owl, and Bunter recoiled.

'Ow! Keep him off!'

'Coker! ' As it was a boy of his own form who was menaced by Horace Coker, Quelch felt justified in intervening, even though Prout was present. 'You will leave Bunter alone! Upon my word - you appear here in a disreputable state in which no boy should appear - I must leave Coker to you, Mr. Prout, as he belongs to your form - Bunter go and get another jacket, immediately, and put it on. I shall investigate the extraordinary story you have told me - and if it is true' - Quelch's voice seemed to indicate that he much doubted its truth - 'the requisite action will be taken.'

Quelch smiled at the Fifth-form master and left him.

Prout, temporarily, seemed speechless - a most unusual occurrence with him. There was no doubt he would find voice presently, and direct it at Coker, whose ill-timed entry had enabled Quelch to throw his own words in his teeth.

SKINNER IS KICKED

OH, dear!'

Bunter was troubled. His temporary amusement at the appearance of Coker of the Fifth, covered in mud and water-weed, had passed. It was nearing tea time and he was hungry. He had missed dinner - the Owl groaned as he thought of that lost dinner! Coker's involuntary contributions to fill the resulting gap had not quite filled it - the remainder of that pork pie, which might have helped to fill a little more, had been rendered uneatable.

Bunter groaned again. He was, he felt, a good man struggling with adversity.

There was, of course, tea in Hall. There he would find bread and butter, and enough of these to satisfy any ordinary appetite. Bunter's, however, was not an ordinary appetite. Moreover, although there might be jam in Hall, there would be no cake, no pastries, no biscuits, no slices of ham - in fact none of those additions to a meal for which Bunter could always find room.

Even those with appetites of a normal size preferred to have tea in their studies, supplemented with what could be purchased from Mrs. Mible at the tuck-shop, or Uncle Clegg's in Friardale.

Unfortunately, both these suppliers required cash for what they handed over their counters. They utterly refused to exchange them for any postal order, which had not yet arrived. Bunter knew; he had previously encountered such restrictive financial policies.

In these circumstances, the Owl of the Remove felt somewhat at a loss. Fortunately, it was a fine afternoon and, being a half-holiday, most of the fellows were out. In the study in the Fourth-form passage, belonging to Temple, Dabney and Fry, who were - unfortunately for themselves - also out, there were two bottles of ginger-beer and a bag of tarts, until Bunter called. When he left they left with him.

Cheered by this contribution, the Owl considered the situation further. Smithy?

Vernon-Smith had promised him a feed that night, to make up for the one he had lost when the car smashed. Of course, it wasn't night yet, but Smithy would surely realise that a fellow required a snack in the interval. Or, perhaps, he would not. Bunter decided to look into Study No. 4. and find out.

The study was empty. After resting a while, the Bounder had gone into Courtfield with Redwing, more to show anyone who might be interested that he was not in the least wearied by last night's midnight adventure.

'Beast!'

It was just like Smithy to go out without giving Bunter a thought. but the Owl was used to such utter disregard of his interests by selfish fellows. Perhaps the Bounder had already bought the supplies for that feed? It might be as well to look and see if he had bought enough, and if they were up to sample, so to speak; a judicious bite, here and there, might be wise.

Bunter took a step towards the cupboard, but before he could take another, the study door was pushed open, and he turned round to see the Bounder, with Redwing behind him. They were back early because Redwing had seen that his friend, despite his show of bravado, was really tired, and had persuaded him to return early.

'Oh. lor!'

'What are you doing in my study?' demanded Vernon-Smith. 'You fat beast!' He glanced at the door of the cupboard, and saw that it was unopened. He waved towards the study door. 'Get out!'

'Oh - I say. Smithy - you were going to stand me a feed - for not having one last night,' stammered Bunter. 'I missed dinner today, too,' continued the fat Owl pathetically. 'That beast, Quelch, let me sleep on until it was over.'

Vernon-Smith burst into a laugh. 'Change for Quelch to encourage you to sleep, fatty. It's usually hard work for him to keep you awake in class - and now get out.'

'But you promised to stand me a good feed today, Smithy,' protested the Owl, 'after walking all those, miles and miles, and I've had hardly anything to eat since missing dinner - I could only find a cake and some biscuits - and a pie - and I lost most of that - oh, dear!'

'Let him stay to tea,' said Redwing. 'You did tire him out last night by all accounts.'

'I didn't ask him to come with me, Reddy - and all that happened after he'd joined me on his own, so it's his own fault.'

'Let him stay to tea all the same,' advised Redwing. 'You did promise him a feed when you came back - this morning.'

'Tactful, Reddy, not to say "last night" - I was thinking of a spread before "prep". I haven't bought the stuff yet.' He laughed again, as he saw the sudden look of dismay on the Owl's face. 'All right - he can stay and get tea for himself. We've had ours. Carry, on, fatty! You'll find something in the cupboard - which we wouldn't have done if we'd been a bit later coming back.'

'Oh, thanks, Smithy! You're a sportsman - like me. You aren't nearly such a rotter as the chaps make out.' The Bounder grinned and flung himself into an armchair, as Bunter opened the cupboard door.

'Oh, I say, Smithy, can I have some of this cake?'

'Yes. Tuck in! Leave room for the feed I'm goin' to stand you after "call-over"!''

'Oh, lor'! Oh, no - I mean - yes, Smithy. I-I'll just have a snack to be going on with.' The Owl cut a large slice from that cake. His hand hovered over it, and then he took the rest of the cake, leaving the slice.

The Bounder eyed him sardonically. He seemed in a tolerant humour. The unexpected presence of Bunter at last night's excursion had created an awkward situation, but it could have been a much worse one. A mixture of threats and bribes had induced Bunter to walk eight miles, but it would have been disastrous if he hadn't been so induced.

'Go easy with the cake, Bunter,' advised Redwing.

The Owl snorted. 'T'ain't your cake, Reddy - Smithy's invited me to eat it, and it wouldn't be polite not to. I've had hardly anything to eat since breakfast - and I missed dinner - and that beast pushed me over and made me sit on Coker's pie - I mean my pie - and - squash it into the mud - and - and I couldn't eat any of it - and - and I couldn't go on to Cliff House, after the beast had stolen my jacket.'

'Who stole your jacket?' asked Redwing, curiously.

'A fellow who took me for Mauly and wanted to take my photograph-'

'And took your jacket instead?' asked the Bounder. 'And you fell asleep in the wood after eating Coker's pie, and dreamed it all.'

'I didn't. The beast was going to drive me to Cliff House in-in his Bentley - I don't believe he had one. Pinching Mauly's jacket - I mean my jacket. Oh, dear! I say, there are some biscuits here, Smithy. Can I-?'

'Yes. Get outside the lot. Come on, Reddy, let's go shopping before "call-over".' He rose to his feet, and the two left the study for the tuck-shop. Outside, Redwing paused and turned.

'That's a queer yarn of that ass Bunter's about someone stealing his jacket,' he said.

'All Bunter's yarns are queer ones, aren't they, because they come from that ass, Bunter?'

'Yes, but that seems a strange thing for even Bunter to imagine.'

'So strange, Reddy,' answered the Bounder, 'that no one will believe it - any more than they will any other of his silly stories.'

Redwing smiled, uneasily. He knew that Vernon-Smith was referring to last night's midnight party. Certainly, the statements of the Owl of the Remove were, usually, regarded with scepticism by those who heard them. Still, too many others knew something of what had happened for Redwing to feel happy about the matter. If anything came out about it, Smithy would be in terrible trouble.

'The fat ass seems to have borrowed one of Mauly's jackets, Reddy, and fallen with it on Coker's tuck. I expect it was in such a mess by the time he'd finished, that saying it was stolen was the best yarn he could think of.'

Redwing smiled. 'It could be.'

'Better keep him out of circulation for a day or two, as much as possible, until last night's faded into the past, Reddy - with a spread or two in between to help him forget it. His memory isn't all that good!' Redwing could see Vernon-Smith's strategy. Bunter's memory was, certainly, not good - a fact upon which Mr. Quelch had frequently commented, when calling upon the Owl to construe. The Bounder pushed his way into the tuck-shop, followed by Redwing, and made his way to the counter.

'I'll have that steak-and-kidney pie, Mrs. Mible - and that cake and those tarts - a dozen eggs - those strawberries, and cream for them - and that pork pie!'

Vernon-Smith paused.

'That should be enough even for Bunter, Reddy - and a bit over!'

'Quite a spread!' said the voice of Harold Skinner, behind him. The Bounder swung round. 'That ought to be more than enough for your fat friend - and fellow traveller - even if he got so hungry having to walk miles and miles. Am I invited too, Smithy?'

The Bounder turned and looked at him.

'No. Skinner! You're not! I don't pay blackmailers - that way!' His hand shot out and grasped Skinner's collar, swinging him round. With the other he pulled open the tuck-shop door.

There was a wild howl as Harold Skinner was booted into the world outside.

COKER MISSES A PIE

'GONE!'

Coker's stentorian roar caused Potter to jerk the teapot. The stream of tea, pouring into a cup, was diverted to the seat of Coker's trousers, as he bent forward to look into his study cupboard. There was another stentorian roar from Coker, as he leapt up and collided with Potter. The teapot crashed on to the floor. Greene jumped aside in time to avoid being splashed. Coker and Potter didn't!

'You ass, Coker!'

'You silly fool, Potter!' Coker grasped the seat of his trousers. That tea had been hot! It would have been quite pleasant, taken internally. Taken externally, it wasn't. 'Ow! Upon my word, George Potter!' He made a stride towards Potter, who dodged round the table. There was already enough wreckage in the study, Potter considered, and he did not feel inclined to add himself to it.

'Chuck it, Coker! Sorry! Quite an accident! Yelling in a fellow's ear like that-'

'It's gone!' roared Horace Coker again.

'What's gone?'

'My Aunt Judy's pork pie!'

Potter and Greene looked concerned. They had had quite a pleasant tea on the bank of the Sark, while Coker was scraping off mud and water-weed. They had been anticipating an equally pleasant supper on that pork pie. When Potter had made tea, Coker - after a few more remarks about their carelessness on the river - had gone to take that pie out of the study cupboard. Now tea had been violently un-made and there was, apparently, no pie.

'I'll pop along and see if I can get something else, old man, while you and Potter mop up this mess: said Greene.'

'Borrow another teapot, too, while you're at it,' observed Potter, regarding the wreck on the floor.

'That fat little Remove fag, Bunter-' Coker bubbled with wrath and grabbed a fives-bat. 'I-I'll thrash him! I'll thrash the lot of them! Come on, you men!' He gave another roar and dashed out of the study. Potter and Greene did not 'come On'. Coker was, no doubt, seeking redress from Bunter, and although they felt that some redress was called for, they really did not want to begin a row in the Remove passage. They wanted supper.

'Hell wake up a hornets' nest,' said Potter. 'I'll clear up this mess, Greeney, while you push along and borrow Hilton's teapot - I know he has two - and anything else you can. If not, try Blundell.'

Greene nodded and left. Potter began to clear up the wreckage, and mop up. It was annoying, of course, but he could not help smiling when he remembered the way Coker had leapt up as that hot tea contacted the seat of his trousers.

In the meantime, Coker had burst into No. 1 Study in the Remove Passage. It wasn't Bunter's, but Coker was too lofty a man to consider where individual juniors had their studies. All the Famous Five were present when the door was suddenly flung open and the wrathful countenance of Coker looked in.

'Where's that little beast, Bunter?'

'Where's that big beast, Coker?' retorted Bob Cherry. 'Where he shouldn't be - butting in here. This isn't Bunter's study.'

'How do I know which studies belong to you scrubby fags?'

'You don't,' said Harry Wharton, 'or anything else.'

'The not-know-anythingfulness of the esteemed and fatheaded Coker is great,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Pass along, Coker,' said Johnny Bull, 'or we'll pass you along.'

'I'd like to see you try.'

'You will if you stay here making yourself a nuisance,' said Frank Nugent.

'I want that little beast, Bunter!' roared Horace Coker.

'Try along the passage,' suggested Bob Cherry. 'Anywhere but here.'

'Take your face out of the doorway: added Johnny Bull. 'We're having supper, and it upsets us.'

Coker clutched the fives-bat, convulsively - but no more! After all he was in search of Bunter - and Bunter wasn't here - and Coker didn't want to wait to teach these cheeky fags a lesson they badly needed. He slammed the door and left. The Famous Five looked at each other and chuckled.

'Bunter's in for trouble, judging by the look of that fives-bat,' said Frank Nugent.

'He asks for it,' observed Johnny Bull.

Harry Wharton looked doubtful. 'Can't let even Bunter be massacred by a Fifth-former like Coker,' he said.

'Bunter's all right,' observed Bob Cherry. 'He isn't in his study. I looked in just now to see Peter Todd. He and Dutton were there, but Bunter wasn't. If he raided some of Coker's tuck,' Bob chuckled, 'he'll keep out of his way till "prep", and then even Coker can't make a row. It will be "prep" soon, and Coker will have to go peacefully.'

'Does Coker ever go peacefully anywhere or any time?' demanded Johnny Bull.

'No reason why he should do anything else, if he doesn't find Bunter,' said Bob Cherry.

'Does Coker ever use reason?' asked Frank Nugent. 'No, but-'

What Bob Cherry proposed to say was not to become known, for at that moment the attention of the Famous Five was drawn by a tremendous uproar further away along the Remove passage. If not Coker, then evidently some other person was not going peacefully.

BUNTER LOSES ANOTHER PIE!

'PASS that pork pie here, fatty. We want some of it, too!'

It was unfortunate that Horace Coker heard that remark of Vernon-Smith's, as he passed Study No. 4 in the Remove passage. He had looked into No. 7, which he had remembered was Bunter's study - and found no Bunter. The door of Study No. 4 was ajar, for it was a warm evening. Coker, as he heard Vernon-Smith's voice, clutched the fives-bat convulsively and flung the door open.

He gazed at a pork pie upon the table. It was near enough, in shape and size, to the one his Aunt Judy had sent him, to deceive Coker, whose intelligence was not of the keenest. Coker had lost a pork pie, and supposed, correctly, that Bunter was the cause of that loss. Now, he found Bunter in the company of a pork pie and eating some of it. Therefore, as Coker saw it, it could be none other than his pie.

'Hand over that pie, you wretched little scroungers,' he roared. 'Sharp now!'

'What?' Tom Redwing swung round in surprise. The Bounder stared. They were used to Coker's ways. They were, generally, prepared to suffer those ways, tolerantly, if not gladly. This, however, was unprecedented, even for Horace Coker - to enter a junior study and demand a pie, not at gun-point, but at fives-bat point, so to speak.

'Mad?' demanded Vernon-Smith.

'What the dickens are you talking about, Coker?' demanded Tom Redwing.

'We're having supper.'

'Oh, lor'!'

Bunter, whose conscience was far from clear, quavered, holding a slab of that pork pie, he had just been about to bite.

'Hand over that pie!'

Coker stepped forward. As he did so, the Bounder grabbed the remainder of the pie and hurled it at him. It hit Horace Coker's nose, and he sat down in the doorway.

'He, he, he! I say, Coker - Ow - Oh, crikey!'

Coker staggered to his feet and charged. He had frequently stated that he had a short way with fags, even though the operation of it sometimes resulted in a short way with Coker. He rushed at Vernon-Smith and grabbed him by the collar across the table. The table rocked and upset. A cascade of steak-and-kidney pie, soft-boiled eggs, strawberries and cream, tarts and a cake descended upon Bunter. The rest of the pork pie had already been used to repel Coker.

'Oh! Ow! Oh, dear! Oh, lor'! Crikey! Beast!'

'Are you mad, Coker?' Redwing grasped Coker's collar, as Vernon-Smith pulled his from Coker's grasp. The next moment a wild and whirling scramble was in progress round the fallen table, and the fallen Bunter. The Owl of the Remove, taking no part in the combat, howled and yelled as Coker, Redwing and Vernon-Smith trod on him in turn, as they swirled round the table.

'Ow! Oh, crikey! Ow, wow!'

'I'll thrash the lot of you,' breathed Coker. He was pulled down and rolled over in the mixture of steak-and-kidney pie, strawberries and cream and tarts now strewn on the floor. Other Removites, attracted by the uproar, swarmed into Study No. 4. Many hands grasped Coker; so many, in fact, that there seemed hardly enough of him to go round.

Harry Wharton and Bob Cherry each took hold of one of Coker's legs, Hurree Singh and Nugent grabbed an arm each, and Johnny Bull took hold of

his hair. Vernon-Smith and Redwing secured handholds and he was carried out to the passage.

'What on earth's happened?' asked Tom Brown.

'He's mad,' said the Bounder. 'Potty! Barged in and tried to take our pie-'

'It's my pie!' shouted Coker. 'Let go and I'll wallop the lot of you.'

'What an inducement!' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'That fat little beast, Bunter, scrounged my pie,' roared Coker.

'That might be true,' observed Johnny Bull. 'All the same-'

'It isn't true about this one,' said Vernon-Smith. 'I'd only just bought it at Mrs. Mible's-'

'Rot! It's mine. That fat fag Bunter-'

'It isn't Coker's pie,' howled the Owl of the Remove. 'Oh, dear! Oh, crikey! That was another one - I mean it wasn't another one! I never touched it - I lost it anyway. Oh, dear, he's squashed all the strawberries and the eggs - and - this pie!

'You fat little beast!' Coker made another desperate effort to shake off the restraining hands and get at Bunter. 'I'll thrash you. I'll thrash the lot of you. I'll-'

'Hold him!'

'Sit on him!'

'Throw him out!'

'What is this unseemly uproar?' It was the chilling voice of Henry Samuel Quelch. The noise died down. The clutching hands ceased to clutch Coker.

'Only a little discussion with Coker, sir,' said the Bounder. 'No harm done.'

'Ow! I'm harmed. The beast trod on me. And all the tuck ruined-'

'Be silent, Bunter! Coker, what does this mean? How daze you come and riot in the Remove passage? Upon my word, you are again in a most disgraceful state.'

Coker certainly was. His hair and clothing were smeared with a mixture of strawberries and cream, steak and kidney, eggs, jams and crumbs. The juniors looked at Coker and laughed. Mr. Quelch looked at him and did not laugh.

'Silence! Wharton, what is the meaning of this disturbance?' Quelch eyed his head boy.

'I don't know, sir. We heard a noise from Smithy's - I mean, Vernon-Smith's study, and we came along to find Coker having some sort of an argument - and we tried to-to persuade him to stop it, and-'

'It was a mistake, sir,' put in Redwing, anxious to pour some oil on the troubled waters, which certainly seemed to need it. 'Coker seems to have lost a pie, and thought we'd taken it - and we hadn't. We were eating one Vernon-Smith had just bought.'

'Absurd!' Quelch frowned. 'Really Coker! Remove yourself to your own quarters, and clean yourself. I shall acquaint Mr. Prout with this circumstance, and leave him to deal with you, as your form master. Now, go!'

Coker opened his mouth as though he had much to say, but, encountering Quelch's gimlet-like glance, decided not to say it. Wonderful to relate, Coker, at least, went peacefully - much later than he should have done, and certainly not in the state in which he had entered. The Remove master turned to his own form. He frowned. Vernon-Smith, Redwing and Bunter all showed many traces of that disturbance amidst the squashed ruins of the supper. Quelch looked at the mess on the carpet of Study No. 4.

'Disgraceful!' he observed. 'This must be cleaned.'

Vernon-Smith - Redwing - this is your study. See that it is done - and then I recommend you to clean yourselves. And you, too, Bunter-'

'Oh, dear! Oh, lor', sir! All that tuck ruined. And it wasn't his pie - that one wasn't - I mean-'

'Be silent, Bunter! I am by no means sure of your innocence in this matter.' Mr. Quelch fixed the Owl with a penetrating gaze. 'I accept Redwing's statement that the comestibles which were being consumed were not Coker's.'

'They-they weren't com-combustibles, sir. A pork pie - oh, dear! And strawberries, and-'

'Comestibles, you ridiculous boy! I accept Redwing's statement, but I cannot help thinking that you have given Coker some cause of offence. Now, let there be no more of this disturbance.'

Quelch walked away. He had been peacefully occupied with his great work *The History of Greyfriars* and had been busy on a chapter dealing with the Great Riot of 1765 when he had been interrupted by the noise of a great riot of 1965. It was Prout, still smarting under Quelch's earlier remarks, who had asked him if he were aware that there was a most unseemly uproar in the Remove passage.

Now that Quelch had become aware that the cause of that most unseemly uproar was a boy in Prout's own form, he intended that Prout should be made aware of that fact also, with no undue delay.

BUNTER SEEKS VENGEANCE

'BEAST!' murmured the Owl of the Remove.

He had left Study No. 4, when Vernon-Smith and Redwing began to clean up the ruins of that supper from their carpet. It was wiser. They might expect him to give them a helping hand, and Bunter disliked work. The cleaning of that carpet was the equivalent to Bunter of the cleaning of the stables of Augeas by Hercules - except that Hercules was willing to work and Bunter wasn't.

The Owl glanced down at his jacket and groaned.

A great deal of that supper in No. 4, which should have gone inside Bunter, had, instead, been bestowed outside him. Indeed, it was surprising, had Bunter cared to think about it - which he didn't - how one supper had smeared Coker so liberally and yet left enough also to smear Bunter and leave quite a quantity trodden into Smithy's carpet.

'Oh, lor'!'

Unfortunately it was his own jacket. He had put it on after having had Mauly's stolen from him by that beast who pretended to be a photographer. Had it been Mauly's which required cleaning, the answer to his problem would have been simple. He would not have cleaned it. It would have been an easy matter to roll it up-uncleaned, of course - and put it back somewhere in Mauly's study - and say nothing.

Unfortunately, this simple solution of the problem could not be put into action. That beast, Quelch, had told him to clean himself. If Bunter turned up in form next day with a jacket which hadn't been cleaned, there would be trouble. All owing to that beast, Coker!

It was hard, Bunter reflected, that a decent fellow like himself should have to live surrounded by so many beasts.

He looked at the jacket again.

'Oh, dear!'

Unfortunately, his only other jacket had a good deal of jam on it. That had been the fault of that beast, Temple of the Fourth, the day before yesterday. Bunter had quite realised the importance of getting rid, quickly, of those tarts which had contained the jam. People, somehow always thought of Bunter, when they missed anything eatable. It was bitterly unjust, but it was so. Temple, who had bought those tarts for tea, arrived when he had just taken hold of the last two. Temple had taken those tarts and squashed them down the Owl's neck and quite a lot on his jacket collar.

Bunter sighed wearily, and opened the door of his own study, No. 7. He made for the armchair. Peter Todd, who was sitting at the table, jumped up and grabbed him.

'Ow! Leggo! Beast!'

'You don't sit down in my armchair until you've cleaned yourself. Think I want it smeared with jam and cream and squashed pie?'

'Oh, really Toddy! I'm tired - frightfully tired. I-I'll clean it presently.'

'Make presently now - then you can sit down in my armchair. Quelch told you to go and clean yourself. Push off and do it.'

Bunter blinked indignantly. Keeping a tired fellow from his armchair! Of course Toddy had bought it, but the Owl had always regarded it as his own. Certainly he used it more than Todd or Dutton did. However, Bunter was used to such selfishness by now.

'Very well, Toddy if you're going to be so mean and-and-'

'I am.'

'So mean - and-and puncture-'

'What?'

'Punct-punctureilious-'

Peter Todd grinned. 'Do you mean punctilious, you fat ass? If so, all that, too. You've just time to go and get clean before "prep" - at least you might be able to remove the two or three top layers.'

'Beast! I-I say, Toddy, isn't there anything for supper? I-I'm famished. That beast Coker ruined the supper Smithy was going to stand me!'

'Yes. It looked ruined.' Peter grinned. 'There's a packet of biscuits. Now push off and make yourself look presentable - as much as one wash will.'

'Beast! Oh-all right.' Bunter grabbed the biscuits and left. Outside, he paused.

Mauly?

There might be something in Mauly's study to stay the pangs of hunger, and - the Owl had a brainwave - perhaps he could borrow another jacket from old Mauly? He wouldn't mind if he didn't know - and that would save all the trouble of cleaning his own.

'He, he, he!'

Ten minutes later, the Owl of the Remove, wearing a jacket which belonged to Lord Mauleverer, and finishing the remains of a cake which had also recently been Lord Mauleverer's property, ambled along to Study No. 4. Those two fellows ought to have cleaned up the carpet by now, if they hadn't been lazy, and Smithy owed him a feed. He had promised him one, but owing to the activities of Horace Coker, that promise had not been kept.

Vernon-Smith and Redwing were still busy with that carpet when the Owl entered. Vernon-Smith had gone to seek the services of Trotter, the page-boy, and to pay for those to be rendered, but he had been unable to find him. It was amazing, indeed, how often it was impossible to find Trotter when there was any work to be done! So he and Redwing had to do it themselves. Redwing looked up as Bunter entered.

'Good! You're just in time to give us a hand.'

'Oh,lor'! Oh, crumbs! I thought you'd have finished, Reddy. I-I say, I think my-my spinal column was twisted when that beast Coker fell on me. In three places,' added the fat Owl, embroidering a little. 'Otherwise, I should be only too pleased to-to help you. I say, Smithy, old chap, haven't you anything to eat in your study? You promised me a feed, and-'

'There it is.' Vernon-Smith waved his hand at a pail in which he and Redwing had been putting the scrapings from the carpet. 'All yours, Bunter! Hairs from the carpet and plenty of dust mixed with it, but you won't mind that. Help yourself!'

'Beast! I mean, dear old chap - I'm frightfully hungry - and that rotter, Coker-'

'Did you take a pork pie of Coker's?' asked Redwing.

'Yes - I mean no. Not that pie - only the one that beast of a fellow who pretended he was a photographer pushed me on to - that was Coker's pie - I mean it wasn't.'

'So you did take one from him?' observed Redwing, 'and he thought he'd tracked it down - a natural mistake.'

'It wasn't a natural mistake,' exclaimed the Owl, indignantly. 'I take a pie from Coker - I mean, I didn't take a pie from him - and he comes and takes one from you, which doesn't belong to him at all. There's Fifth-form justice for you. I hadn't even finished that pie, when that photographing beast made me sit on it-'

'If you aren't going to help us get this mess off the carpet, Bunter,' said Vernon-Smith, 'you can go away. And take your feed with you. Or give it to Coker to compensate him for the pie he lost and you squashed!'

'Oh, really, Smithy-' Bunter eyed the pail, and an idea flashed into his fat brain. There was, as people had observed, plenty of room for any of them.

'I say! He, he, he! I've a good mind to fix it over the beast's door.' Vernon-Smith looked up.

'A booby-trap over his study door? Well-that's an idea!'

'Help me, Smithy!' The Owl's eyes gleamed. 'He'll go to the games study after "prep" - he always does - and Potter and Greene too, I shouldn't wonder.' Vernon-Smith paused and looked at the pail. Redwing looked at him in alarm.

'Chuck it, Smithy! There'll only be a frightful row.'

'There's already been one here, owing to Coker.'

'Forget it, all the same. Don't take any notice of Bunter's fat-headed suggestion.'

'Tain't a sat-headed fuggestion - I mean fat-headed suggestion!' exclaimed the Owl, indignantly. 'That beast, Coker, smashed up my supper.'

'Why should he get away with it, Reddy?' demanded the Bounder. 'Even Bunter can have a good idea, sometimes. You wouldn't think so to look at him-'

'Oh, really, Smithy!'

'Coker's responsible for this mixture.' Vernon-Smith waved his hand at the pail, half full of a most unappetising conglomeration of steak and kidneys, smashed strawberries, cream, broken eggs, pieces of cake and carpet-dust. 'He ought to have it.'

'Look here. Smithy--'

'Tisn't a full pailful, of course, but with a little ink and soot-'

'He, he, he!'

'And there's a tin of golden syrup in the cupboard-'

'Oh, lor', He, he, he!'

'And a little flour-'

'Chuck it, Smithy,' said the alarmed Redwing once more.

'Over Coker? Why not?'

'Because there'll be the most awful row if you do,' said Redwing.

'Coker seems to like awful rows.'

'It will be known where this muck came from-'

'Only by Coker on the receiving end of it, Reddy,' observed the Bounder, going to the cupboard, and taking out a tin of golden syrup. He poured its contents into the pail. 'And though he's every kind of an ass and chump, he's not a sneak. And if he comes here making inquiries - we can answer them! - Now for a little soot.'

Vernon-Smith hauled the pail over to the fireplace, and began to rake soot down into it with a fire-shovel.

'He, he, he!' cackled Bunter.

'Smithy, for goodness' sake!' exclaimed Redwing. 'It may not be Coker who gets it. It might be Potter or Greene. And you've nothing against them.' The Bounder laughed, and added some ink to the soot, and then emptied a bag of flour into the pail. 'Nothing, Reddy, but this kind of thing is an occupational risk to people who share a study with others like Coker. Not a very great one. He always pushes in and out first - that's his little way. None of this "by your leave" or "after you" with Coker. Now, you buzz off, Bunter. I said I'd stand you a feed, and I will - another time, but we'll stand this one to Coker, first.'

'He, he, he!'

The Owl cackled and left. Tom Redwing looked at his friend. The Bounder grinned.

'Wonders will never cease, Reddy. Fancy Bunter having a good idea!'

'Smithy, don't be such a chump! If you're caught-'

'If?' said Vernon-Smith. 'I'll take care of that, Reddy. All the Fifth go to their games study after "prep". As usual. Potter and Greene because they don't want to be left alone with Coker, and Coker because he never wants to be left alone by himself with no one to lay down any law to. I'll pop along after "prep" to make sure that's happened tonight. If it has, I make a return trip-'

'Smithy-'

'Carrying a hamper with this pail inside - quite an innocent - looking parcel. You can fix a pail over a door, Reddy, so that when someone opens the door, the pail tilts upside down - I'll show you-'

'No! Stop it, and just stand Bunter a feed for losing this one. Tell him you've chucked this potty idea. Send him away with anything you give him to his own study, and let's have peace in this one. After all, it seems pretty clear that he did take one of Coker's pies!'

'And so Coker tried to take one of mine. I'm not a greedy chap, so he can have it. The bits are in this pail.' Vernon-Smith sat down in an armchair, and grinned again at Redwing, who continued to look troubled.

DELIVERED AT THE WRONG ADDRESS

'IT is deplorable, Prout,' observed Quelch, icily, 'that a senior boy should presume to take the law into his own hands, in such a manner, and instigate a tumult of this nature amongst juniors.'

'Regrettable, indeed, Quelch,' said Prout. He was not pleased by the discovery that the unseemly uproar in the Remove passage, to which he had called Quelch's attention, had, apparently, been caused by a boy of his own form! 'Nevertheless, it would seem that Coker of my form was in pursuit of some missing eatables, which he thought had been purloined by a boy of your form - this Bunter.'

'He was mistaken, Prout. They had not been so purloined,' Quelch breathed hard. It was rather trying to have to defend the activities of that absurd boy, Bunter, who had only that afternoon committed so crass a stupidity as to lose his jacket, and return with a ridiculous story of its having been stolen by a man who wanted to take his photograph! Still, justice must be done, even to Bunter.

'He may have been mistaken on this occasion, Quelch.' Apparently, Prout considered that justice must be done, even to Coker. 'Nevertheless, I must point out that this boy, Bunter, has a reputation for the unauthorised acquisition of articles of an edible nature, belonging to others. It would seem impossible for anyone to control that deplorable tendency.' Prout fixed Quelch with a meaning eye. Quelch was Bunter's form master, and the one to exercise control over him at Greyfriars. Prout's expression indicated that Quelch had, regrettably, failed to do so.

'I should not deny that implication, Prout.'

'Of course not, my dear Quelch.'

'But even if it were justified-'

'"But even," Quelch-?'

'But even if it were justified, Prout, that does not excuse a senior boy acting on an utterly erroneous assumption, and behaving in a riotous manner.'

'Quite so, Quelch but he thought he had caught this boy, Bunter, in *flagrante delicto*.'

'That, Prout,' observed Mr. Quelch, firmly, 'is, as I have already endeavoured to convey to you, no justification for a boy of your form causing the most outrageous uproar in a study belonging to boys of mine. You, Prout, are the master of what is supposed to be a senior form-'

'I am not only supposed to be, but am the master of a senior form, consisting of boys of a mere responsible and developed character than those in junior forms.'

'That description, doubtless, applies to some of them. Prout - at least. I presume so. I think, however, that even you, Prout, will hardly endeavour to apply your eulogy to that boy, Coker! Responsible and developed character, indeed! '

'H'm.' Prout remembered certain past reflections and observations of his own about Coker. However, he had no intention of confiding them to Quelch!

'*Fiat justitia ruat caelum*,' he observed. 'That means, my dear Quelch-'

'I am aware of what it means, Prout,' snapped Quelch. 'If you are prepared to apply that admirable precept to the boy, Coker-'

'Let us proceed now to the study he occupies, Quelch,' said Prout, firmly. 'You will then and there hear my interrogations on this matter, and his answers to my - to your accusations, Quelch. He may not, indeed,

be the most brilliant and balanced of my pupils,' Prout paused as he considered how very far from that Horace Coker really was! 'Nevertheless he is a responsible senior boy, who, I am assured, did not enter into any contest in the Remove passage, without the gravest provocation. Come!' Prout stalked out of the Masters' Common-Room somewhat ponderously, and was followed by Quelch. Prout was now silent. That, at least, was something! Arriving in the Fifth-form passage, Prout paused outside the door of the study occupied by Coker, Potter and Greene.

'Coker!' Prout tapped on the door. There was no reply. 'H'm! He does not appear to be here, Quelch. However'- Prout pushed open the study-door. Why Prout did so was not clear. He had called Coker and there had been no reply. It was obvious that there was no one within. Coker, Potter and Greene were, most probably, in the Fifth-form games study, 'prep' being over. However, the reactions of Prout in certain circumstances were often as inexplicable as Coker's own.

Prout had, recently, expressed the opinion that justice should be done, though the heavens fell. For one moment, as he entered Coker's study, it almost seemed as though they had! A mass of something soft and sticky descended on his head, and some of the substance slithered down his neck. He staggered forward, endeavouring to detach a glutinous chunk of the stuff from his face.

'My dear Prout!' Quelch had been following closely in the wake of the Fifth-form master, and observed with surprise the mysterious happening which had suddenly occurred.

'Whatever-?' Mr. Quelch discovered that whatever had smitten Prout had not spared him. Sundry splashes of the mysterious substance fell on his hair, and as he halted, a large chunk suddenly descended from above and stopped in the space between his collar and the back of his neck.

'Upon my word, Prout! What is this?' Mr. Quelch frantically clawed at the back of his collar.

'Preposterous! Outrageous!' It was the indignant voice of Prout. 'Good Heavens! I am positively covered with some filthy, glutinous substance. Good gracious, Quelch!'

'It is some trap - a trap operating when the door opened,' snapped Quelch. 'What is known as a booby-trap - an outrage! And in a senior study!'

'Unparalleled!' boomed Prout. He was not in a state of mind to defend his form against any aspersions of Quelch's at that moment. 'Scandalous! Coker - where is Coker?'

'My hat!' It was an exclamation from Cedric Hilton, returning from the Fifth-form games study to Study No. 6.

He had been surprised to find an unusual disturbance outside No. 4, belonging to Coker, Potter and Greene. Disturbances in and about that study were not, of course, unknown. Coker inhabited it, and the presence of Coker seemed to attract disturbances as catmint attracts cats! However, this one certainly seemed to be of an unusual nature, as it appeared to involve two form masters in a deplorably dishevelled condition!

'Is anything the matter, sir?'

'An outrage! A disgraceful occurrence!' Prout scooped some more of the stuff from the region of his face and glared. 'Is that Hilton? Where is Coker? This unparalleled outrage! Grooch!'

The Fifth-form master shivered, as a sticky and clammy mixture, which, although he did not know it, was mainly composed of a mixture of golden syrup, soot and flour, slithered further down his neck. 'Where is Coker? To set up such an apparatus over his study-door. Disgraceful! Disgusting!'

'Deplorable!' Mr. Quelch scraped a large and sticky chunk of the mixture from his head. He had not received quite so much of the mess as had Prout, but, in his opinion, quite sufficient. In fact, too much. 'I am subject to this when entering a Fifth-form study - a senior boy's study. Really!'

'Where is Coker?' boomed Prout again. 'Fetch him immediately, Hilton!'

'Yes, sir, certainly!' Hilton suppressed a grin. 'But Coker can't be responsible for this, sir. He wouldn't set a booby-trap over his own study-door - he'll be coming back from the games study soon, and it would have caught him - or Potter or Greene.' Hilton suppressed another grin.

'Allow me to investigate this, sir. And, if I might suggest it - you and Mr. Quelch will probably want to wash.'

Prout grunted, but he realised that Hilton was talking sense. It was unlikely that even Coker, incredibly stupid as he knew him to be, could have been quite so much so as to erect a booby-trap over his own study-door.

'Yes, Hilton. Inform Coker of this-this shocking occurrence, and tell him that I wish to see him. Come, Quelch! We must eliminate the traces of this unparalleled outrage!'

Prout ambled away, grunting, and Quelch, with a grim expression, followed him. He, too, realised, that Hilton's suggestion was a sound one. The greatest and most urgent need for both Prout and himself was a wash! Cedric Hilton refrained from smiling until they had turned the corner.

Then he carefully investigated the doorway of Fifth-form Study No. 4.

There was a pail swung over the top of it, on the inside.

It was fixed in such a position that a string fixed to the door turned it upside down when the door opened.

Hilton smiled and cut it down. Then, holding it fastidiously at arm's length, he carried it to his own study. Putting it there into a large paper bag, he proceeded to Study No. 4 in the Remove passage.

Vernon-Smith and Redwing looked up as Hilton entered. He held out the bag.

'Yours, I think!'

'What-?' The Bounder took the paper bag and peered into it. 'Oh, my pail - and I see - empty. So it worked?' He looked at the Fifth-former with a rather puzzled air. He could not see how Hilton had identified him as the constructor of that booby-trap, or why he had brought back the pail.

'Yes,' said Hilton. 'It worked very well - if you look at it in that way.'

'Coker asked for it,' observed Vernon-Smith. 'He mucked up our feed, so I put what was left of it into that pail - and a bit added.'

'Um yes,' said Hilton. 'Delectable mixture, no doubt. As I've brought back your pail, hadn't you better get rid of the evidence? Pail might be identified. Well good luck - you may need it!' Hilton turned to go, and looked round at the doorway. 'I wouldn't lose any time, if I were you, Vernon-Smith. Prout might put two and two together - he does sometimes.'

'Prout?' exclaimed the Bounder. 'Why Prout? Coker's every kind of a chump, but he wouldn't sneak to Prout.'

'Wouldn't and doesn't need to,' said Hilton. 'Prout called on Coker, when Coker was out.'

'What?' Tom Redwing gasped in consternation. 'Did Prout get that muck?'

'Some of it - not all. He left some for Quelch who was with him.'

'Prout and Quelch! You idiot, Smithy!'

'I happened to turn up when they'd just received your present,' said Hilton. 'They didn't seem pleased. In view of what happened to old Coker here, I put two and two together. Seem to have added them up correctly, don't you think so? So may others. Thought this pail and string would be safer elsewhere. Make the trail more difficult to follow. Good night.'

Cedric Hilton smiled, bowed politely, and left Study No. 4. Redwing and Vernon-Smith looked at each other.

LORD MAULEVERER DISCOVERS A RUIN

'GOOD gad! Ruined!'

The Famous Five were just calling on Lord Mauleverer when they heard that remark. Classes were over, and it had been their intention to invite him to walk with them over the Common to take tea at the bun shop in Courtfield.

Bob Cherry, leading the inviting party, pushed open the door of Study No. 12 a little further. His lordship was holding up a jacket and regarding it with some distaste. 'Brokers in at Mauleverer Towers?' inquired Bob. 'Or have the hire purchase people got tired of waiting for the payment on your last pair of trousers?' asked Nugent.

'Or is there a distress warrant on your Sunday topper?' asked Wharton. Lord Mauleverer swung round and grinned. 'Oh, no, nothin' like that!' he said.

'Then what or, who's ruined, Mauly?' asked Bob Cherry.

'This.' - Lord Mauleverer held out the jacket, with the air of a man who feared that it might turn and bite him at any moment.

'Oh!' Harry Wharton and Co. inspected it closely. It certainly did not seem to be in that well-kept condition usually found in Lord Mauleverer's garments. It was smeared over wide areas with what looked like an unpalatable mixture of various foodstuffs.

'Not like your usual form to get your clothes in a state like that. Mauly,' said Johnny Bull.

'It may not be ruined, Mauly,' added Bob Cherry, 'but it's nearing the bankruptcy court. Better write off the ten-and-sixpence it cost you and buy another at old Lazarus's.'

Lord Mauleverer smiled. That jacket had, certainly, cost him more than ten-and-sixpence, and he was unlikely, in any case, to endeavour to replace it at Lazarus's shop in Courtfield, although that establishment offered secondhand clothes amongst a variety of other oddments, which had been bought, some Greyfriars men declared, in keen competition with jumble sales.

'Better be more careful next time, Mauly,' observed Johnny Bull.

'I didn't make this mess,' replied Lord Mauleverer. 'Wouldn't know how to. Beastly bore, isn't it? I'll have to get another, or get this cleaned pretty quick. I'm running short.'

'Of cash?' exclaimed Harry Wharton, in surprise. The others stared. Lord Mauleverer was far and away the richest fellow in the Remove, and, indeed, in the whole school.

'My dear chap, no. Runnin' short of jackets.'

'Gaps in the wardrobe?' said Frank Nugent.

'Just that,' agreed Lord Mauleverer. 'Only in jackets. Sudden discovery. Bit of a shock! This has got a spot of ink on it.' He waved his hand at the one he was wearing. It had no spot of ink that the others could see. and if it had, it was certainly not visible to an extent which would have bothered any other members of the Remove. 'That ass, Skinner, shakin' a pen this afternoon. Got to change it, naturally. Then I found this.' He waved a hand at the smeared garment. 'I've only one more. Can't go along with only one spare jacket, can I?'

Bob Cherry smiled. He, himself, possessed one spare jacket, commonly worn only on Sundays and when the other needed cleaning - and so did most Removites - but he knew that Lord Mauleverer looked at these matters differently. 'You've certainly got this into a shocking state.'

'I'm surprised at you, Mauly,' said Nugent.

'The shocking statefulness is terrific,' added Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'I didn't get it into any shockin' state!' exclaimed Lord Mauleverer, indignantly. 'Told you so. Just discovered it. Must be Bunter. Jacket's all slit up the back, too.'

'Ah, the Sherlock Holmes touch,' observed Bob Cherry. 'Bunter's the only fellow who needs to slit borrowed jackets up the back to make them fit. This jacket's been slit. Therefore, the slit and the mess were made by Bunter. *Quod erat demonstrandum*, as old Quelch would say.'

'It is undoubtedly the work of the fat and pinchful Bunter,' said Hurree Singh.

'M'yes!' said Mauleverer. 'Fat ass doesn't know any better, I suppose, but it's gettin' a bit borin' the way he borrows my jackets. Three this week-'

'Three this week?' exclaimed Johnny Bull. 'What can that fat chump want with three jackets? If it had been three pies, that would be more like him.'

Lord Mauleverer grinned rather ruefully. 'Yaas! Still he's had three jackets. Took one of mine Wednesday night when he went out with Smithy instead of me goin'. Had a bit of a smash-up in the car they took, I understand, and Bunter was tumbled about and rolled in the stuff they had to eat. Don't mind that. Grateful in a way. If I'm to have my jacket rolled in a mess of things to eat, I'd rather not be inside it.'

'We did you a good turn that night, Mauly,' said Harry Wharton. 'In more ways than one, it seems!'

'M'yes. So did Bunter, I suppose. Not meanin' to, and not likin' it much by all accounts. Cheap at the price, I should say. That jacket and now this. Two for Chunkley's to clean. It's the nuisance of havin' to take 'em, I mind.'

'And what about the third, Mauly?' asked Bob Cherry. 'You said you were three down.'

'H'm, yes! But there's no need to clean that - at least, I suppose so. Doesn't concern me, anyway, I'm pleased to say. It's lost.'

The Removites smiled. It was typical of Lord Mauleverer's lackadaisical attitude that he would be pleased at the loss of a jacket preventing him from having to bother about getting it cleaned.

'Lost? How?'

'Well, Bunter borrowed it off me, after he'd messed up the first one in that smash, and a photographer fellow took it off him, so he says. Odd story even from Bunter. No sense in it. Still, I suppose it's true - or almost. He lost it anyway - and then borrowed this.'

'Yes, I remember Bunter coming in with that yarn.' Bob Cherry had been one of the crowd who had listened with amusement to Quelch calling the Owl to order for wearing no jacket. 'Pretty steep, Mauly. Still Bunter's yarns are always pretty steep. Quelch seemed to think so.'

'He didn't believe a word of it,' said Johnny Bull. 'And neither do I. That fat ass couldn't tell the truth if he tried. And he never tries. Why on earth should anyone want to steal Bunter's jacket? Pinchers don't go in for that kind of thing.'

'M'yes,' observed Mauleverer. 'Still he did lose it somehow! And now I've got to walk over to Chunkley's with this one. And the other. To get 'em cleaned. What a bore!'

'Kick that fat ass, and make him take them,' said Johnny Bull.

'Too much exertion, if I've got to go to Chunkley's too,' said his lordship. He looked at his soiled garment again, and shook his head. Bob Cherry grinned and glanced at it.

'That must be the one Bunter was wearing last night, Mauly,' he observed. 'Cheek of him to take it, of course, but you owe its present state to

Coker. He came into Smithy's study where Smithy was standing Bunter a feed, and rolled him in it.'

'Yaas!' said Lord Mauleverer. 'Heard about that row. Case of mistaken identity about a pork pie, what?'

'There was another row in Coker's own study later on,' added Harry Wharton. 'Someone fixed a booby-trap over Coker's door, and Prout walked into it.'

'Oh, gad! Reprisal going the wrong way,' exclaimed Mauleverer. 'Annoyed Prout a bit, I shouldn't wonder.'

'More than a bit, by all accounts,' observed Nugent.

'Smithy was standing Bunter a feed for something,' said Harry Wharton.

'To keep his mouth shut about that fat-headedness on Wednesday night,' added Johnny Bull.

'And use it for the eatfulness rather than the talkfulness,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'I suppose the only way to keep Bunter from talking is to give him something to eat,' said Bob Cherry. 'And you can't keep that up all the time, even with Bunter. The longer he's kept from saying anything about last Wednesday night's business the safer for Smithy -but if Smithy's at the back of that booby-trap affair, Bunter may know about it too. That's asking him to bottle up a lot of secrets. If Coker had walked into it, it wouldn't have mattered.'

'Except to the esteemed and fat-headed Coker,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

'Smithy doesn't share secrets with Bunter,' stated Johnny Bull.

'Not usually,' put in Wharton, 'but they were both in Smithy's study when Coker came in and made that row. And so they may both know something about that booby-trap in Coker's own study afterwards.'

'Which got Prout,' grinned Bob Cherry.

'And Quelchy,' said Nugent. 'I hear he was just behind Prout and got some of it. Not so much as Prout, but enough to annoy him too.'

'That is the terrific understatementfulness,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'The likeness of the esteemed Quelch to the excellent bear with the sore head this morning was terrific.'

'So that's why he was so sharp in class to-day - even more than usual,' observed Johnny Bull. 'It looks as though he hasn't traced anything to Bunter yet - but if he sees that about,' Johnny nodded at Mauleverer's soiled jacket, 'it will give him ideas.'

'Oh, I say!' exclaimed Lord Mauleverer. 'Meanin' that if he finds out that Bunter wore this and the mess on it was caused by Coker, he might think that it was Bunter tryin' to get his own back with that booby-trap. And Smithy helpin' him! Sooner this is somewhere else the better. Oh, dear, I'll have to go to Chunkley's after all!'

'Beautiful evening,' said Bob Cherry. 'Plenty of time before "call-over" if you get a move on.'

Lord Mauleverer looked disinclined to get a move on. 'We came in here to ask you if you'd care to have tea with us at the bun shop.'

Lord Mauleverer brightened. 'That's an idea! Think Quelchy would let me use his telephone to get a taxi? Perhaps he's forgotten all about last night and is in a good temper now?'

'And perhaps he isn't,' said Johnny Bull. 'Beaks don't forget about such things. Taxi be blowed! We'll take you a sharp, brisk walk across the Common!'

Lord Mauleverer shuddered.

'No! Might join you fellows later, after takin' these jackets to Chunkley's for cleanin'. Thought of takin' the first one yesterday. Good thing I didn't, isn't it, as I have to take this, too? Would have been a

shockin' waste of effort and time. Shows you it never does to hurry. Well I'll be seein' you chaps pretty soon. Perhaps.'

The juniors laughed.

'Bunter ought to take those jackets, if you're too lazy to do so,' said Bob Cherry. 'He's the cause of their being in the mess they're in now.' Lord Mauleverer cheered up. 'That's an idea. He seems to have lost a feed over my jacket. Offer him another to go and have this mess taken off, what?'

'You're too soft, Mauly,' Johnny Bull snorted. 'Boot the fat ass until he does take them. He won't require all that booting, if you tell him his own safety from Quelch depends on it.'

'Booting Bunter at all is real hard work, of course,' added Bob Cherry, 'but you don't mind that, do you, Mauly? You may have to run after him quite a lot!'

'Oh, dear. Perhaps I'd better leave out the bootin' and keep to the feed. More-more businesslike,' said Lord Mauleverer.

'Listen. Mauly,' said Harry Wharton, 'the invitation to join us at the bun shop is still open - but you've got to get those jackets to Chunkley's cleaning department, whether you come to us afterwards or not. Promise me that you'll get them there somehow - whether you have to bribe or boot Bunter into taking them - or whether you can use Quelchy's phone for a taxi or have to walk. Promise?'

Lord Mauleverer nodded and smiled. 'Yes, I'll get them there somehow. Seems to be important, doesn't it? Suppressing evidence and all that sort of thing? See you fellows later.'

LORD MAULEVERER CONFUSES THE TRAIL

'YES, my dear Quelch, I think you will find that it is, undoubtedly, the case, that boys in your own form are responsible for this unparalleled outrage!'

Lord Mauleverer paused in Master's Passage. He had been going to Mr. Quelch's study to ask if he might be permitted to use his telephone. He had stopped as he heard the booming voice of Prout coming from that apartment.

'I will look into the matter, Prout!' Mr. Quelch's voice was cold, and sounded, rather, as if he wished he were in a position to invite Prout to bend over and take 'six', as he had done to many a previous visitor to that study. Unfortunately such measures could not be taken with the Fifth-form master! 'If you will now excuse me, I am rather busy.'

'I have seen Coker,' continued Prout, booming on regardless. 'He has assured me regarding the matter which we encountered last night, he disclaims all knowledge of it, and so do Potter and Greene, the other occupants of the study. I have observed that all traces of the outrage seem now to have been removed from the study doorway-'

'I will look into the matter, Prout, as I have already told you-'

'It seems to me, Quelch, that the boys who set it undoubtedly intended it for Coker himself. On hearing that it had actually inflicted damage on me,' Prout's voice rose in indignation, 'they endeavoured to clear away all traces of this-this unparalleled piece of mischief! If you would investigate amongst those of the boys of your own form, who appear to have a grievance against Coker, in consequence of his misunderstanding of last night-'

'I will do so, Prout. And now, you must excuse me-'

'I should urge haste, Quelch. *Festina lente* is not a good precept in such a matter as this-'

Lord Mauleverer withdrew. It might have been entertaining to wait and listen to Quelch's comments on the words of Suetonius as applied to himself by Prout, but Mauleverer was no eavesdropper. He had stopped because he had hoped - as Quelch was, doubtless, also hoping - that Prout's eloquence was coming to an end. Apparently, it wasn't - and Quelch was unlikely, when it did, to be in the mood for another interview, even with one of his own boys, who merely wanted to use his telephone!

Mauleverer went along to Study No. 4 in the Remove passage. Vernon-Smith and Redwing looked up as he entered.

'Hallo, Mauly, walk in! Reddy and I were just going for a run on our bikes to Pegg. Might get a dip in the sea. Care to join us? Plenty of time if we put it on a bit.'

Lord Mauleverer shook his head. 'No, thanks, all the same. Everyone tryin' to get me to do somethin' energetic, in this hot weather. Just looked in to warn you chaps that Prout's turnin' detective about that thing he walked into in Coker's study last night. Stirrin' up Quelchy to do the same. So if there are any precautions you can take-'

Redwing looked troubled.

'I got Trotter to clean up the mess in Coker's study, before he came back to it,' he said. 'I'd have done it myself - but it would have looked odd if anyone had come along and seen a Remove man doing it. Though we'd have risked it if we hadn't found Trotter.'

'Couldn't find him at first,' added the Bounder. 'Reddy and I cleared up this place before we did. Trotter won't say who employed him - if he's

asked - because I paid him not to! No evidence left! Quelchy may make inquiries, but a chap isn't obliged to incriminate himself!

He smiled at Redwing, who, rather uneasily, smiled back. Redwing knew that his friend's code in these matters did not prevent him telling a deliberate falsehood to a master if he considered it necessary.

'He might make those inquiries of Bunter,' observed Lord Mauleverer. 'Not a discreet chap, Bunter. Borrowed another of my jackets and left it smeared with lots of your evidence, Smithy. Sendin' it to the cleaners. Thought of gettin' Bunter to take it. Better all out of the way, what?'

'You're a good chap, Mauly,' said Vernon-Smith. 'Bunter could do with being handed over to the cleaners, too, with your jacket, instead of just taking it. Pity he can't be!'

'It isn't only that silly business of last night!' exclaimed Redwing. 'If Bunter talks about it, he may let out something about that midnight trip of yours on Wednesday, Smithy. And that's much more serious.'

'Thought of that,' said Lord Mauleverer. 'Can't keep Bunter out of circulation permanently, what? Pity! The longer the better, perhaps. I'll try and get him away now. Soon as I can. Heard Prout quote to Quelch a proverb about makin' haste slowly, which didn't seem to please him much. Can't rely upon him doin' it, so I'll go along now and see if I can deal with Bunter if he's in. And if I might suggest somethin'-'

'You really are a good sort, Mauly!' exclaimed Redwing.

Lord Mauleverer looked pleased. 'Not bein' disinterested, you know.

Merely tryin' to save my jackets. What about goin' along now and confessin' to Quelch about last night? Quite a mistake! Meant it for Coker! Sort of reprisal for what he did here, messin' up your feed.

Shocked when you heard what had happened to him! Deepest apologies. That sort of thing. Leave Bunter right out of it. Probably cut Bunter out of inquiries.'

Lord Mauleverer smiled, bowed, and closed the door.

BUNTER MEETS TROUBLE

'PRIME!' exclaimed the Owl of the Remove.

Billy Bunter's remark was not being applied to the scenery around him, though on such a fine summer afternoon, the beauty of the Kent countryside was well worth praise. His observation related to the bag of tarts, which he had bought - after tea - at the bun shop in Courtfield. Lord Mauleverer had stirred him into activity - or what passed with Bunter for activity. It had not been easy. Bunter had been asleep in Peter Todd's armchair, and had been prepared to sleep until tea time. The sight of a pound-note in Mauleverer's hand had, however, awakened him. Mauleverer had explained that the Owl could have that one pound to spend on tea, or anything else he fancied at the bunshop, *if he, first of all, took two jackets to Chunkley's Cleaning Department. It was in his own interests to take those jackets, as one of them bore traces of the same sort of stuff as had been in last night's booby-trap over Coker's study - and Quelch was on the trail! On the production by Bunter of Chunkley's receipt for the articles, the Owl would be given another ten shillings. Thus stimulated by greed and self-interest, the Owl had got out his bike and gone to Courtfield. He had then paid a brief visit to Chunkley's and a much longer one to the bun shop. After a substantial tea, he had invested what remained of Mauleverer's pound, in jam-tarts, and set off for the school. On nearing Greyfriars, he had halted by the stile in Friardale Lane, propped up his bike by the hedge and climbed into the little wood beyond.*

'Greedy beasts!'

The Owl was thinking of any other Greyfriars men who might see that bag of tarts! There were some of them, who, if they saw those tarts, would think nothing - simply nothing - of asking him to give them one! His brother, Sammy, for instance. Bunter shook his head as he thought of the greed of people like his minor. It would be much safer to eat the whole contents of that bag before going in. There was still time before 'call-over' to find a quiet place in which he might do so.

Safely out of sight amidst the trees, he sat down on the grass, and took out a tart. It was on the way to his capacious mouth, when he heard a voice behind him.

'So this is the way of it, Bert.'

Bunter stopped, with his mouth open, and the tart poised in mid-air. It was the voice of that beast of a photographer, who had stolen his jacket! 'I hid that ruby in the woods near the river, when they were closing in on me. I'm not looking for it yet, because everywhere I go round there I'm followed, and I'm not leading them to it. Here's different. They know I couldn't have got up here in the time, and it's the beat of P.C. Tozer - not an alert man. Safe enough. Now, listen.'

'Orl right. Charlie. What's the hidea?'

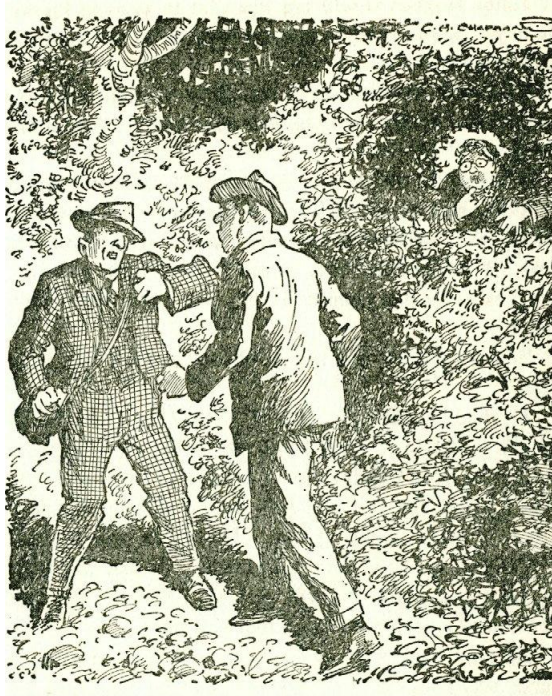
Bunter peered through the trees, not daring to move.

He caught sight of the man who had pretended that he was going to take his photograph - that individual known to the police, though not to Bunter, as 'Gentleman Charlie'. His companion was a burly, evil-looking ruffian. Bunter was scared stiff at the idea of being seen by either of them.

'I will explain. I suppose you are wondering why I sent for you?'

'It did cross me mind. You ain't put me on to this because you likes me looks?'

'You wouldn't expect it, Bert. Business is business.'



BUNTER PEERED THROUGH THE TREES, NOT DARING TO MOVE

The fact is that I have a genuine limp owing to that shot which hit me, and if I had to move quickly it might be awkward. Now, there was another little haul that night, which I don't want to lose. There was a letter I collected from a dressing-table. It wasn't practicable to hide it where I hid the ruby and the police were getting nearer. So I put it in the pocket of a boy I found sleeping against a tree-trunk on the edge of the lane - a Greyfriars boy from that school there.'

'What was 'e sleeping there for at that time of the morning?'

'I don't know. I suppose he had been breaking bounds, and sat down to rest. I thought he was Lord Mauleverer, but he wasn't.'

'So you made a mistake, did yer?'

'He was wearing one of Lord Mauleverer's jackets, Bert. I was misled by the name-tab. Now I want that letter.'

'Letters ain't valuable, Charlie.'

'This one is. It is a threatening one from a bookmaker. Sir Julius Hogben would not like that to become known. He might be prepared to give up looking for the ruby if I kept it quiet.'

''E 'ad a valuable ruby, as all the papers ses - and couldn't find enough to keep 'is bookie quiet! Why didn't 'e sell it?'

'I expect he wishes now that he had! It was a family heirloom, and he didn't want to part with it. Now he's parting with it - and a bit more. But I must have that letter. I stopped the boy, whom I recognised, next day, and took his jacket from him. He was not a very intelligent boy.'

Bunter, despite his fright, almost uttered the word 'beast!'

'He had, apparently, helped himself to Lord Mauleverer's jacket - and when I met him he led me to suppose that he was Lord Mauleverer. I admit that I was surprised when I found him so completely devoid of good manners. Doubtless some young upstart. His name was Bunter.'

The Owl quivered with indignation. So that was what the beast had really thought of him! Fellows like that didn't know a gentleman when they saw one!

'He went back without his jacket and had no idea, of course, why I wanted it. They will probably put down his story of its loss to a wild imagination! He looked that sort of boy. Now, if I carried out any more such activities, there might be an investigation - and a closer watch on me! I don't want to move from here until I've picked up the ruby. You can - and will, probably want to, once you've done the job. All you have to do is to get hold of the right boy. Lord Mauleverer.'

'You seem to 'ave lost your nose for sniffing out the right sort, Charlie, after you found your boss's pocket-book and lost your butler's job.'

There was a pause. Then Bunter heard the voice of the other man speaking again.

'We all have pieces of our past which we don't care to dwell upon, haven't we? For instance, Bert, your leaving Dartmoor, before the Governor could say "good-bye" to you officially!'

'Now, look 'ere, Charlie-'

'Don't worry. You are quite safe here from people like P.C. Tozer - where no one will know you as "Bert, the Twister". It is fortunate that I knew where you would be in London and could send for you. Now here is a photograph of Lord Mauleverer, in one of a school group which I managed to get hold of in Courtfield. I have marked him, see. Now, all you have to do is to look for him - and take his jacket. Tomorrow is a school half-holiday. Most of the boys will be out in the open, especially if the weather remains fine. Be about. Try to look like an agricultural labourer or something of that sort.'

'I'll watch for 'im. 'E won't escape me.'

The way this was uttered made the listening Owl shiver. 'Good! No unnecessary violence. And meet me here tomorrow night at nine - with, I hope, the jacket - and intact - just as you take it off him.'

'Wotjer mean? Think I'm goin' to rummage in it for a blooming letter?'

'No, Bert! You couldn't handle that letter. I can. If what I want in that jacket is missing, Inspector Grimes of Courtfield - a really keen officer - will be on the watch for it. He might find his way to you, which would be very awkward, you being an escaped convict.'

'Bust me, Charlie, if you're a-threatening of me-'

'Of course not, Bert. Now, you'll just get that jacket for me - and a fat reward for yourself, which I'll give you - and then you can go back to London, if you want to.'

There was a growl from Bert. Apparently he did not consider their friendship a very deep one!

'And Suppose I bring you a jacket wot ain't got that letter inside it? 'E may 'ave found it issel'f or be wearing another one.'

'I have one of his jackets, which I took from that fool, Bunter, and you are bringing me another. A schoolboy can hardly have an unlimited supply. I shall know at once if it is the one I want. If it isn't I must make other plans. That's all until nine o'clock tomorrow night.'

There was the sound of someone walking away. As it died away, Bunter ventured to peep out. That beast of a photographer had disappeared, but that other man, who seemed an even greater beast, was still in view. The tart had dropped out of Bunter's hand, unheeded, so great was his stress of mind. This was the beast who was going to attack Mauly, and would attack Bunter, if he saw or heard him - which was, of course, much worse.

'Oh,lor'!'

Bert moved. For one terrible moment, the Owl thought he was coming towards him. Then he realised that the man was only going towards the stile by Friardale Lane. He stopped there, keeping under cover of the trees, and looking down the lane towards the gates of the school.

He was between Bunter and the way back to the school. Bunter did not dare to move. In the grass at his feet lay that neglected bag of tarts. The fat Removite almost groaned as he reflected that if he had only risked Sammy's greediness and the inquisitiveness and greed of any other fellows, he would by now be safely in Study No. 7, eating them—instead of having to wait while a frightful beast stood by the stile, cutting off his only exit.

VERNON-SMITH IS GATED

'COME in!'

Vernon-Smith opened the door of Mr. Quelch's study as he heard the answer to his tap on the door. The feelings of most Removites, on entering that apartment, were, frequently, rather like those Daniel must have experienced, when he was invited to enter the lions' den. Indeed, there were occasions when some of the form felt that they would prefer to meet the lions.

'Well, Vernon-Smith? What do you want?'

'I have come to say that I am very sorry, sir-'

'You are sorry for what?'

'For what happened last night, sir. I meant it for that chump - for Coker, sir, because he came and assaulted us - I was horrified when I heard that you and Mr. Prout had got it.'

Quelch stared at the Bounder, his countenance growing grimmer.

'Am I to understand, Vernon-Smith, that it was you who fixed that arrangement - that trap - over Coker's study-door? Upon my word-'

'Yes, sir. We - I meant it for Coker. It was our supper that he'd smashed up when he made that disturbance. We - I thought it would serve him right, if I gave it back to him. I am the only one responsible, sir.'

There was a long silence. The Bounder half expected Quelch to rise and produce a cane - but he did not!

'I am minded to punish you most severely for this irresponsible prank,' said the Remove master, at last. 'The only reason I refrain from doing so, is that you did not intend it for Mr. Prout and myself, and that you have confessed.'

Vernon-Smith brightened. The cane was not, apparently, to be brought into use. Mr. Quelch had, however, something more to say on the matter.

'Your conduct in general has not been good, Vernon-Smith. You have more than once put yourself in danger of expulsion from Greyfriars. For the offence you have just admitted, you will be gated until Monday.'

The Bounder's face fell, although it was a light punishment; indeed, much lighter than he thought he might receive, and very much lighter than he would incur if Quelch knew anything about last Wednesday's midnight escapade. Fortunately he didn't!

He could not now go with Redwing to Pegg Bay for that pleasant dip in the sea before 'call-over'. Having taken Mauleverer's advice about going to Quelch, he had expected, whatever happened in consequence, to have been able to come back and go out with his friend. Now, he could not.

'I must warn you, Vernon-Smith, that I shall keep a careful watch upon you, and if your conduct does not improve, I shall take you before the Headmaster.'

Vernon-Smith remained silent. If Quelch knew about Wednesday night, he would certainly take him before the Head.

'You may go.'

Outside, Vernon-Smith made his way to Study No. 4.

Redwing looked up as he entered. 'Well?'

'Fairly well, Reddy. Gated for the weekend.'

Redwing's face lit up. 'Oh, that isn't much - and soon over.'

'Except that it prevents me going to Pegg with you now - or tomorrow.'

I've a good mind to-'

'Smithy don't be such an ass. Quelch will be on the watch.'

'Yes, he said as much, my general conduct not being good. All the same-'

'All the same nothing!' exclaimed Redwing. 'Old Mauly's advice was good - jolly good - and I'm glad you've taken it - but there's still that idiotic business of yours last Wednesday night to be kept quiet. Don't encourage Quelchy to look in your direction any more than he's now inclined to, Smithy.'

'Lesson to Quelchy not to be too inquisitive, eh?' Vernon-Smith laughed. 'All right, Reddy. We'll give the sea a miss this afternoon, and I'll just stroll round the quad in view of Quelchy to show him what a good boy I am.'

The Bounder laughed again and left the study. It was a fine afternoon, and a pleasant stroll could be had in the old quad until 'call-over'. Not so pleasant, perhaps, as would have been a bathe in the sea off Pegg, but still enough so in the circumstances.

He would just show Quelch that he need not be suspicious. Vernon-Smith knew, though he would not admit it even to himself, that Tom Redwing had been quite right in advising him to walk warily. If anything about last Wednesday's midnight escapade came out, the consequences for him would be very serious indeed.

He paused outside the door of Lord Mauleverer's study, and then opened it. Mauleverer looked up as he entered. 'Hallo. Mauly! Not gone off to sleep again?'

Lord Mauleverer smiled. 'No: it's such a fine afternoon, that I really think I'd like a little stroll before "call-over". Not far, of course. Up to the corner of Oak Lane and back. Care to come with me, what?'

'Sorry. I can't - thanks to you.'

Lord Mauleverer looked blank. 'Thanks to me? Why, what have I done?'

'Nothing but give me good advice. I went to Quelchy as you suggested. Not too pleased at what I had to say, but in view of my frank confession I'm gated - for the weekend only - with a warning about my future behaviour. On second thoughts, though, just say the word, Mauly, and I'll risk a stroll with you.'

Lord Mauleverer shook his head. 'No. Too disturbin' if you don't mind. Guilty conscience walkin' alongside me and all that sort of thing. Infectious, too, perhaps. Might catch it, bein' an accomplice.'

Vernon-Smith grinned.

'You couldn't get a guilty conscience about anything, if you tried, could you, Mauly? Not even if you'd come out with me last Wednesday night, instead of that ass, Bunter.'

Lord Mauleverer shuddered.

'No. Other things to bother about. Car crashes and walkin' miles accordin' to Bunter. Might be able to get as far as Oak Lane now, if I don't keep on thinkin' of what I might have had to have done. Sorry not to have your company this time though, Smithy.'

COKER DECIDES TO ACT

'IT won't do!'

Coker, Potter and Greene were coming back from Friardale, where Coker had been standing them tea at 'Uncle Clegg's.' Coker had paused outside the gates of Greyfriars, made that remark, and then strode on. Potter and Greene had stared at each other, and then walked after him. Coker turned and looked at them.

'It won't do.'

'Why ever not?' exclaimed Potter. 'They're the same gates they've always been, and we've always gone in that way. Why won't it do? I don't suppose they'll alter the entrance to please you.'

'Don't be an ass, George Potter,' Coker snorted. 'I wasn't talking about the gateway!'

'Weren't you? You looked at it and said it wouldn't do. What were you talking about - if you happen to know?'

'What? Look here, Potter-'

'Gosling's lodge, perhaps,' put in Greene. 'Not majestic, but it isn't meant to be. And it's been here for a long time. I shouldn't think they'll do anything to that either, even if you don't like it.'

'Better ask Prout about it,' said Potter. 'He'll know of the possibilities. I don't think you'll get very far, though, with any complaint. What about using this gateway to go in with now, Greeney, even if Coker doesn't think much of it.'

'Yes,' said Greene. 'Too late to get any alterations started on it tonight. No time before "call-over".'

'And you'd have to get the Board of Governors to approve any alterations first, Coker,' added Potter. 'Better go in now, and submit your plans later.'

'You idiot, Potter. I wasn't talking about Gosling's lodge or the gates.'

'No? Something else which will have to be altered to suit you?'

'No, William Greene. I was talking of the Hogben ruby.'

Potter and Green stared at him.

'The ruby?' exclaimed Greene. 'I'm afraid that's lost. A pity, but-'

'I said it wouldn't do,' repeated Coker. 'The fact is, you fellows don't think. The ruby's lost. It's got to be found, hasn't it? What won't do is the way people are looking for it. The conduct of the police, for instance.'

'Ask Prout if you can use his telephone, and ring up Inspector Grimes, and tell him what you really think of him,' suggested Potter.

'Don't be a chump, Potter. That fellow they call Gentleman Charlie - he's still here, isn't he? Why?'

'He's given out that he's convalescing at the "Cross Keys", after being peppered with a gun fired by one of Sir Julius's staff,' observed Greene, 'but it's an open secret that the police think he's hidden the ruby somewhere, and is waiting for a chance to pick it up. Anyway, wherever he goes between the Hogben estate and the Sark where they picked him up, he's being watched.'

'They're watching in the wrong place,' observed Coker.

'Oh, do you think so?' exclaimed Potter. 'How interesting! Let's turn back now, and go in, and you can tell us all about it, as we go.'

'No time.'

'Plenty of time for you to tell us before "call-over",' remarked Greene.

'If not too much,' added Potter.

'If you insist upon it,' said Greene.

'Let's turn back,' said Potter again. 'We don't want to keep on strolling up Friardale Lane.'

'Of course not,' said Coker. 'I'm hoping to pick up a taxi.'

'What?'

It was a simultaneous exclamation from Potter and Greene.

Why Coker should hope to pick up a taxi in Friardale Lane, Potter and Greene could not think. 'Call-over' was getting nearer, but it was not so near that a taxi was necessary to get to it in time. Besides they were less than 100 yards from the gates!

'Coker, old man,' said Potter, solicitously. 'What about going in and lying down?'

'It's been a bit hot in the sun,' said Greene, soothingly. Coker glared.

'You utter idiots!'

Potter and Greene were really quite concerned. They had never rated Horace Coker's intellect as being amongst the brightest in the school - any more than had Mr. Prout or any other people who knew Coker. This, however, seemed to indicate a sudden serious worsening of Coker's brain-power, such as it was.

'Let's come in now, old man, and sit quietly in the study until "call-over",' said Greene.

'Didn't I tell you, William Greene, that I wanted a taxi?' roared Coker.

'Fellows come back by taxi sometimes when they want to be in time for "call-over" and have been staying too late in Courtfield-'

'But we aren't in Courtfield,' exclaimed Potter, now thoroughly alarmed.

'We're in Friardale Lane - you must know Friardale Lane - quite close to the gates - come along - we don't want any taxi, old chap.'

Coker didn't come along. He began to stride rapidly in the other direction towards the junction with Oak Lane. Potter and Greene, in a much disturbed state of mind, followed him.

'I say, Coker, old fellow-'

'We'll go up to the corner of Oak Lane and wait there, Potter. Don't dawdle, Greene. If there's a taxi coming back from the school, we'll stop it there. We don't want a lot of fellows seeing us get into it.'

'Us?' exclaimed Greene. 'Why should we take a taxi? Here and now? You don't really want one, old man. That's just imagination, isn't it?'

'If you're trying to be funny, George Potter-'

'Better not walk along this way any more,' said Greene. 'If we go too far we may be late for "call-over".'

'I'm not going in to "call-over",' said Coker.

'You're not going in for "call-over"?' exclaimed Greene. 'You ass - I mean, old fellow.' Greene remembered that Coker seemed to have been stricken by a sudden mental illness, and apparently needed patience and kindness.

'I have something more important to do than attending "call-over" tonight. And as quickly as possible.'

Potter and Greene stared. Was it possible that Coker had not been stricken by a sudden mental illness, which caused him 'to see taxis' as it were, but was merely being just Coker?

If he thought that he had suddenly to go somewhere more important than to Hall for 'call-over', that might not qualify him for being put under restraint, although it would certainly qualify him for trouble with Prout. Everyone in Greyfriars was expected to attend 'call-over', unless he had special permission to be absent. If Coker did not answer *adsum* to his name, the master on duty would report him missing.

'Where do you want to go as quickly as possible?' asked Greene, in a weary tone.

'Pegg Bay.'

'Pegg Bay?' exclaimed Potter and Greene.

'Yes. That's where we're going as soon as I can get hold of a taxi.'

'We?' exclaimed Potter. 'We're jolly well not, you chump! If you're cutting "call-over" to go to Pegg Bay, we certainly aren't! If you want a dip, jump into the fountain in the quad. Come on, Greeney. I'm going back. Pegg Bay? You must be crackers, Coker!'

Coker glared.

'I am not going to Pegg Bay for a dip, George Potter,' he said, frozenly.

'If you want to know-'

'I don't!'

'We are going to retrieve the Hogben ruby. I suppose the taking away of a valuable heirloom from a thief is of more importance than "call-over".

When we walk in with it-'

'When!' said Greene. 'Why on earth should it be in Pegg Bay? The fellow who took it - and who's being watched by the police - wasn't within miles of Pegg Bay. Whatever makes you think it may be there?'

'If you'll listen a minute,' replied Coker, calmly, 'I'll explain. I've thought it all out. You remember that boat of ours which was missing on Thursday morning? Someone broke the lock of the boat-house to get at it. The pieces of that boat drifted ashore on the beach near the Shoulder.'

'I know,' observed Greene. 'It drifted down the Sark and out to sea. The pieces aren't worth recovery, Blundell says. He went out to have a look at them, when the police reported that it might be the wreckage of our boat.'

'And what's that got to do with the Hogben ruby?' asked Potter, wearily.

'Come on, Greeney. If Coker wants to go gathering driftwood, let him!'

'Useful for lighting the study fire when we have one, of course,' added Greene. 'Bit soon, perhaps. We shan't be needing it until the Christmas term. We'll have to store it somewhere.'

'If you will cease to talk nonsense, William Greene, I shall be obliged,' observed Coker, icily. 'The Hogben ruby is amongst that wreckage. I've thought it out. You fellows didn't. Of course, you require brains to think out a thing like this.'

'How did you manage, then?'

'What did you say, Potter?'

'Just asking your methods, old chap.' Coker glared suspiciously at Potter.

'I tell you I've worked it out. That boat was missing, and it was left to drift down the Sark to the sea. That fellow they took hadn't got the ruby on him. No evidence about anything, so they can't charge him. He put that ruby in the boat.'

'What?'

It was a simultaneous exclamation from Potter and Greene.

'He stuck it in a crevice somewhere, and let the boat go.

He knew he'd be searched when the police found him,' continued Coker. 'He was limping, because he'd got some gunshot in his leg and couldn't run away. He was smart. And it required a smarter man than Inspector Grimes to work it out. These local police-such an idea never entered their heads. It has mine.'

'You think he stuck it in a crevice somewhere - and let it drift down the river with the ruby in it? It might have gone anywhere - across to France or over the North Sea - or down the Channel into the Atlantic - according to winds and tides,' exclaimed Potter. 'There'd be less hope of his finding it again than if he'd stuck it in a hole in a tree. No one but an absolute idiot would do such a thing.'

'I've worked it all out,' repeated Coker, calmly. 'I know. Don't argue or waste time. Come on!'

'Where to?' demanded Potter.

'Pegg Bay, of course. I haven't seen a taxi yet - but we may get one on the way. If it's some junior who's hired it to take him to the school, I'll stop it, and commandeer it,' stated Coker. 'Matter of urgent necessity - and as I said - Come on! And don't waste time.'

'Waste time? And what about "call-over"?'

'No one will worry about our having missed "call-over" when we walk in with the Hogben ruby.'

'And if we don't walk in with the Hogben ruby?'

'There is no "if" about it, Greene. I have worked it out.'

'We cut "call-over",' said Potter, 'and go to look amongst the wreckage of a boat for a crevice which may be there, and for the ruby which may be stuck in it! Come on, Greeney. Let's leave him to it.'

Coker began to roll up his sleeves.

'I don't want to thrash you fellows before I start,' he said, with a grim look. 'It would waste time - not much, but more than I like to spare. All the same I shall, if you give me any trouble. I require your assistance. It may be necessary to break up those pieces of the boat into little bits. That's all you fellows are fit for. Now, come along and don't argue any more.'

LORD MAULEVERER IN DANGER

'PLEASANT evenin',' murmured Lord Mauleverer.

It was, indeed, a very pleasant summer's evening, so much so that he was very glad that he had been tempted to take a little walk before 'call-over'.

He was not naturally lazy like Bunter, but he did not believe in violent exertion. A sharp, brisk walk across Courtfield Common, such as had been suggested by Harry Wharton and Co., and 'putting it on' with a bike to Pegg Bay, in accordance with Vernon-Smith's plans, both seemed to him to come under that heading.

So he had strolled across the quad, through the gates and was now walking up Friardale Lane.

There were no other Greyfriars fellows about, except Coker, Potter and Greene of the Fifth, who seemed to be having too intense an argument to notice him as he passed. That, of course, was not an unusual circumstance when Potter and Greene went out with Horace Coker, if argument was the right name to give to a discourse in which Coker did nearly all the talking.

Might turn left and go down to the Sark, thought Lord Mauleverer.

He was nearing the spot where Oak Lane ran into Friardale Lane. About halfway between the gates of Greyfriars and Oak Lane was the stile on the side opposite to the Greyfriars grounds, which gave access to a footpath running through woods. Lord Mauleverer toyed with the idea of going that way, and then decided in favour of the banks of the Sark. He was not, however, destined to go there that evening.

'Oh, 'elp! 'Elp someone, please.'

Lord Mauleverer stopped as that call came from the other side of the stile. He made for it and peered over. He saw a rough-looking man, seated on the ground by some trees about twenty yards away. He was holding one leg and rocking to and fro, as if in agony.

'Good gad, what's up?'

Lord Mauleverer climbed quickly over the stile and ran towards the apparently injured man.

'What's the matter? Are you hurt? Can I help you?'

'Oh, yes!' The man looked up and groaned. He was not an attractive-looking person, but Mauleverer, willing to give any assistance, if it were needed, was not disposed to be critical.

'I think I've broke my leg. Or strained it. 'Elp me round 'ere, please.' The man started to crawl, slowly, round the other side of a clump of trees.

'Better stay where you are. If anythin's wrong with your leg, it's best not to move it,' advised Lord Mauleverer. 'I'll get a doctor.'

'No. I'd rather not. Just 'elp me round 'ere.'

'But-' It seemed a mysterious thing for an injured man to want to do, but Mauleverer refrained from any questioning. He followed the man round the clump of trees, ready to give any necessary help.

The man stopped. They were now out of sight of Friardale Lane.

'Better now?' asked Mauleverer, solicitously.

'Yus!'

The man sat up and looked around. There was no one else to be seen. Suddenly, to Mauleverer's astonishment, the supposed cripple sprang to his feet.

'What-?'

The man grinned.

'You're Lord Mauleverer, ain't yer?'

'Yes, but what-'

'Bit of luck seein' you the first blooming night just like this! Now then!' He turned on Mauleverer, sharply. 'I want that blooming jacket of yours. Off with it now - sharp!'

'Are you mad?' exclaimed Lord Mauleverer, looking at the man, coldly. 'I thought you were injured.'

'Well, I'm not - but you blooming - well will be if you don't do as I say. Take that jacket of yours orf sharp - and don't argue.'

Lord Mauleverer stepped back. A hand shot out and grabbed him by the shoulder.

'Give me that jacket, or I'll break your neck.' Mauleverer knocked the man's arm from his shoulder and stepped back again. The man advanced menacingly. At that moment, however, both he and his aggressor were startled by a loud yell.

Something squirmed out of a thicket at the back of Mauleverer, and a fat figure ran towards the stile. Billy Bunter wasn't used to running, and disliked it intensely, but he was now putting on a speed which would have done him credit at the school sports.

'Ow! O lor'! Oh, crikey!'

The fat Owl clambered over the stile, lost his footing, and fell the other side.

'Ow! Wow! Yaroooooh! Help!'

Springing up with an alacrity of which no one at Greyfriars would have thought him capable, Billy Bunter sped down the lane in the direction of Greyfriars.

Lord Mauleverer, with but the pause of an instant, had started to follow Bunter. He was not afraid of this man, but realised that the burly ruffian was far too big a proposition for him to tackle on his own. He was too late, however. Bert the Twister's hand shot out and grabbed him again as he made the first move.

'No, yer don't. Orf with that jacket now, 'ere at once, or I'll twist yer neck! And don't lose no time.'

Bert the Twister looked menacing. He realised that that fat fool, whoever he was, might raise an alarm. Impatience lent an even uglier appearance to his most unpleasant face.

COKER TO THE RESCUE!

'I DON'T want to be rough with you chaps,' said Horace Coker to Potter and Greene, 'or impatient. But having thought this thing out, I'm not having it messed up by people who can't think at all. All you have to do is exactly as I say - and don't try to argue.'

'You utter ass! If you think we're going to cut "call-over" because you want to take us on a wild goose chase-'

'That's enough from you, George Potter. I don't want to get rough with you unless I have to-'

'Well, it looks as though you'll have to,' interrupted Potter.

'Nice for the onlookers to see three Fifth-formers having a scrap in the public highway,' observed Greene. 'Here's someone coming along the lane now.'

'Never mind that-'

'It's that fat fag, Bunter,' said Potter. 'Putting on a bit of speed too. Wonders will never cease. Didn't think he could do it.'

'Ow! Help! Murder! Ow!'

'Bunter?' Coker frowned. 'That's that fat little beast who stole my pork pie. I've a good mind to wallop him here and now.'

'Getting your hand in for taking on me and Greene, I suppose?' asked Potter. 'Look here, Coker, don't be an ass-!'

'Hold on!' exclaimed Greene. 'This kid seems to be in trouble. Coming to us for help. Someone after him, I wonder?'

'Ow! Help!'

The fat Owl was still yelling between breathless puffs, as he neared the Fifth-formers.

'You aren't going to refuse him, I hope, Coker?' said Potter, severely.

'A junior appealing for help to a senior like you?' He winked at Greene.

'It's odd how fellows in distress make a bee-line for Coker,' observed Greene.

That fat Removite seemed about to try and attract their attention for something. If he could be diverted to Coker, and hold Coker's attention, that would be all to the good. Potter and Greene really did not want a brawl with Coker just outside the school.

'Help! Ow!' Bunter rushed up, and put the three Fifth-formers between him and the stile he had just left. He puffed breathlessly. 'Oh, lor' - that beast. Ow! He's got Mauly. He nearly got me! Oh, crikey!'

'You young ass!' growled Coker. 'Who's frightened you?'

'Ow! That beast! He's got Mauly!'

'Who's got Mauleverer?' asked Potter.

'Ow! A friend of that beast who took the ruby-'

'What?' Coker's interest quickened at the word 'ruby'.

'Where is Mauleverer?' asked Greene. He was beginning to see that something really serious had happened to scare Bunter.

'I'm dealing with this, Greene,' said Coker, coldly. 'Now Bunter-'

'Where is this whatever it is that's happened to Mauleverer?' interrupted Potter.

'Ow! Over there. He's murdering Mauly. Behind the stile-'

'Come on,' said Greene. 'Better look into this. May be nothing, but-' He started up the lane towards the stile followed by Potter and Coker.

Coker, determined not to be thrust out of his natural leadership of the party, pushed ahead of the party. He looked over the stile and gave a sudden yell.

'Hi! Stop that!'

Placing his hand on the top of the stile, Coker leaped over, lost his balance and hit the ground with a crash.

'Ere you keep orf!'

Potter and Greene, as they followed, heard a rough voice which, although they did not know it, was that of Bert the Twister.

'Stow it! Ow! Oh, my!'

Bert the Twister had caught Mauleverer a blow on the side of his head which had dazed him considerably, and was engaged in wrenching off Mauleverer's jacket when Coker sprang over that stile. He had been prepared to go on wrenching it off, regardless of the appearance of another schoolboy. However, the proceedings did not work out like that. Coker may not have had much sense or science, but he had plenty of pluck. He picked himself up from the side of the stile. The next instant a blow like a sledge-hammer hurt Bert the Twister on the nose. It had not been a handsome nose before: it became a very much less handsome one after Coker had punched it!

'Ow! You! Bust me! Ow!' Involuntarily, he released Lord Mauleverer, who staggered away free and sat down abruptly on the grass. Bert the Twister's fist hit Horace Coker on the ear. The next moment, he received a terrific blow on the jaw and then it really began to feel as though he had become mixed up with a mowing machine.

Bert was big and burly but very much out of condition.

The long period of involuntary abstemiousness in one of Her Majesty's gaols had partly reconditioned him - but it had had a lot to do to begin with - and self-indulgence since his escape had more than undone any benefit received.

Coker's fist hit him on the nose again, destroying whatever beauty remained in it after the first punch - which wasn't very much.

'Ow! Oh! I'll murder yer!'

Potter grabbed one side of him and Greene the other.

Bert the Twister came over with a crash and yelled again. 'Keep the brute down, Greeney. Hurt, Mauleverer?'

'Oh, no! Nothin' much.' Lord Mauleverer got to his feet, swaying slightly, but managed to smile. 'You chaps came up and dealt with him before he could go far. Thanks very much.'

'Is this the fellow who pinched the Hogben ruby?' asked Coker. 'Bunter said-'

'No. Take my Davy I didn't. Wooogh!' Bert the Twister's protest ended in a muffled gurgle as Coker's firm hand pressed his face into the grass.

'Keep hold of him, Potter and Greene. I shall probably search him presently - or get you fellows to do it!'

'We're keeping hold of him,' said Potter. 'Leave the searching to the police. That's their job. That fat ass, Bunter, seems to have heard something about the ruby, Mauleverer. In connection with this fellow.' He paused and stifled the beginning of a remark by Bert the Twister by pushing that gentleman's face deeper into the grass. 'Do you know what it is?'

'No,' said Mauleverer. 'Didn't even know Bunter was here, until he suddenly rose like a rocketin' pheasant when this chap was takin' hold of me. Wanted to steal my jacket - tried to make me take it off and give it to him. Why, I don't know. It isn't worth anythin' much. Seems peculiar.'

'Look 'ere let a bloke go. I ain't stolen nothing! Only a little game. Ow!' Another remark by Bert the Twister was cut off suddenly as his face was once more pushed into the grass.

'What's this here?' said a voice suddenly.

Lord Mauleverer and the Fifth-formers looked up into the weather-beaten countenance of P.C. Tozer.

'What are you a-sitting of that feller for?'

'Because he's stolen the Hogben ruby-' began Coker.
He was interrupted by a howl from Bert the Twister.

'I ain't. Let me get up-'

'No,' said Potter. 'Tozer, we found this fellow assaulting Lord
Mauleverer here - and we stopped him, and are still stopping him.'

'Ho!' observed Tozer. 'Hassault, hey?'

'Yes,' said Greene. 'And you might add attempted robbery, if you want to
fill up your little notebook. Like to take him over?'

P.C. Tozer looked dubious. From what he could see of Bert the Twister
under Potter and Greene he looked a burly man. It might be difficult for
Tozer to take charge of him. He could only do his best.

'Hand him over,' said Coker. 'We can't wait here all the evening. Got to
get in for "call-over" soon. Mustn't miss "call-over". Don't you chaps
realise that?'

Potter and Greene looked at Coker, and then at each other. Considering
what Horace Coker had recently been saying on the subject of attendance
at 'call-over' this really was rather cool!

Still, Coker was always Coker! Perhaps the mention of the ruby had made
him sniff it nearer than Pegg Bay!

'I'll take 'im inter custody,' said Tozer, with some satisfaction. It was
some time since Tozer had arrested anyone.

''Ere you can't. I ain't stolen nothing.' Apparently Bert the Twister was
alarmed at the very idea of being within the grasp of the law.

'I shall 'ave to call upon you gents for assistance in 'andling 'im-'

'Can't wait. We have to get in for "call-over",' observed Coker.

Potter and Greene again looked at Coker and then at each other. Then they
looked at Tozer.

'Where are you taking him - the station house?' asked Greene. He smiled.

P.C. Tozer saw that smile and bridled. The 'station house' was the
grandiloquent official name of the old thatched cottage, with roses round
the door, in which he resided in Friardale. True, there was something in
the nature of a 'lock-up', but prisoners had been known to escape from
it, more than once - and it was even reported that one of them had once
locked Tozer, himself, in for some hours!

'I'm a-taking of him to the Hinspector in Courtfield,' said Tozer with
dignity, 'being as how the 'Ogben ruby's been mentioned and 'e's on that
case. The charge is assault and attempted theft. I shall 'ave to ask you,
my lord, to come with me and make it.'

'Oh, gad! Bust goes "call-over" then. Still the law's the law. I shall
have to explain to Quelchy. What about me goin' and ringin' up for a taxi
from Gosling's lodge?'

'Better ring up for a police car and tell them to come here,' said
Greene, 'and take us with what we've collected. Taxi's too small. We're
three and then there's Tozer and the prisoner-'

'Look 'ere-' began the prisoner. Potter pushed his face into the grass
again.

'We're a big load for one taxi - five - leaving out Coker.'

'Leaving me out?' roared Coker. 'You won't. I'm in charge of you. You
can't handle this without me. And-'

'And you want to be in for "call-over",' added Potter. 'Blow "call-over".
Talk about fiddling when Nero's burning.'

'What?'

'Bothering about childish things like "call-over" when there's business
to be done. Now we're on the track of that ruby-'

'Oh, crikey!' exclaimed Potter. 'Are we? But we want you to explain why
we can't be at "call-over", Coker. The occasion requires just your tact
and judgment,' he added, piling it on. All Coker's friends knew that,
properly handled, his leg could be pulled to almost any extent. 'It needs

just your touch. Quite beyond us. Mauleverer must go to make the charge, and we - just to hold the prisoner - but you're a free agent. You can do as you like.'

Coker grunted, but to Potter and Greene's great relief, said no more. There was the sound of an approaching taxi. Mauleverer, with more luck than Coker, had managed to get one, which had just dropped a passenger. Whether it was or was not a tight fit for five would, at any rate, be tried.

The taxi stopped in the lane near the stile and Mauleverer jumped out, and waited for them. Coker, with another grunt, strode off in the direction of the school, with the air of a great man refusing to be bothered by the disturbances of the rabble.

Potter and Greene looked at each other across the prostrate form of Bert the Twister, upon which they were still sitting. That individual, having tired of having his face pushed in the grass, was temporarily quiet. Potter looked up at P.C. Tozer, whose weather-beaten countenance recorded what was probably pleasure at his first arrest for some years past.

'Much more tranquil without dear old Horace,' murmured Potter to Greene. 'Lovely evening, isn't it?'

Greene agreed that it was indeed a lovely evening. 'Even he can't make a mess in reporting why we're absent from "call-over",' he observed, referring to Coker. 'Better get this chap into the taxi now, hadn't we?' Potter agreed that they had. Bert the Twister was far from agreeing, but raised from the ground within the grasp of the two Fifth-formers, and P.C. Tozer following behind with a truncheon, he really had no option. He was, apparently, one of those present who did not agree that it was a lovely evening.

BUNTER HOLDS THE STAGE

'I SAY, you fellows, I rushed at him-'

'And stopped before you reached him, and then turned and rushed the other way,' said Bob Cherry.

There was laughter in the 'Rag', and the fat Owl looked indignant. It was crowded that evening and not only by the Removites. It was open to all the juniors, but generally the Shell and the Upper Fourth fellows preferred to disdain it, and not mix with the Remove, which they professed to regard as being composed of those who were almost fags. The extraordinary story, however, with which Bunter had come back, had roused general interest. There seemed to be something in it, though not, of course, too much, Bunter being Bunter. For once, in a way, the fat Owl was the centre of attention. Usually he lacked an audience for his remarks. Indeed, it was remarkable how quickly any gathering dissolved when he joined it.

'I rescued Mauly-'

'That seems to be true, in a way,' observed Johnny Bull, in a tone which indicated that he doubted if as much could be said for any other of Bunter's statements. 'He ran screaming down Friardale Lane, and into Coker, Potter and Greene, who went to help Mauly.'

'I struck that ruffian down, and then went for help,' said Bunter, with dignity. 'He was too big for me to handle on my own. I admit that.'

'Go hon!' exclaimed Bob Cherry, facetiously.

'I listened to him talking to the other beast before I hit him-'

'And now we're listening to you talking before you hit him,' said Nugent.

'It's all very well for you fellows to laugh-'

'Thanks. We will,' observed Harry Wharton.

'He was talking to that other beast, who went away - that beast of a man who wanted to take my photograph.'

'It's agreed that the man who wanted to take Bunter's photograph is a beast,' remarked Peter Todd. 'He could have no human intelligence at all to want to do that.'

'Oh, really, Peter! If they get back the Hogben ruby, it will be due to me.'

'Whether it's due to you or not, you won't find Sir Julius handing it to you when it's found - if it ever is.'

'You silly ass. When I say due to me I don't mean due to me.'

'That's lucid and explains everything, of course,' observed Harry Wharton.

'It will be thanks to me, I hope,' said Bunter, with a dignified air, 'that I now make myself plain.'

'No need - someone has already - nature, perhaps,' said Wibley.

The juniors laughed. 'Oh, really, Wibley-'

'What has this afternoon's business got to do with the loss of the Hogben ruby-' asked Temple of the Fourth.

'I heard him say he'd got it,' replied Bunter. 'I mean that he hadn't got it. It was the other man who was to pinch the letter. That's why he took Mauly's jacket. See?'

'No,' observed Temple. 'There's nothing to be seen. What you're saying doesn't make sense.'

'Does anything Bunter ever say make sense?' asked Fry.

'Beast! Yah! Kick these Fourth-form rotters out,' howled the Owl.

'You kick them out,' suggested Johnny Bull. 'After getting your hand in with that fellow this afternoon, you should find it quite easy. Never too much trouble for anyone to handle the Fourth,' he added.

There was a murmur from those members of the Fourth present.

'Try,' invited Dabney.

'Pax!' exclaimed Vernon-Smith. 'We all know the Fourth are no good in a fight with Removites or ruffians.'

'Look here-' began Fry.

'But we don't want to have a row in the "Rag" now. And I'm really rather interested to know what happened this afternoon.'

'Oh, thanks, Smithy.' It was not often that the Owl found anyone interested in anything he said. 'You're a sportsman - like me!'

'If you're curious, Smithy' said Harry Wharton, 'you'd better ask Mauly next - if not first! After all, he was the chap the man tried to rob.'

'Mauly doesn't know anything about it,' howled the Owl. 'He wasn't there at all until I rushed in and rescued him-'

'Then he must still be there,' observed Tom Brown, 'seeing you haven't done so yet.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Beast, I was there all the time. Watching them.'

'Frozen stiff until you were trodden on - and then you rushed - in the other direction,' said Bulstrode.

'I saved Mauly - and his jacket.'

'You mean Coker did - with the help of Potter and Greene.'

'It's a strange business all the same,' put in Harry Wharton. 'According to Bunter, there were two of them there at first, and he heard a reference made to the other chap having taken the Hogben ruby. The fat ass must have heard something to that effect. He couldn't have made it up.'

'Oh, really, Wharton-'

'That's a pretty odd assortment of things for a thief or thieves to steal. First a ruby worth thousands - and then a jacket. I daresay Mauly's jackets are expensive - but they aren't all that valuable in comparison.'

'They took Bunter's jacket the other day - which must be even less valuable,' said Nugent.

'If they'd taken Bunter inside with it, it would have been of no value whatever,' added Johnny Bull.

Bob Cherry shook his head. 'Might have had to pay them to take the loot away,' he said.

'Oh, really, you fellows-'

'There doesn't seem any sense in it,' observed Tom Brown.

'The senselessness is terrific,' added Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. 'The esteemed and disgusting Bunter's jackets are of no usefulness to any other person of lesser widefullness, and they are usually tuckfully smeared from the last meal.'

The juniors roared.

'Oh, really, Inky - my jackets are good-class ones,' observed the Owl, loftily. 'I get them from the best tailors in-'

'Petticoat Lane?' suggested Bob Cherry.

'No, you ass - Savile Row - that's it - the best tailors in Ravile Sow - I mean-' 'The Portobello Road.' 'No, you chump! 1--'

'By all accounts the one that chap took from Bunter was Mauly's,' interrupted Peter Todd, 'which he borrowed without permission.'

'For that night trip,' said Harold Skinner.

The Bounder looked at him, and Skinner quailed and shrank back.

'What night trip was that?' asked Temple.

'None of any consequence - at least to you,' replied Vernon-Smith, shortly. It looked as if Skinner was trying to make out that he had a 'hold' over Vernon-Smith - and Vernon-Smith resented the implication. 'H'm! It seems that Mauly's jackets are the only ones in demand. Queer! I wonder if he knows why. Where is he?'

'In his study, I expect,' said Bob Cherry with a grin. 'Can't rest as well here with all the row that goes on.'

'He isn't in his study. I looked,' said Harry Wharton. 'Someone else's then, I expect. I expect he's taken cover there, because - unlike Bunter - he doesn't like being in the limelight.'

'Beast!'

'I heard Coker explaining to Wiggins, who was taking "call-over",' said Wibley, 'why Potter and Greene and Mauleverer wouldn't be there to answer their names. He told him that they were wanted by the police. That gave old Wiggins a shock!'

The juniors roared.

'Then he realised that Coker must have got it wrong.'

'As he usually does with most things,' said Johnny Bull. 'Then Coker said something about being on the trail of the Hogben ruby.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'If Prout or Quelch or Hacker or even Capper had been taking "call-over" he wouldn't have got far with that nonsense,' observed Harry Wharton.

'The not-far-fulness would have been great,' said Hurree Singh.

'All the same,' said Peter Todd, 'there does seem to be some connexion between the loss of Sir Julius's ruby and this jacket-stealing. That chap they call "Gentleman Charlie" is still at the "Cross Keys", because they haven't enough evidence to charge him. And this other chap, who's now in a cell in Courtfield Police Station, has met him and talked to him about the ruby according to Bunter-'

'According to Bunter,' repeated Johnny Bull.

'Yah! Don't blame me if you don't get hold of that ruby.'

'Thanks. We shan't!'

'I heard Potter tell Hilton that the man they took to Courtfield is an escaped convict known as Bert the Twister - a most dangerous fellow.'

'Lucky Bunter didn't know that when he rushed on him, and smote him to the earth,' said Nugent.

'Ow! Oh lor!'

'Cheer up, fatty,' said Bob Cherry. 'You're bound to meet him again! •

'Oh, crikey!'

'They'll take him back to Dartmoor, and you're sure to go there yourself soon. You've already started a life of crime by pinching tuck and that will lead to other things.'

'Ow! Beast!'

'Like rubies and jackets. You've already begun in the jacket line. How many of Mauly's did you take? Criminals always ask for other crimes to be taken into consideration.'

'Oh, dear! Oh, lor!'

'Chuck it. Bob,' said Harry Wharton, laughing. 'Don't scare the fat ass.'

'Ow! I only took two. You beast, Cherry. The one I wore when I went out with Smithy that night. It's all right, Smithy, I shan't say a word about that.'

Vernon-Smith scowled and the others laughed.

'I took that back to Mauly. I'm thoughtful about taking back things I've borrowed, I should hope.'

'Except pies,' said Nugent. 'And cakes and tarts and biscuits and anything else eatable you can lay your hands on.'

'Beast! I disdain to answer you, Nugent. You're low. Then there was that other jacket of Mauly's I borrowed which that photographer beast took from me.'

'Instead of taking your photograph,' said Todd. 'I suppose he wouldn't risk cracking a valuable camera.'

'Yah!'

'So you've only pinched two of Mauly's jackets,' observed Wibley.

'Up to the time of going to press, as they say,' added Bob Cherry, 'or were there any more? Cough it up Bunter. "Come clean," as your criminal friends say.'

'Ow! Beast! I took two of Mauly's jackets to be cleaned at Chunkley's this afternoon,' said the Owl. 'I actually missed tea. I'm an obliging chap. Of course, Mauly stood me tea at the bun shop. I mean - he didn't stand me tea at the bun shop.'

'Is that why you were such an obliging chap as to walk to Courtfield with Mauly's jackets?' asked Peter Todd. 'I didn't walk. I biked. Oh, lor'. Oh, crikey!'

'What's the matter?'

'Oh, I left that bike in Friardale Lane. I forgot it when I ran away from that beast - I mean when I didn't run away.'

'Never mind,' said Todd. 'It can't get any rustier than it is now, even if you leave it out all night. You haven't cleaned it since the Christmas term, have you? And no one will steal it, unless they're collecting old iron.'

'I daresay Bunter won't need to clean it at all now,' said Tom Brown. 'Your crook friends seem to have a wide range in their takings, Bunter, from rubies to jackets, so why not bikes?'

'Ow! You go and fetch it for me, Toddy old chap. I'll stand you a feed out of my postal order I'm expecting.'

'It'll have to be slops then, for I shan't have any teeth by the time it arrives,' retorted Peter Todd. 'Buzz up first thing in the morning and get it.'

'No! Oh, lor' That other photographer beast might be there to meet him - to get that letter.'

'What letter?' asked Vernon-Smith.

'He, he, he!' Bunter brightened at the recollection. 'The one he put in Mauly's jacket. He said he did. Fancy old Sir Julius not being able to pay his bookmaker. I always do. I'm a sportsman.'

'You utter ass, what do you mean?' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'Sir Julius doesn't have anything to do with bookmakers - and if he were fool enough to owe money to one, he could and would pay it.'

'Oh!' The Owl snorted. 'The man sent him a threatening letter. That beast's got it. And he's going to meet the other beast at nine and get it from him after he's taken it from Mauly's jacket. So there!'

'Drivel!' exclaimed Bob Cherry.

'Tain't. I heard the beasts arrange to meet.' Bob Cherry whistled.

'Oh, crumbs! There's nothing in that fat-headed letter story, of course, but if Bunter's got it right about their arranging to meet - did you tell Quelchy that, you fathead?'

'No! I don't mind. Catch me being there when they do. Not that I'm afraid.'

'The fat chump,' said Nugent. 'The police must be told. If the other fellow turns up, he can't meet his friends because the man's in gaol - but he might meet a constable or two.'

'And some of us,' said Harry Wharton. 'We'll be around anyway.'

'I don't quite understand,' began Vernon-Smith, perplexedly. He was interrupted as the door of the Rag opened and Wingate entered.

'Dorm,' he said, briefly. 'Pack up now, and get along.' It was bed time and nothing more could be done or explained in the Rag that night.

MR. GRIMES INTERVIEWS LORD MAULEVERER

'COME in!'

There had been a tap at the door of Study No. 12, and Lord Mauleverer looked up as the tapper entered. It was Saturday, and therefore a half-holiday. Classes were just over, and his lordship was looking forward to some pleasant hours to be spent in a reasonable state of laziness. It was not likely now that any other person would disturb him in the matter of jackets, Bert the Twister being safely under lock and key.

It was Trotter, the page, who entered.

'Inspector Grimes to see yer, me lord. In the Visitors' room.'

Mauleverer fished a half-crown out of his pocket and gave it to Trotter, for no other apparent reason than that Trotter seemed to expect it.

'Does he? I wonder why?'

Lord Mauleverer was puzzled. Last night, Inspector Grimes had thanked him for his part in the apprehension of an escaped convict, though Mauleverer could not see what he had done in the matter other than being assaulted by the man. He thought that he had given the police all necessary particulars. It would almost seem as though he had not.

'Oh, gad! Another beastly form to fill in, I expect!'

It was, his lordship realised, an age of form-filling. All over the country forms were being filled in by numerous people - forms which served no ascertainable purpose; forms which were never read, immediately filed, and began mouldering unobserved while people composed amended forms. He must take his share in the routine.

He rose to his feet and left the study. It would not be fair or polite to keep Inspector Grimes waiting. He went along to the Visitors' room and opened the door.

The inspector was standing by the window, and turned as he entered. It struck Mauleverer immediately that Mr. Grimes was rather ill at ease. For all his easy-going ways, Mauleverer was a keen observer in such matters. The inspector was also holding a large brown-paper bag, recognisable as one of Chunkley's. This was surprising. Mauleverer knew that police inspectors did not customarily carry such parcels, when in uniform.

'Good afternoon, my lord. I am sorry for the occasion of this visit, but I have no option.'

Mauleverer blinked. This sounded a little odd.

'Oh, all right' he said. 'Somethin' more about last night I ought to have told you?'

'No! I am grateful for what you did last night, of course.'

'Nothin' to be grateful for,' replied Mauleverer. 'Potter and Greene, perhaps? Not me. Just had myself assaulted.'

'Possibly, my lord. Still you were of service in taking the trouble to charge the man, and bring an escaped convict to justice. I am afraid that the matter upon which I have called this morning is a more serious one, and on it I must ask you to make a statement.'

'Good gad! What's the trouble?' Lord Mauleverer knew that when the police invited people to make statements, it usually meant that there was something to be explained - or an attempt made to explain it.

Inspector Grimes was unpacking the brown-paper bag which had been tied with string.

'I should, your lordship, in the ordinary course of affairs, have gone to your Headmaster in this matter. However, I have been informed that Dr. Locke is away - he is attending some scholastic conference, and will not

return until Monday. I decided, instead of interviewing the temporary Headmaster, to come straight to you for an explanation.'

Lord Mauleverer smiled, despite his perplexity. Prout, as the senior master, would be the temporary Headmaster in Dr. Locke's absence. To consult him in preference to Mr. Quelch, Lord Mauleverer's form-master, might make some difficulties. Inspector Grimes had cut the Gordian knot by seeing neither.

Inspector Grimes pulled away the string and pulled out the contents of the parcel. Mauleverer exclaimed at the sight of them.

'Good gad! Those jackets I sent to Chunkley's.'

'Yes, my lord. These are the two jackets you despatched yesterday to Chunkley's Cleaning Department. I had a telephone call from the manager this morning in answer to a police inquiry, which has been put out amongst cleaners in general.'

Inspector Grimes paused, and unfolded one of the jackets.

'Early last Thursday morning Hogben Grange was broken into, and a valuable ruby stolen. It has not been recovered, and no arrests have yet been made. Sir Julius Hogben himself went out to help apprehend the intruders. Whilst doing so, he heard voices, and saw two people, one of them with a handkerchief tied across his face, presumably to conceal his features.'

Lord Mauleverer nodded. He did not see where this was leading to or why it should be told to him.

'He took hold of one of the men by the jacket collar, and then the other one hit him on the jaw, knocking him down. A piece of this individual's jacket collar was torn off and came away in his hands. The men escaped. It was dark and he could not see them to recognise them.'

'Plucky of him to tackle two fellers like that,' observed Lord Mauleverer.

'Indeed so, my lord. The piece of material was handed by Sir Julius to us. It was of good quality, and we sent out a description of it immediately to see if it could be identified. It has!'

'Good work!'

'I think so, my lord. It came from Huntsmans of Savile Row in London, who made jackets for some six customers from it. They supplied those names to us, confidentially, this morning. Amongst those names is your own.'

'Yaas!' replied Mauleverer, unperturbably. 'Might be. I always go to Huntsman's for my things. Good people.'

'What is much more serious, my lord, is that the piece of material taken by Sir Julius Hogben fits exactly a tear in one of the jackets you sent to Chunkley's yesterday for cleaning and repairs. I should like to have your explanation of that circumstance.'

'Good gad!' Lord Mauleverer remembered his talk with Vernon-Smith the day after that midnight escapade. He had known that Sir Julius had torn a piece from the collar of one of the people who were supposed to have robbed the Grange. From Bunter's chatter he had gathered that that midnight party had not gone off as smoothly as the Bounder had planned. He had even surmised that the two truants, returning so late, might have become mixed up with the searchers for the thieves. He had wondered at the coincidence of a piece being torn from his own jacket borrowed that night by Bunter. Yet, he had never thought things would turn out in the way they had now been presented to him by Inspector Grimes!

'The utter ass!'

'Well, my lord? You must see that this matter cannot be left as it is now.'

'No, of course not. I suppose you think I was wearin' that jacket that night. I wasn't you know. Can't prove it, but I was asleep in our dorm here. Gad what a mix-up! The silly chump!'

'To whom are you making that reference. Lord Mauleverer? Myself?'

'Oh, gad no! Wouldn't think of it. Have to do your duty. Done it very well - and promptly. I haven't stolen that ruby,' said Lord Mauleverer, 'but there - I suppose I'd say the same if I had? Goin' to arrest me, what?'

'No, your lordship.' Inspector Grimes permitted himself his first smile for some time. 'I think it is most improbable that you took Sir Julius's ruby. You would hardly, had you been involved in those proceedings on early Thursday morning, have sent your torn jacket to be cleaned and repaired in the vicinity. It seemed to be well known in the neighbourhood that one of the clues held was a piece of jacket torn from the collar of an unknown person at the time of the robbery.'

The inspector frowned. He had not been pleased at the publicity which that piece of news had gained, though he had not yet come to suspecting P.C. Tozer as the source of the leakage.

'Moreover, my lord, you were attacked yesterday by a man, an escaped convict, whom we believe to be an associate of one of our suspects. He sought to steal your jacket from you. Nevertheless, you will see that I must have an explanation of how your jacket came to be where it was to be torn by Sir Julius. You say that you were not wearing it. Who was? Did you lend it to some other person?'

'No. Chap borrowed it, though. But he didn't steal the ruby. I'm pretty certain. Wouldn't know how to!' added his lordship, thinking of Bunter.

'What was his name?'

Lord Mauleverer looked steadily at Inspector Grimes. 'Look here. Mr. Grimes,' he said quietly. 'This is where I can't help you yet. You've got the idea that some Greyfriars man, who borrowed my jacket, was outside the school last Thursday mornin' pretty early.'

'I am right, am I not?'

'Might be,' replied Mauleverer. 'Wouldn't say you're wrong. But if so, the chap was out of bounds, you know. Not a criminal offence, but a pretty serious school one, especially at that time in the mornin'. Tradition here, we don't give fellers' names away. Sneakin' they call it. So that is why I can't tell you. Sorry - but you see how it is.'

The face of Inspector Grimes set grimly.

'Lord Mauleverer, I cannot allow any schoolboy punctilio, however praiseworthy, to interfere with the processes of the law. I must insist upon your giving me that name.'

'Can't do!' said his lordship. 'Sorry and all that. You'll have to produce the handcuffs. Wonder what Quelch will say to my bein' arrested? Bit annoyed, I shouldn't wonder.'

'If you persist in your refusal to give me that name, Lord Mauleverer, I must take this matter before Mr. Quelch. He will, no doubt, ensure that you reveal it in due course,' observed the inspector, grimly.

'In due course, eh?' Lord Mauleverer looked thoughtful. 'That bein' so, and satisfactory, I might do somethin' in this silly affair. What about my seein' the chap and puttin' it to him, and gettin' him to come and see you? He knows more about the business than I do, and a chap can give his own name if he likes. Might be able to satisfy you without you havin' to say any thin' about him to Quelch.'

Inspector Grimes looked thoughtful.

'If this boy, to whom you refer, will see me, Lord Mauleverer, I shall be pleased,' he said. 'I cannot give any undertaking, but if it is not essential, in the course of my investigations, to reveal what is merely a breach of school rules, I shall not do so. I am stretching a point' - Inspector Grimes rose to his feet - 'but I am prepared to do so, if this boy comes to see me some time this afternoon. Good morning, Lord Mauleverer.'

The inspector rose to his feet and left the room. Lord Mauleverer stared after him, hardly hearing the sound of the bell for dinner, which was now sounding through the school.

'That ass, Smithy, and that chump, Bunter!' he exclaimed.

VERNON-SMITH SEES LIGHT

'IF that fat ass, Bunter, has got it right,' Mauleverer heard the voice of Vernon-Smith saying, as he approached Study No. 4, 'that fellow the police suspect of having taken the Hogben ruby arranged to see that other chap at nine tonight, where they met yesterday. The police ought to know that, Reddy. Being a good boy,' the Bounder laughed, 'who's gated and wouldn't think of going to tell them, what about you?'

'I'll go.' It was Redwing's voice in reply. 'The chap they call "Gentleman Charlie" may not know yet that his friend's in gaol again. The police can't arrest him though - they haven't so far. No evidence.'

'No evidence of stealing the ruby, but plenty of stealing Bunter's - really Mauly's - jacket. They could hold him on that. Why, here's Mauly! Perhaps he'll go with you? Like to go and see Inspector Grimes for me, Mauly?'

'No need, Smithy,' Mauleverer stepped inside the study. 'He's just been here to see me - for you!'

'What?'

'Pact! Practically clinked the handcuffs at me. Did I hear someone talkin' about stolen jackets? Dangerous things, these days. Complicatin'.'

'What are you talking about?' exclaimed Redwing.

'Jackets,' replied Lord Mauleverer. 'Bunter took two of mine to Chunkley's yesterday to be cleaned - and repaired. Bit torn out of the collar of one of them. You remember about that, don't you, Smithy? Inspector Grimes brought me the jacket with the missin' bit. Kind of him, wasn't it? Said Sir Julius had torn the bit from the collar of a chap he thought was a burglar. Early on Thursday mornin' last. Intriguin' situation, what? Mind if I sit down?'

Lord Mauleverer eased himself into an armchair and smiled.

'What-?' Redwing gasped. He turned to Vernon-Smith. 'Smithy, what does this mean?'

'Ruin, probably,' replied the Bounder, calmly. 'If you don't mind my being melodramatic. That ass Bunter was wearing one of Mauly's jackets when he joined my little midnight jaunt. Old Hogben grabbed it thinking he'd caught a burglar and I - intervened. It will want some explaining to Quelchy. Is Grimes explaining to Quelchy, Mauly?'

'No,' replied Mauleverer. 'Wanted me to do the explainin'. Said it couldn't be done - not without givin' away a fellow's name, which wasn't done. Wasn't too pleased at first, but if a fellow who knew more about this matter than I did - still mentionin' no names - went and saw him not later than today. Old Grimes would mention no names if he didn't have to, it not bein' his business to enforce school rules. Reasonable, what?' Redwing turned an ashen face upon his friend. 'Smithy, you must see him. It's your only chance. And-'

'And I'm gated, Reddy! Have you forgotten that?'

'Smithy, you must go somehow!'

'How? Ask Quelchy for permission to go to Grimes and explain that when I was out of the school just after midnight, I wasn't committing a burglary?'

'I'll go and explain to Grimes for you. I was going to see him anyway-'

'No. Thanks all the same. And to you, too, Mauly. Let me think a moment.'

The Bounder sat down and stared in front of him.

Lord Mauleverer regarded him placidly, and Tom Redwing with growing

anxiety.

Could anything be said in extenuation of that midnight excursion, which had ended so disastrously? He could not explain anything to Grimes without bringing in Bunter, who had worn Mauly's jacket. And Bunter, brought in, was most unlikely to be silent, even if Inspector Grimes decided to remain so.

Must he bring in Bunter? Yes. He had on that jacket!

Smithy remembered the man he had seen fumbling with its pockets, apparently attempting to see if the sleeping Owl was worth robbing. Was he? Vernon-Smith knew that someone had later taken another jacket, which Bunter had been wearing. And that a further attempt to steal one of Mauly's jackets had been made. And the ruby had not yet been found! The man who was suspected of having a hand in its disappearance was still in the neighbourhood, there being no evidence against him.

'So that's it!'

'Smithy-' began Redwing.

That fellow who had come down from London, and was now in custody - according to Bunter he had been told to get hold of a jacket which contained a threatening letter from a bookmaker to Sir Julius Hogben. The Bounder smiled. The existence of any such letter was unlikely, but there being no honour amongst thieves, it was a likely pretext for the acquisition of a jacket, which one thief might use, when he was commissioning another thief to get hold of one, which he did not want searched for anything more valuable!

'Got it! It must be!'

'Smithy!'

It all tied up. A man peppered with a shot-gun and unable to run fast, if running were needed, as well it might be. Closely watched by the police! The employment of an ex-convict, whom it would be very easy to give away if he tried to 'double-cross' - yes, it all hung together!

Vernon-Smith rose to his feet, his eyes blazing with triumph.

'If I get it back for old Hogben, he'll overlook my knocking him down. He must - and being there at all. He's a governor of the school. I'll ask him to say nothing to Quelch!'

'Smithy, what do you mean?'

'Reddy, I've seen the whole thing and a way out! I'll explain presently - but I must go and see old Grimes. I-'

There was a tap at the door. The Bounder broke off with a scowl.

'Come in.'

The face of Harold Skinner peered round the door. 'Oh, sorry, Smithy. I thought you were alone - and rather wanted to see you-'

'Well, I'm not alone. Clear out!'

Lord Mauleverer rose to his feet. He did not like to hear anyone so addressed, even Skinner.

'Have to leave you now, Smithy! Got some things to do. Interested to hear how you get on.' He smiled and left. The situation was still full of difficulties, but it seemed as if the most immediate ones must be solved by Vernon-Smith himself.

On his exit, Vernon-Smith turned to Skinner.

'Well? So you haven't cleared out. As you've stayed, what do you want?' Skinner glanced at Redwing. He really did not like to say what he wanted before Redwing, but there seemed no help for it.

'I say, Smithy, can you lend me a couple of quid? I'm in a frightful hole.'

'Joe Banks, I suppose?'

'Yes. "Panther" for the Lantham Handicap. I thought it was a dead cert-'

'You always do.'

'I know you backed it. Ifs only two quid, but he's pressing me. Be a sportsman, Smithy.'

The Bounder laughed.

'Why not be one yourself? Do you call being a sportsman being ready to take a bookie's money if you win, and not being ready to pay him, if you lose? Nothing doing, Skinner.'

Skinner opened the study-door and then turned, to make another appeal.

'Smithy-?'

'No, Skinner. You're no sportsman - and I don't like you anyway.'

Skinner closed the door abruptly, and then turned to see the fat Owl of the Remove who had been passing on his way to Study No. 7 and stopped, as was his general custom, to listen to any private conversation which might be going on.

'He, he, he! You're no sportsman, Skinner-not like me.'

MR. QUELCH MAKES A DISCOVERY

'HE, he, he!'

Skinner glared at the fat Owl. His first impulse was to rush at him and smite him - there were few people whom Harold Skinner was able to smite, but Bunter was one of them. Then he paused; he might make use of Bunter to avenge himself on Smithy, towards whom he now felt very bitter.

'And I suppose you call yourself a sportsman?'

'He, he, he - yes. Smithy chose me specially that night-'

'And you dreamed it all.'

'I didn't. I tell you-'

'Tell me somewhere else - not here in the passage.

Anyway I'm going to the Rag. You can follow if you like. I don't believe,' added Skinner, 'that you went out at all last Wednesday night. I'd bet a couple of cream-puffs on it. I've got a couple of cream-puffs - and I'd give them to you, if you could convince me - but they're quite safe. You can't.'

Harold Skinner turned and made for the Rag. There would not be many there at the beginning of a fine Saturday summer afternoon, but there would be some. People like Fisher T. Fish and Hazeldene, who were not lovers of the open air, and not on particularly good terms with their study-mates. If he could get Bunter to talk about that night's escapade, with an audience, it might not be long before the story came to the ears of authority - and Vernon-Smith would pay.

'I say, Skinner-'

As he had expected, the fat Owl followed him, the vision of two possible cream-puffs hovering before his eyes. Skinner looked round as he entered the Rag. Hazeldene was there, Bulstrode and Micky Desmond. Skinner went over to the open window and looked out. Then his pulse quickened.

He saw Quelch below, slowly strolling that way. He was, perhaps, waiting for someone to accompany him on a walk, Capper or Wiggins, very likely. Walking was Quelch's favourite form of exercise. In the meantime he was strolling nearer below, and would presently be within earshot of the open windows!

'I say Skinner about those cream-puffs!'

'What about them?'

'Well, you bet me-'

'Did I?' Quelch was coming nearer. Skinner turned.

No one else knew that the Remove master was approaching below.

'You said you'd let me have them if I could convince you that I really did go out the other night. You can take my word. I suppose?' added Bunter, in a lofty tone.

'Your word?' Skinner laughed and took a sideways glance below. Quelch was quite near now. Skinner moved away from the window. 'Well, what *did* you do the other night?'

'I went out with Smithy on a car-run after midnight.' Bunter looked round the Rag to see if anyone else was suitably impressed. Hazeldene did not seem interested, but Bulstrode and Desmond were looking at him. What he did not know was that Mr. Quelch had stopped below, and was very interested. 'We went miles.'

'Rats!'

'It ain't rats - I mean, it's true. We went-' Bunter began to embroider a little, as was his custom - 'to a-a casino. We - played - we played bac-baccarat.'

'You ass!'

'And is that how you spent the night with Vernon-Smith?' chimed in Micky Desmond.

'Sure, and I don't believe you. He wouldn't take you for a companion.'

'He did! howled the Owl. 'I was out for hours and hours - I'm a sportsman. Like to like! Then we strolled home. Hours and hours. Oh, lor'!'

Bulstrode laughed. 'That doesn't sound as if you enjoyed it much, fatty! Why did you stroll home?'

'Because the car broke down. Oh, dear! Hours and hours.'

'Smithy said he was going out that night,' said Peter Hazeldene, 'but he wanted to take Mauly. Not you.'

'Mauly wouldn't go. He's not a sportsman. So-so I offered to go instead - being a sportsman.'

'Wednesday night, wasn't it? Lucky you didn't run into those burglars. That was the night they got into Hogben Grange,' said Bulstrode.

'Sure, Bunter would have run a mile rather than meet the likes of them,' added Desmond.

'I didn't. I knocked one right into a ditch. Punched him right on the jaw. Or, at least, Smithy did.'

Bulstrode laughed. 'Same thing, of course. And then you woke up - almost. I noticed you were pretty sleepy next day. Quelch actually let you off class to sleep some more because of your nightmares. I suppose you went away to have some more?'

'Beast! I say, Skinner, what about those cream-puffs?' Skinner walked away. He had heard Quelch move again, and had no desire to be on the scene if the Remove master came to investigate the truth of what he had heard. Quelch's appearance below the window had been fortunate from Skinner's point of view. He had been in luck - and Vernon-Smith would soon be very much out of it!

'I say, Skinny, what about those cream-puffs?' wailed Bunter.

Skinner felt almost - but not quite - inclined to give them to Bunter. The great objection to that was that he had no cream-puffs and no money to buy any.

THE SECRET OUT!

'VERNON-SMITH!'

It was Quelch's voice, and Vernon-Smith swung round at the sound of it. He had been looking through the gates and talking to Redwing, who had been endeavouring to deter him from his resolve to go out and see Inspector Grimes.

'Yes, sir?'

'Were you intending to go out, Vernon-Smith, despite the fact that I have forbidden you to do so?'

The Bounder looked round. Wingate was wheeling his bicycle towards the gates. With the Captain of the School in the way it was, obviously, not practicable to go out. Wingate would know that he was 'gated'.

'No, sir.'

It was a 'white' lie. The Bounder never hesitated to lie to a 'beak' if he considered it necessary. Redwing, who had greater scruples in this matter than his friend, looked troubled.

'I do not believe you, Vernon-Smith - but I now come to a much more serious matter, which has just been brought to my notice. I have heard that last Wednesday you broke bounds at midnight, and stayed out until the early morning. Is that the case?'

Vernon-Smith hesitated. The fact that Quelch knew this was a shock to him! For a moment a denial hovered on the tip of his tongue - but what was the use? There would be further inquiries.

'Yes, sir. It was only a lark. I wanted to see the country by moonlight.'

'Indeed. You induced another boy - Bunter - to come with you?'

'I did not induce him, sir.' There was resentment now in the Bounder's tone. This, at least, was being answered truthfully.

'Bunter is hardly likely to have acted on his own initiative,' said Quelch, coldly, 'You attended a casino somewhere where you indulged in the playing of baccarat.'

'I did not.' The Bounder almost shouted. 'I have told you the truth, sir. I went for a run in a car. It broke down. I did not go to any place to gamble. If Bunter told you any such thing, he is not telling the truth.'

'I have not yet interviewed Bunter,' said Quelch. 'I am assured that you are the leader in whatever happened.' The Remove master looked at Wingate, who had come up with his bicycle. 'Kindly remain here, Wingate, for a moment. Now, Vernon-Smith, this is the most serious occurrence of all. You struck Sir Julius Hogben, a governor of this school. You hit him on the jaw and knocked him into a ditch. There is evidence - if but circumstantial - to that effect, so I warn you not to deny it, if it is true.'

Vernon-Smith paused. 'After the car broke down, we had to walk back, sir,' he said, slowly. 'We were near Hogben Grange, when a crowd came along looking for those burglars. Sir Julius separated from them - and found us - and thought we were the people he was after. I didn't want to be found, so I hit out - and that's all, sir.'

'And enough,' said Quelch, grimly. 'Wingate, please, take this boy to the Punishment room and lock him in. He will remain there until Monday when the Headmaster returns. I warned you about your conduct the other day, Vernon-Smith. This time you have gone too far!'

Vernon-Smith looked round and saw a look of utter misery on Redwing's face. This was the end. Wingate was coming nearer. He would soon be in the Punishment room to await expulsion. What else? Unless-?

The Bounder suddenly made up his mind. Turning round, he sped for the gates. Wingate ran out to stop him, but Vernon-Smith put out a foot to trip him. The captain of the school went sprawling full-length in the quadrangle. Then Vernon-Smith ran towards his bicycle.

'Vernon-Smith!' It was Quelch's voice. 'Come back at once!' Regardless, the Bounder sprang on Wingate's bicycle, and, pedalling furiously, disappeared through the gates and down Friardale Lane!

ANOTHER SECRET OUT!

VERNON-SMITH got off Wingate's bicycle, propped it against the kerb, and went into Courtfield Police Station. Outwardly, he was calm. He knew, however, that he was at a critical stage in his career. He was about to have an interview with Inspector Grimes. Much depended on the outcome of that interview!

At Greyfriars he had burned his boats. He had broken bounds, disobeyed his form master, sent sprawling the captain of the school, and taken his bicycle. Over all hung the shadow of that midnight jaunt, which was a secret no longer.

If his calculations were wrong as to what would happen at this interview with the inspector, he was returning to certain expulsion.

A police-sergeant looked up interrogatively, as he approached the desk.

'My name's Vernon-Smith,' he said. 'Inspector Grimes is expecting me. Tell him that I'm here because of what he said to Lord Mauleverer.'

The sergeant disappeared, and Vernon-Smith waited.

Presently he found himself confronting the inspector, who motioned him to a chair.

'You wish to tell me something, Master Vernon-Smith?'

'Yes, Mr. Grimes. In fact, several things. Following upon your interview with Lord Mauleverer about that jacket he sent to Chunkley's.'

Inspector Grimes looked at him keenly.

'Are you the boy who was wearing it at the time it was damaged?'

'No - but he was in my company.'

'His name, please?'

Vernon-Smith thought rapidly. It was no good trying to keep the Owl's identity secret. It was bound to come out, now that so much was known. Besides-Inspector Grimes had promised Mauly that he would not disclose any offences against school rules, unless he had to. That didn't matter now - to him - but he might get that amnesty to cover Bunter.

'Bunter of my form, He was the chap who gave the alarm yesterday, which resulted in the arrest of that man you know as Bert the Twister.'

'We are grateful to Master Bunter for that circumstance.' The inspector did not add that Bert the Twister, incarcerated securely in a neighbouring cell, pending his return to Dartmoor, was far from grateful.

'Yes. And he heard - which I intended to tell you even before I learned from Mauleverer that you wanted to see me - Bunter heard the man make an appointment with that other man - your suspect. Same place at nine tonight. He may not know that you have collected his friend.'

'Oh! Thank you for the information. It may be useful - though there is no charge against him at the moment.'

Vernon-Smith smiled at the note of regret in the officer's voice.

'Yes,' he said, 'you'd like to meet him instead of his friend, but don't think it would be of much use, as you can't detain him. No evidence, but plenty of suspicions about the ruby. If you wanted to hold him, however, you can charge him with stealing a jacket from Bunter!'

'What?' The inspector sat bolt upright. 'What do you mean, Master Vernon-Smith?'

'A fellow who pretended to be a photographer stopped Bunter on Thursday and stole his jacket - another one of Lord Mauleverer's, really. He'd borrowed that, too! I think it will be found that he's the man you know as "Gentleman Charlie"!'.

'I had not heard of this happening.'

'No - I suppose Mr. Quelch would not think it worth while reporting it to you. He knew you were busy with the Hogben Grange robbery. And he knows Bunter's stories are apt to be - highly coloured. I think this one was true, though - and I'll tell you why presently, if you'll listen to me.'

'Jackets seem to figure rather prominently in recent activities at Greyfriars,' observed the inspector. 'I think you had better, first of all, give me an account of what happened the night you broke school bounds. At the present time, Sir Julius Hogben thinks that, on that night, he tore a piece from a garment belonging to one of the men who burgled the Grange.'

'Yes,' replied the Bounder. 'I will. He didn't! I thought I'd like a midnight run in a car - a midnight picnic. Bunter was with me by mistake.'

'By mistake?'

'Yes! I had proposed to take another fellow. He wasn't keen on it, but I'd got him to promise to come. Sharp practice on my part, I daresay, Mr. Grimes.' The Bounder laughed. 'However, he couldn't come. Some other fellows sat on him in bed and he couldn't move. I thought he'd managed to free himself - but he hadn't. I thought I had hold of him, leading him downstairs and outside. It was all in the darkness, of course - but when I got to a place where I could see, I found it was Bunter. He'd got on to it somehow, and substituted himself.'

The shade of a smile crossed the face of Inspector Grimes.

'Yes?'

'I couldn't take Bunter back - it would be too noisy. I had a car waiting, so I took him with me. We had a crash some miles away, and had to walk back. You can check all this with the chauffeur, if you want to. His name's Johnson and he's employed by the Courtfield Garage.'

The inspector made a note, and waited for Vernon-Smith to continue.

'We had to walk back about eight miles, and came to the other side of the Sark. It was getting light, and I saw a boat on the east bank near our boat-house. To cross there would save another two miles, and Bunter was about "all-in". So I swam over and got the boat, and went back in it, putting in near where Oak Lane comes to the towpath. Near our Cloisters.' Inspector Grimes was listening attentively.

'I thought it was odd, a boat being tied there, but that I'd better tie it up again. I sent Bunter along Oak Lane first to save time, as he was pretty slow in going.'

'Yes. He would be tired,' observed Inspector Grimes.

'He was. He didn't go far. He sat down against a tree and fell asleep, as I found a little later. I was just tying up that boat when I heard a shot - and then a fellow came running down Oak Lane towards me.'

The inspector's interest quickened.

'I hid myself, quickly,' continued Vernon-Smith. 'I didn't want to be spotted out of bounds at that time of the morning by anyone who might know me. Couldn't go along and see Bunter as I might run into the chap. Had to let the boat go, and it drifted off. One of ours, it seems.'

'Yes, I have heard that. Go on!' said Inspector Grimes.

'He came down to the boat and looked for it - but it was out in mid-stream then. I followed as soon as I dared - to find Bunter. I saw him asleep and this chap bending over him, apparently rifling his pockets. That's what I thought it was then.'

'Yes?'

'He went back up the lane - and then I heard a lot of people coming. One of them was Sir Julius Hogben - I heard his voice. I got Bunter awake, and we hid. I didn't, of course, want to run into a governor of the school, there and at that time. But that ass, Bunter, made a noise and Sir Julius heard-'

Vernon-Smith paused.

'He came towards us. I tied my handkerchief over my face and hit him, and sent him sprawling. He grabbed hold of Bunter's jacket - Lord Mauleverer's really - as he fell - and tore out a piece of the collar. And then we returned to school.'

The Bounder ceased speaking and looked up at the inspector and smiled.

'And is that all, Master Vernon-Smith?'

'Except that I think we had better produce the Hogben ruby!'

Inspector Grimes started and stared hard. 'Have you got it?'

'No, you have!'

'What? Where?'

'In that jacket of Mauleverer's which Chunkley's brought you, and which Bunter was wearing that night.' Inspector Grimes seemed stupefied for a moment, and then he pulled open a drawer of his desk.

'It all ties up - or should,' said the Bounder. 'That fellow wasn't robbing Bunter - he was hiding the ruby. If he'd stuck it in a tree-trunk or the ground, he'd never find it again, very likely. He couldn't get across the Sark because the boat had gone, and there'd be people along the lane presently who'd search him, and find the ruby if he kept it on him. He looked at the name-tab on the jacket and saw it was Mauleverer's. He couldn't know, of course, that Bunter had borrowed it. All he had to do, as he saw it, was to hang about and watch for a chance of getting hold of that jacket. That's why there's been this jacket-stealing. And when he'd got hold of Bunter, and found out that he wasn't Mauleverer and that he hadn't got the same jacket anyway - he sent for a friend. Bunter might have recognised him if he saw him again. He wants to remain near until he gets the ruby - and better lie low and get a friend to do it.' Vernon-Smith sank back and watched Inspector Grimes. All that he had said hung together - if the ruby were there! If it were not - he must return to the school and expulsion!

The inspector was feeling the material with dexterous fingers. Suddenly it seemed as though he held a lump beneath the cloth in the lining.

'Might be a stone worked through a hole,' observed the Bounder, 'though that's not very likely with one of Mauleverer's things.'

Inspector Grimes looked up and smiled, and worked the lump out and into the daylight. There were gleams of a deep red colouring as it caught the rays of afternoon sunlight through the police-station windows.

'The Hogben ruby!' exclaimed Inspector Grimes. 'Thank you, Master Vernon-Smith!'

AN INTERVIEW WITH SIR JULIUS

'Is that Sir Julius Hogben?' Vernon-Smith listened to the inspector talking on the telephone. 'This is Inspector Grimes - Sir Julius, I am pleased to be able to tell you that we have recovered your ruby-' Inspector Grimes ceased to speak and the Bounder listened to a series of crackles which he supposed represented the pleasure of Sir Julius at the news. Herbert Vernon-Smith was feeling pleased himself. His belief as to what had happened in Oak Lane that night had been proved correct. There was still much to be done before he could return to Greyfriars with any other result than being locked immediately in the Punishment room - but there was now a fair chance that it could be done!

'I thought you would be pleased at the news, Sir Julius. I must tell you that I was put on the right track by a Greyfriars boy called Vernon-Smith.' (There was another interlude of crackling on the telephone.) 'You wish to see him and thank him? Certainly - he is here now - yes, I will bring him over with me in the car - with, of course, the ruby. I think I should tell you, in the course of his recent activities, which have led to the ruby being found, he has broken certain school rules. You, as a governor of the school-'

There were some more crackles and then the inspector put back the receiver. He turned to Vernon-Smith.

'I am to take you to see Sir Julius - and he is only too ready to ignore any breach of the school rules. I did not, as you will have heard, particularise those breaches. I imagine there is no actual rule against punching a governor of the school' - Inspector Grimes smiled - 'but I advise you to be circumspect when you deal with that matter. Sir Julius is so pleased at the recovery of the ruby - and at your part in its recovery - that I think you may be able to return to Greyfriars with a clean sheet.'

'You're a sportsman, sir,' said the Bounder enthusiastically, 'but it won't be all that easy at Greyfriars - though if Sir Julius is grateful. I hope he'll help me out of the worst of it. I go back to some trouble anyway. I was "gated" over another matter - and to get here and see you, as I thought I ought to, I had to defy Mr. Quelch and go out.'

'H'm!' The inspector smiled again. 'I must say, Master Vernon-Smith, that though I am very appreciative of the way in which you have helped the law, you seem to have indulged in a remarkable amount of lawlessness yourself. However, I hope things may not now be too bad for you. There is a duty car outside. Go out and tell the driver that I am coming to take it. Get in yourself and wait for me while I clear up some business here. Then we will go to Hogben Grange.'

Some ten minutes later, the car was proceeding up the drive towards Hogben Grange. As they neared the house, Vernon-Smith could see Sir Julius standing on the steps. He had evidently heard the car, and could hardly wait in patience to see his prized ruby again. As he gazed at the old baronet's beaming countenance, the Bounder felt a pang of remorse at the thought of having punched him. At the time it had seemed the only thing to do.

'So this is the boy?' Sir Julius was shaking him by the hand. 'Come in-come in, Inspector.' He led the way into his study. 'The ruby?' Inspector Grimes produced the ruby and handed it to its owner. Sir Julius gazed at it lovingly. It was a famous heirloom in his family, and he had despaired of ever seeing it again. Now it was, miraculously, restored to him!

'I am most grateful, Inspector - most. And to you too, my dear boy! Inspector Grimes tells me that it is to information received from you that I owe the recovery of my ruby - and that you have broken some school rules in the process? Well, well, boys will be boys!' The baronet chuckled. 'I have some influence, I think, with your Headmaster - and I will ask him to be very tolerant about the matter - very tolerant! What have you done?'

'I must tell you first of all, sir, that I and another fellow broke bounds that night,' said Vernon-Smith. 'We went for a run in the moonlight - in a car. It was my idea - a silly one, perhaps. The car broke down and we had to walk back. Coming back, we were near your house when you were chasing that fellow.'

'If Master Vernon-Smith had not happened to be there,' put in the inspector, 'he would not have seen the evidence which enabled us to recover your ruby.'

'Oh! In that case,' the baronet looked again at his beloved ruby, 'I cannot condemn the enterprise - breaking bounds at night - but my dear boy, forget it - and I shall endeavour to get your Headmaster to do the same - for yourself and your companion. What is his name?'

'Bunter, sir. And I must say that if he hadn't been there, too, I don't think you would have had your ruby yet, as you will see if Inspector Grimes gives you the details of its finding.'

That, reflected Vernon-Smith, was quite true. If Bunter had not been with him and gone to sleep at just that place and time, the jacket he was wearing would never have been made a hiding-place for the ruby.

'Good! I shall not forget that. The boy will be rewarded. I am pleased that you have told me about him, and make no attempt to take all the credit.'

'There is something else. I must now tell you, sir,' said the Bounder, 'and Bunter had no part in it - and this is no credit at all to me. It is an offence against yourself. There was a crowd of your servants coming down the lane - and you were with them. I thought we should be discovered, so I put a handkerchief before my face and punched you. It seemed the only way of escape at the time - and I am sorry.' There was a long silence, and then, to the Bounder's relief, Sir Julius laughed.

'Well - and I've been boasting that I had a fight with a burglar - my only consolation for my loss! And now I have no loss, thanks to you! If you hadn't punched me, and got away, I suppose I should have taken you before your Headmaster. You'd have been expelled and I should have lost my ruby. When I was a Greyfriars boy I once punched a prefect, and got into a most frightful row. You punch a governor of the school - and - oh, well - let bygones be bygones-'

Vernon-Smith felt a great sense of relief. He was over the last hurdle - the most difficult one of all - and had landed safely on the other side!

'I'll take you back to Greyfriars in my car, my boy, and see your Headmaster now.'

'Dr. Locke is away until Monday, sir. Mr. Prout is acting for him. You'll see him and Mr. Quelch, my form master-'

'They'll do. We'll go at once.'

Sir Julius turned to Inspector Grimes with renewed protestations of thanks for what he had done to recover the ruby, and then hurried out of the room. The inspector turned to Vernon-Smith.

'Well, Master Vernon-Smith, I suppose I ought not to say that you should not have done what you did do - in view of the result of your various illegalities. I say so all the same. Thank you again for the help you have given the police - and don't break any more rules and law, if you can help it. You won't always get away with it.'

FORGIVEN

'THAT is Sir Julius Hogben's car.' Prout turned to Quelch, who, with him, had been gazing out of the window of the Masters' Common Room. 'H'm! And the boy appears to be with him! It is difficult for a Headmaster to enforce discipline when a governor of the school would appear to condone misdemeanours. However-' Prout ceased speaking - though, doubtless, for only a short time!

Quelch turned to the Fifth-form master. Prout, in Dr. Locke's temporary, if brief, absence, was acting Headmaster - a position of which Paul Pontifex Prout was fully aware! Quelch, as a stickler for discipline, had felt bound to report to him Vernon-Smith's activities of the morning. They had, indeed, involved a boy outside Quelch's own form, and no lesser person than the captain of the school, whom he had attacked. After describing the affair as 'unparalleled' and 'deplorable', Prout had retired to the Headmaster's study, where he was, temporarily, monarch of all he surveyed. The survey did not include anyone to whom he could talk, so he had soon afterwards rejoined Quelch whom he had found in the Common Room.

'I must inform you, Prout, that since you left me, I have received a telephone call from Mr. Grimes. He informs me that the Hogben ruby has been recovered-'

'Ah, excellent!' Prout brightened. 'Admirable work on the part of the police, do you not think? When hope had been abandoned! However, one never knows. I remember other similar cases of the recovery of articles which seemed irretrievably lost. When I was in the Rockies-'

Quelch cut in quickly. 'He has also stated, Prout, that it is owing to the activities of two boys of my form - Vernon-Smith and Bunter - that the ruby has been recovered at all. Though these activities involved serious breaches of the school rules.'

'Good gracious me, Quelch! Admirable! I should say deplorable. An unparalleled situation. One cannot, of course, overlook breaches of the rules of the school. However-'

'I think it is probable, Prout, that Sir Julius may ask you to do so. The decision, of course, is yours. You are Headmaster here - *pro tempore* - and your authority within the school is absolute. No governor of the school can override it - if you stand firm.'

Mr. Quelch was well aware that Paul Pontifex Prout would not think of standing firm against a governor of the school.

'One exercises a wise discretion in such matters, Quelch. Still, *fiat justitia ruat caelum*.'

'An admirable precept, Prout - exercised, of course, with wise discretion. But, here is Sir Julius. We must meet him.'

Prout stalked out of the Common Room and made his way to the school entrance, followed by Quelch. Quelch looked at Vernon-Smith, who was behind Sir Julius.

'Mr. Prout - Mr. Quelch. I have recovered my stolen ruby - and it is thanks to this boy here - Sir Julius waved a hand at Vernon-Smith - and another boy - a boy called Bunter. I am proud that Greyfriars boys have acted so astutely, as you must be. There has been some breaking of the school rules in their activities - but I have now come, personally, to ask you to overlook them!'

'Of Course, of course!' Prout beamed. 'As Headmaster, *de facto*, if not *de jure*, I am only too pleased.' Quelch smiled in the background. He had had the idea that Prout would temper his statement that justice should be

done though the heavens fell with a wise discretion - when the falling heavens might bring with them a governor of the school.

'Boys will be boys,' said Sir Julius Hogben.

'Indeed, Sir Julius. I remember when I was in the Rockies-'

'I shall reward these boys.' It almost seemed as if Sir Julius wished to cut short Prout's reminiscences of when he was in the Rockies. 'Very well - and in the meantime, and on account' - he took out a pocket book and withdrew some notes from it, 'take these Vernon-Smith - for yourself and the boy, Bunter, for a feast of celebration. No doubt the boy, Bunter, will wish to join in?'

'Yes, sir, I think he will. Thank you.'

Sir Julius Hogben moved on with Mr. Prout. Mr. Quelch remained and looked at Vernon-Smith, who had stayed behind. The Bounder stepped forward.

'I am sorry, sir, for what happened this morning,' he said. 'Very sorry, indeed - but I knew - once I had discovered what I was sure was the truth about that missing ruby - that I should tell the police at once. And I knew - being "gated" - and about to be put in the Punishment room - that you wouldn't let me go. You wouldn't have believed me, if I'd explained.' There was a long silence, as the Bounder ended. Then Mr. Quelch spoke at last.

'Your actions this morning, Vernon-Smith, can be described as inexcusable - but it seems that they must, nevertheless, be excused. If you had not acted as you did, Sir Julius's ruby would still be missing.'

Quelch paused.

'Sir Julius Hogben has interceded for you with Mr. Prout, who, as you will know, is acting Headmaster in Dr. Locke's absence. Mr. Prout has overlooked your conduct. I shall do the same. Mr. Grimes telephoned me before he took you to Hogben Grange, and informed me of the activities of yourself - and of Bunter - and that to them was owed the recovery of the ruby. He asked for clemency for you.'

'Oh, I didn't know that. That was jolly decent of him, sir.'

'In view of this, I, too, overlook your conduct, Vernon-Smith, your own and Bunter's outrageous breach of rules last Wednesday night - and what subsequently occurred in the study of Coker of the Fifth form. The matter ends here. Your "gating" is rescinded. I can only repeat what I conveyed to you before - the necessity of your being very, very careful in future.'

Mr. Quelch turned round and left.

BUT NOT FOR EVERYTHING

'I SAY, you fellows, tuck in! This is my spread. Given to celebrate my recovering the Hogben ruby.'

The Removites turned to look at Bunter. It was the feast of the term, being held in the Rag by the special permission of Prout, the benevolent Headmaster *pro tem*. The Upper Fourth and Shell were wisely making themselves scarce. It was, of course, known that the money for the 'spread' had been given by Sir Julius as a reward for what Vernon-Smith, and also Bunter, had done. Yet Bunter's present claim sounded decidedly steep!

'Your recovering it?' exclaimed Bob Cherry. 'What did you do? Just go to sleep and let a fellow hide it in your jacket!'

'That was me being astute,' retorted the fat Owl. 'If I hadn't let him do that, he'd have stolen the ruby. So there! I ought to have all the reward really. But I'm a generous chap. I don't mind Smithy having a bit - but it must be understood that I found it. Me!'

The Owl took hold of a large cake and engulfed most of it in one bite.

'Coker's claiming to be the real finder,' said Nugent. 'He says he went out to look for it on Friday evening - and here it is! If he hadn't rescued Mauly and his jacket, and detained the man Bert, no one would have put the clues together - and found it.'

'Potter and Greene detained the man by sitting on him,' said Johnny Bull. 'I say, you fellows, don't go giving those Fifth-form beasts any of my reward!' howled the Owl. 'It's like your cheek, trying to throw it right and left. Who took that jacket to Chunkley's to be cleaned, I should like to know? Me! And if I hadn't been a sportsman and gone out with Smithy that night-'

Vernon-Smith laughed. 'All right, you can take the credit-'

'And let the cash go,' observed Wibley. 'That's fair. If Sir Julius forks up any more - as he will - it's all yours.'

'No!' yelled the Owl. 'Don't you get trying to pinch my money you beast-'

The Bounder laughed again. 'All right, Bunter, you can have it,' he said, 'and call yourself a sportsman - even if all you really did was to go to sleep and provide that fellow with a hiding place for his loot-'

'Beast!' yelled the Owl. 'Didn't I get that other beast pinched, too? It was me gave the alarm-'

'Yes, you certainly did. I daresay it could have been heard in Friardale-'

'Beast!'

'I wonder what they'll do with that chap now?' said Harry Wharton. 'If he turns up at that place tonight, there'll be police to bag him.'

'Can't for the ruby,' said Vernon-Smith. 'It isn't stolen now. Might take him for Bunter's jacket, though it isn't worth much-'

'Like its owner,' added Johnny Bull.

'Beast!'

'It was Mauly's jacket anyway - though I don't suppose that that will be worth much after Bunter's used it.'

'You beast, Bull. After all I've done for you and the school. Shedding glory on it. I'm-I'm a sportsman - always have been-'

'The sportsmanship in the excellent Bunter is great,' observed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, 'and the fatheaded-fulness has been terrific.'

Nevertheless, it has brought home the bacon, as your esteemed Shakespeare says.'

'I am sure he said nothing of the sort,' exclaimed Harry Wharton. 'All the same, Bunter has been useful for once. Not much of a case against that "Gentleman Charlie" chap now. They'll probably warn him to make himself scarce.'

'And hold proceeding for the robbery of that jacket over him, if he doesn't,' observed Bob Cherry. 'Bunter pinched it from Mauly, and he pinched it from Bunter. If they make a charge against him they must make one against Bunter, too-'

'Ow!'

The juniors laughed.

'Somebody said something about watching for him to turn up tonight and helping the police if need be,' said Frank Nugent.

'I believe I did,' said Harry Wharton. 'It isn't worth it now - and the police won't want us - and it was nine o'clock they were to meet according to Bunter - and we can't be there at that time.'

'Not wanting another night's outing, Smithy?' asked Wibley.

The Bounder shook his head. 'Not yet, anyway. Too close to the last one. And that - and everything else - being forgiven, if not forgotten-' He broke off as the door of the Rag opened. It was Wingate of the Sixth, who entered and, to the surprise of the juniors - and some uneasiness - he was carrying a cane!

'Come in Wingate, and join the feast,' said Johnny Bull.

'No, thanks! Where is my bike, Vernon-Smith?'

'Oh, crumbs!' The Bounder remembered. 'I quite forgot it. I left it outside Courtfield Police Station. It will be quite safe there.'

'You forgot it, did you? Forgotten how you got it?'

'Oh, sorry! I had to go. And Quelch has overlooked everything, Wingate!'

'Such as-?'

'My breaking "gates" and that business of the other night.'

'But not, I think, tripping up a prefect and taking his bicycle. Bend over!'

'I say, Wingate!'

'Bend over!'

The cane rose and fell six times. When Vernon-Smith raised himself again, he was gasping and quite white.

'All clear now,' said Wingate. 'Account paid in full, I think. Hope you enjoy your feed.'

Tucking his ashplant under his arm, he left the room.

The next book in
THE BILLY BUNTER SERIES
Will be
BUNTER TO THE RESCUE