

**MAGNET CHRISTMAS NUMBER**

# *The* **PHANTOM** OF THE **MOAT HOUSE!**

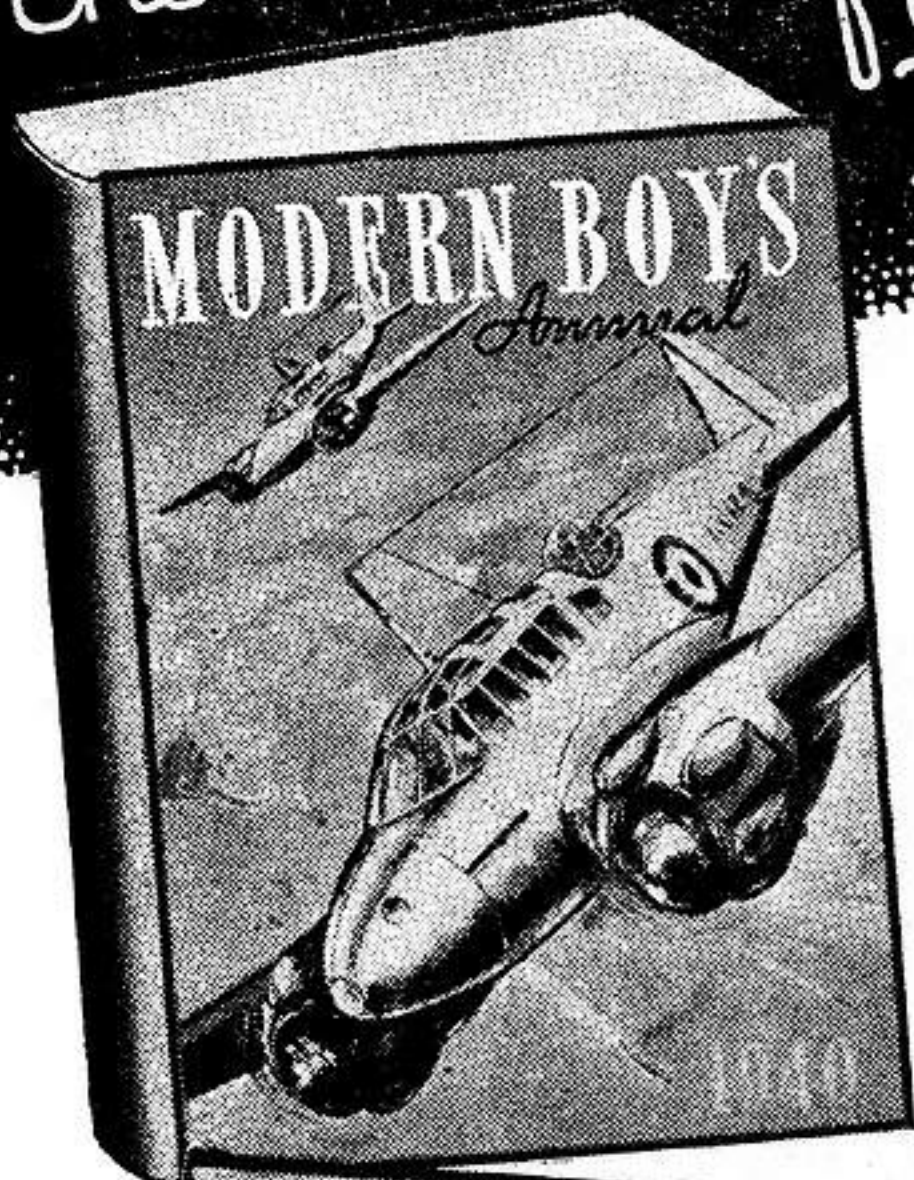
*By*  
**FRANK  
RICHARDS**



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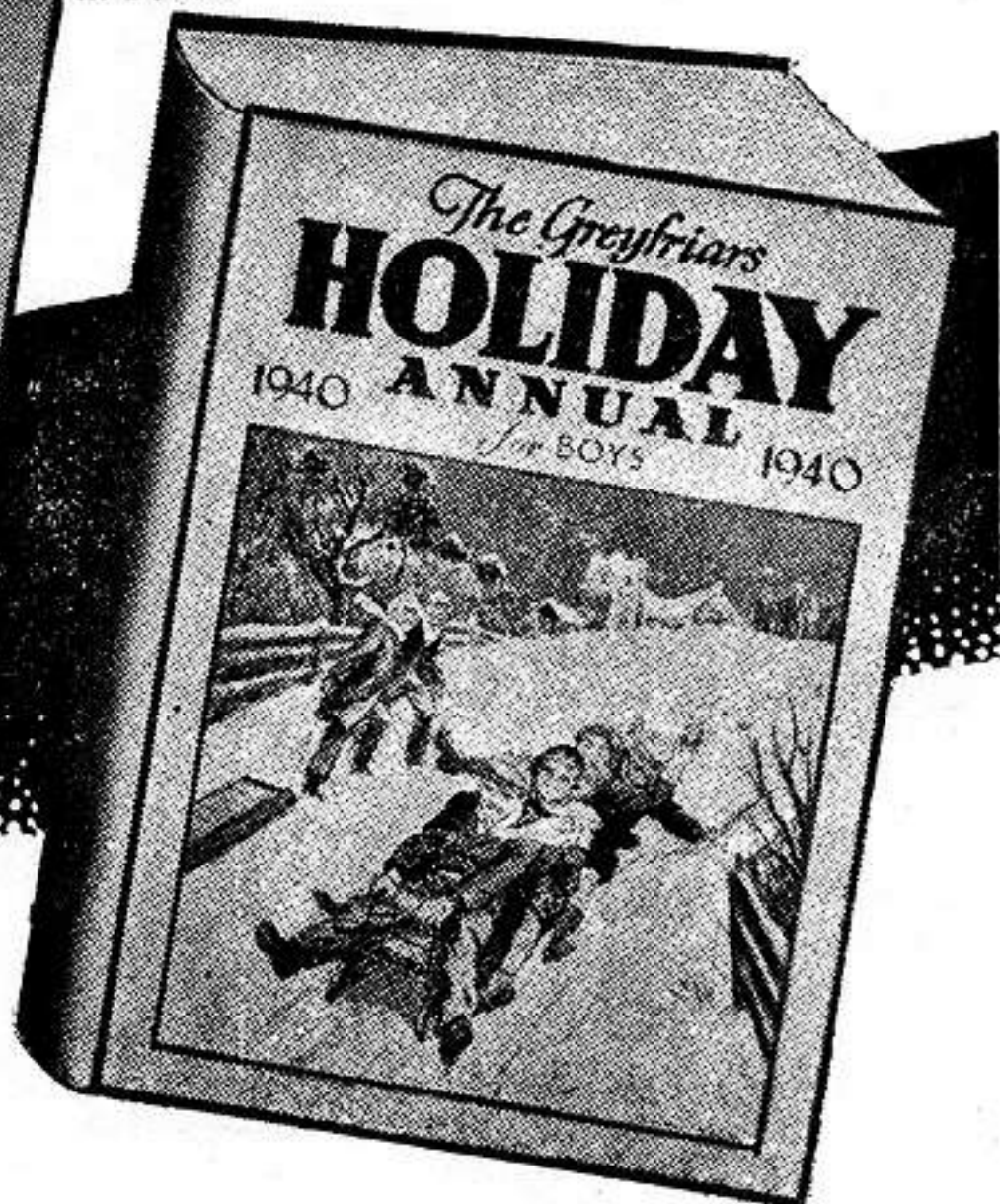
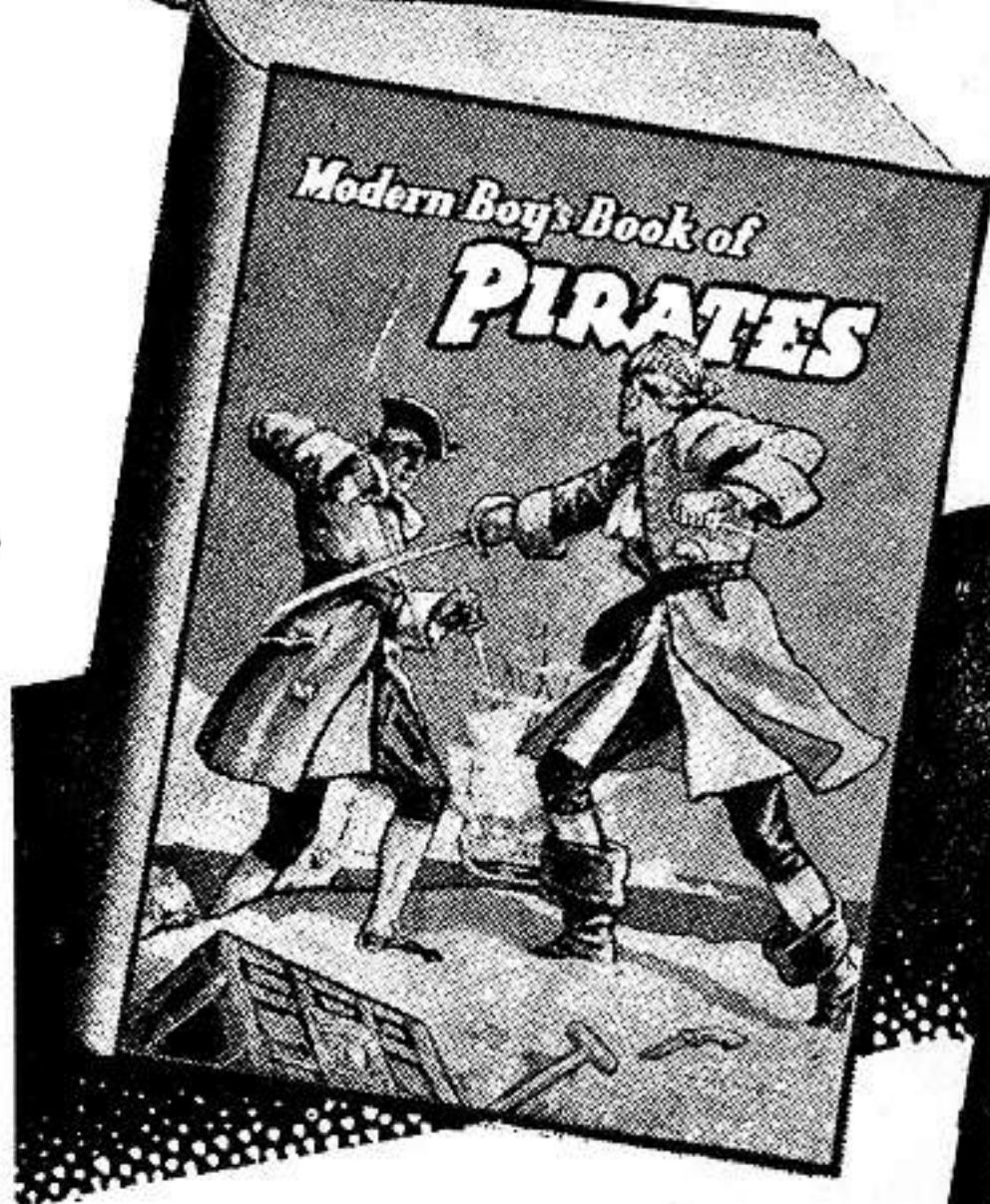
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# The PHANTOM of the MOAT HOUSE!



By  
**FRANK RICHARDS**

## PUDDINGS FOR NOTHING!

"YOU fellows like Christmas pudding?"  
"Do we!" grinned Bob Cherry.

Billy Bunter, really, hardly needed to ask the question. Harry Wharton & Co. of the Greyfriars Remove were not so fearfully keen on the sweet and sticky things of life as Billy Bunter was. Foodstuffs did not seem to them, as they did to Bunter, the beginning and end of existence. Still, it was an undoubted fact that they liked Christmas pudding.

With the end of the term drawing near, and break-up close at hand, many thoughts turned, naturally, to such things as turkeys, crackers, Christmas puddings, and mince pies.

In point of fact, a slice from a Christmas pudding would have been quite a windfall to the Famous Five about that time.

It was morning break. It was a keen, sharp, cold December morning. Most fellows had come out after second school, feeling that a snack at the tuck-shop was one of the necessities of life. A crowd of fellows had headed for Mrs. Mible's little establishment in the corner of the old quad. The Famous Five hadn't.

There was financial stringency. Cash was short; money was tight. Christmas tips did not seem to be flowing in yet. So there was a food shortage—not due to the war.

If some kind relation had sent Billy Bunter a Christmas pudding, the Famous Five were prepared to help him dispose of the same.

Bunter gazed, with palpitating heart, at the slowly moving, twinkling light. Then he gave a gasp of utter terror as a strange metallic sound, like the clinking of iron keys, came to his fat ears!

"You'd like some?" asked Bunter, blinking inquiringly at the Co. through his big spectacles.

"Sort of," agreed Johnny Bull.

"The likeliness would be terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter!" declared Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Cough it up!" said Frank Nugent.

"Where is it?" asked Harry Wharton.

"Will you let a fellow speak?" howled Bunter. "I haven't got it yet. I'm going to get it. I've only got to phone for it."

"Phone to Bunter Court?" asked Bob Cherry, with deep sarcasm.

"Eh? No; to Chunkley's, in Court-field."

"What?"

"You know their ripping Christmas puddings!" said Bunter, his eyes gleaming behind his big, round spectacles. "They're worth—well, they're worth practically anything! I mean to say, a jolly good Christmas pudding is practically priceless. Still, you can get 'em for a guinea."

"And you've got a guinea?"

It seemed improbable as Bunter, only that morning, had been trying in vain to borrow half-a-crown up and down the Remove.

"Well, no," said Bunter. "I meant to have one of those magnificent

Christmas puddings if my postal order came. I think I told you fellows I was expecting a postal order; but it hasn't come. But I can jolly well tell you that I can get a Christmas pudding from Chunkley's, all the same."

"Are they giving them away in war-time?" asked Frank Nugent.

"Sounds probable," remarked Bob.

"Oh, really, Nugent! Of course they ain't!" snapped Bunter irritably. "But I've only got to phone for one, all the same. You see, I know how."

"You know how to get a Christmas pudding from Chunkley's for nothing?" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

"Just that," smiled Bunter.

The Famous Five regarded William George Bunter in mystified inquiry. If the fat Owl of the Remove knew how to get Christmas puddings for nothing, it was undoubtedly a thing worth knowing.

"I've thought it out—see?" grinned Bunter. "I've got the brains for it. You fellows haven't. You're not brainy, you know. I bet you'd never have thought of it in a dozen terms! You see, now Quelch is away—"

"Quelch!"

"Yes, now Quelch isn't here, you know—"

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"What on earth has Quelch got to do with it?" exclaimed Harry Wharton.

It was a fact that Mr. Quelch, the master of the Remove, was away. The strange and mysterious disappearance of Mr. Quelch was still an exciting topic at Greyfriars, though it was some days now since he had gone.

But what connection there could be between Quelch's absence and Christmas puddings was really a deeper mystery than Quelch's disappearance itself.

"I mean to say, Chunkley's, in Court-aid, won't know anything about Quelch being away," said Bunter. "Why should they?"

Bob Cherry tapped his forehead significantly. So far as Bob could see, Billy Bunter's extraordinary remarks could only be accounted for on the theory of insanity.

"Nobody uses Quelch's study while he's gone," continued Bunter. "Anybody could go in, see?"

"Mad as a hatter!" said Bob.

"Oh, really, Cherry! The telephone's still there," said Bunter. "Well, if Chunkley's get an order by telephone for a Christmas pudding from Quelch they will deliver it, of course—an order for a guinea pudding, see?"

"How could they get an order from Quelch, when Quelch has disappeared into space, and nobody knows where he is?" howled Bob. "And if they did, how could the pudding come our way?"

"You don't catch on, old chap! You're rather dense. Any fellow could nip into Quelch's study and say he was Quelch—"

"Wha-a-t!"

"And give the order—"

"Oh crikey!"

"With special instructions for the carman to deliver it at a special time, and—"

"Oh crumbs!"

"When we're out of class, see? He's directed to deliver it to—say—you, Wharton!"

"Me!" gasped the captain of the Remove.

"Yes, old chap. Or Cherry. One of you, anyhow. Well, one of you takes it off the carman. We get it up to the study, and—and scoff it, see?"

Harry Wharton & Co. gazed at Billy Bunter.

This, it seemed, was Bunter's wonderful way of getting a Christmas pudding for nothing.

The fat Owl of the Remove grinned from ear to ear. Evidently he was greatly taken with this great scheme.

"The beauty of it," he explained, "is this—Quelch being away, nothing can come out. Chunkley's deliver the pudding, thinking that he's here, of course, as he gave the order, or they think he did. He, he, he! Quelch won't know, as he's gone off, goodness knows where, and when he comes back—if he ever does—all he will know is that there's a bill from Chunkley's for a Christmas pudding. He can argue it out with them, see?"

The Famous Five still gazed at the happy Owl.

Bunter, it seemed, did not see anything unscrupulous in this little scheme. He was, in fact, thinking wholly of the Christmas pudding. A fellow couldn't think of everything, and a Christmas pudding was enough for Billy Bunter to think of. It occupied, in fact, his whole mind.

"Some wheeze—what?" asked Bunter cheerily. "I'll do the phoning; one of

you fellows takes in the pudding when it comes—that's fair. We whack it out all round. I'm letting you fellows into it, because you're pals of mine, and I'm having the Christmas holidays with you, Wharton."

"Are you?" ejaculated the captain of the Remove.

"Oh, yes, old chap!"

"First I've heard of it!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"Gentlemen, chaps, and sportsmen," said Bob Cherry, "that fat chump pinches all the tuck he can lay his paws on in the Remove studies, and we boot him for it. But if he begins pinching pudding outside Greyfriars, they may run him off to chokey. We can't have Remove men sent to chokey. It would let down the Form. It's no good talking to him. Bump him!"

"Good egg!" agreed Harry Wharton.

"I say, you fellows, don't play the goat!" exclaimed Bunter, in surprise and alarm. "I say, I've got to get in and phone, so as to get the pudding after third school. I've got to go in and ring up Chunkley's, and say—Yaroooop!"

Bump!

"Whooooop!"

Bump!

"Oh crikey! I say, you fellows, leggo!" yelled Billy Bunter. "I won't let you have any of the Christmas pudding now—"

Bump!

"Wow! Wharrer marrer—gone mad?" howled Bunter. "If you think you're going to have any of that Christmas pudding after this, I can jolly well say, plainly—Wow! Wow! Wow! Ow!"

Bump, bump, bump!

"Wooooooooooogh!"

The Famous Five walked away, leaving Billy Bunter sitting in the quad.

Bunter sat and spluttered. He spluttered, he gasped, and he gurgled for breath. And he did not do any phoning for Christmas puddings in break that morning! He was still gurgling when the bell rang for third school.

#### UNEXPECTED!

"GOODNESS me!" said Mr. Lamb.

And the Remove smiled. Some of them liked Mr. Lamb, the new art master. Some regarded him with good-humoured contempt. Nobody took him very seriously.

He was a rather pale young man, in the thirties, with gold-rimmed glasses, a sleepy-looking face, and hair worn a little long.

He looked arty. In the art classroom he wore a velvet coat—which often had chalk on it. His manner was mild, and if anything surprised him, he would ejaculate "Goodness me!"

Already the Remove had christened him the Pet Lamb.

By chance, he had a good deal to do with the Remove. Mr. Quelch, their Form-master, being absent, Lamb was taking the Form in his place.

Mild and sheepish as he seemed, he was rather a capable man; for, although he had come to Greyfriars School as art master, he was able to take a junior Form in most subjects, and his offer to do so had been very useful to Dr. Locke, suddenly left without a Form-master for the Lower Fourth.

For several days now the Remove

had been taken by Mr. Lamb—and they got on quite well with him.

All the unruly spirits in the Form ragged unmercifully—as unruly spirits will do, unless held by a strong hand.

Mr. Quelch's hand had been strong enough. Even Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, had seldom ventured on ragging Quelch. But even Billy Bunter could venture on a rag with the Pet Lamb.

There was no doubt that most of the Remove found Mr. Lamb an agreeable change from the stern sway of Mr. Quelch in the Form-room.

Some of the juniors were concerned about Quelch and wondered what had become of him, hoped that he was safe, and that he would return. All the same, they found life easier with the Pet Lamb.

Whether they acquired quite so much knowledge from Lamb was another matter! Still, there were quite a lot of fellows in the Remove not fearfully keen on the acquirement of knowledge.

At the present moment Mr. Lamb was letting in his Form for third school. They were gathered at the Form-room door, which Lamb had to unlock.

He dropped the key and, in picking it up, dropped it again. That was Lamb all over. He was always dropping or losing something.

"Goodness me!" said Mr. Lamb. "Where is that key?"

Harry Wharton politely stooped, picked up the key, and handed it to him.

Lamb gave him a blink over his glasses.

"Thank you, Wharton!" he said. He unlocked the door at last, and the Remove trooped in.

Bolsover major barged into Skinner and sent him sprawling. Skinner, as he went, grabbed hold of Bob Cherry and Vernon-Smith, and took them both to the floor with him.

Immediately five or six fellows rushed to help them up.

Helping them up was rather a strenuous process. Somehow or other, three or four fellows sprawled over, bumping and roaring. Somebody caught hold of Bunter's fat ankle, and the Owl of the Remove sat down with a roar.

"My boys, go to your places!" bleated the Pet Lamb. "Please do not make so much noise! Get up, Skinner—get up, Cherry! My goodness, please go to your places!"

"Somebody barged me over, sir!" said Skinner. "I've hurt my leg! I can't get up, sir!"

"Goodness me! Is your leg badly hurt, Skinner?" bleated the Lamb.

"Very bad indeed, sir!" said Skinner.

He gave a deep, hair-raising groan. There was a ripple of merriment through the Form-room!

Skinner, of course, was not hurt—this was a rag! Skinner was wasting the time of the lesson, which was so much to the good, and at the same time getting a little fun out of the innocent Lamb.

Everybody played up! Scenes like this took place at least once a day in the Remove Form Room, since Lamb had been in charge there. The Pet Lamb seemed to be absolutely unsuspecting.

"Poor old Skinner!"

"His leg's very bad, sir!"

"Shall I help him to his place, sir?"

"Shall I go and phone for the doctor, sir?"

"Don't shove, Russell, you swab!"

"Look here, don't you shove—"

It was a regular chorus. Half the Form gathered round Skinner, to render first aid.

Harold Skinner, extended on his back on the floor, gave realistic groans.

"Please help Skinner to his place!" bleated the Lamb. "But, please, please do not make so much noise! I fear that it will be heard in other Form-rooms. Please be as quiet as possible!"

Such a game when Quelch was there was unimaginable.

Skinner's injury, if he had tried that game with Quelch, would have been immediately cured by a swipe of Quelch's cane.

But anything could be done with the innocent Lamb!

A crowd of fellows gathered round Skinner to help him.

He was lifted up, holding on to Bob Cherry and Vernon-Smith. He clung to them and groaned. Russell, Ogilvy, Tom Brown, Squiff, and three or four more fellows crowded round to help—with the result that the whole party sprawled over, with a din that must certainly have been heard in other Form-rooms.

There was a roar of voices.

"Look out—"

"Don't tread on me, you cad!"

"Who's that barging?"

"Can't you keep order—Mr. Lamb keeps on asking you to keep quiet—why don't you keep quiet?"

"If you shove your hoof at me again, Bolsover, I'll jolly well swipe you!"

Mr. Lamb blinked on at the scene. He wore his velvet coat, even in the Form-room—and the Removites were not going to take a man in a velvet coat, who wore his hair long, very seriously!

"Now, please—please," said Mr. Lamb, "this must cease! We are wasting time—you do not realise, my boys, that we are wasting time!"

"Don't we?" murmured Bob Cherry.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Please go to your places! I will assist Skinner. Go to your places at once—leave Skinner to me!"

"Chuck it, you fellows!" said Harry Wharton. As head boy of the Remove, he felt bound to do what he could to help so helpless a master to keep some sort of order. "You'll have the Head here."

The Famous Five set the example of going quietly to their places.

Mr. Lamb fairly drove the rest away from Skinner; and that playful youth was left at last, groaning on his own, in the middle of the Form-room.

Skinner was not chucking it yet—he was not keen to begin on Roman history! Ragging the Pet Lamb was ever so much more amusing than the reign of Diocletian!

"Now, my boy—" said Mr. Lamb, bending over him.

The whole Form looked on, grinning. They wondered that even the unsuspecting Lamb could be taken in like this. But he seemed to have no doubt that Skinner's leg was hurt and that he could not rise.

Bending over Skinner, the Pet Lamb took him by the shoulders to assist him up.

That was a chance Skinner was not going to lose. He jerked his head up suddenly and crashed it fairly on Mr. Lamb's nose!

Lamb went over backwards and sat on the floor.

"Oh!" he roared.

He clasped both hands to his nose, which must have been considerably pained by that sudden shock.

"Ha, ha, ha!" shrieked the Remove.

"He, he, he!" cackinated Billy Bunter.

"Oh! Sorry, sir!" exclaimed Skinner. "Did my head knock against your nose, sir? So sorry, sir—quite an accident, sir—"

Mr. Lamb leaped to his feet.

His nose was crimson and had a pain in it. His mild and sleepy-looking face, under the effect of that pain, had quite lost its mild look. Fellows stared at him, surprised by the anger that flamed in his face. This was the first time they had had a hint that Lamb had a temper. But a look at his face now was sufficient to reveal that he had one—and a bad one when it was roused.

He made a rapid stride to Mr. Quelch's desk, where Quelch's cane lay.

temper had broken out, which they had never dreamed that the Lamb could possibly possess.

"We will now commence!" said Mr. Lamb.

His mild look returned—as if he recollected himself. He was once more the mild and innocent Lamb.

But there was no more ragging in that lesson. The Remove were feeling rather as if they had been playing with a sheep that had suddenly turned into a tiger! Third school that day, in the Remove room, was as quiet and orderly as if Henry Samuel Quelch had been there!

### BILLY BUNTER GETS GOING!

**B**ILLY BUNTER looked this way and that way, like Moses of old: and, like Moses again, he saw no man.

After dinner there was nobody about in Masters' Passage.



So far, that cane had not been handled in the Remove room since Lamb had been in charge! Now he grasped it and spun round towards Skinner—who, still extended on the floor, was ready to go on with the game.

Swipe!

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry.

"Phew!" breathed the Bounder.

From Skinner came a frantic yell as the cane swiped across his legs. It was a terrific swipe, and it hurt Skinner. If he had not been hurt before, he was hurt now!

Swipe, swipe!

Skinner bounded to his feet like a jack-in-the-box: He raced for his desk.

Swipe, swipe, swipe! came across his shoulders as he raced. He yelled at the top of his voice.

Swipe, swipe!

The Remove stared on, transfixed by that sudden and unexpected scene.

It was a sudden and startling revelation to them that the Pet Lamb was not so meek and mild as he looked, and as they had hitherto believed him to be. He was swiping with that cane as Quelch would never have dreamed of doing.

Skinner dodged into his place yelling. Never had a ragger so sincerely repented of his ragging.

Mr. Lamb, breathing hard, laid down the cane.

The Remove watched him as if mesmerised. They had never dreamed that the Pet Lamb could be like this! In those moments a fierce and savage

Satisfied on that point, the fat Owl of the Remove cut along to Mr. Quelch's study and whipped into that apartment.

He shut the door after him and grinned.

Once inside that study he was safe.

Mr. Lamb, though he acted pro tem. as master of the Remove, did not use the Remove master's study. He had his own study up the passage, which had belonged to the former art master, Mr. Woosey.

Quelch's study had been deserted ever since the strange and mysterious disappearance of Mr. Quelch. There was no danger of anyone coming to that study. It was all right for Bunter.

Grinning the fat Owl rolled across to the telephone. Bunter was there to carry out the great scheme he had detailed to the Famous Five in break.

They had heard it without enthusiasm. They had bumped Billy Bunter for thinking of it; and, no doubt, hoped that they had sufficiently discouraged him.

But Bunter meant business.

Bunter was really quite unscrupulous in these matters. If there was a pudding or a pie to be annexed, Bunter would annex it.

The pudding, in Bunter's estimation, was the chief thing. The method by which it was acquired was a very secondary consideration.

So the fat Owl sat down by the

telephone of his missing Form master and rang up Chunkley's in Courtfield.

"Chunkley's!" came a voice. "Mr. Quelch speaking from Greyfriars School!" said the fat Owl, with a really successful imitation of Quelch's clear, sharp voice. "I require you to deliver a guinea pudding—"

"That will be the livestock department, sir—guinea-pigs in the livestock department! I will put you through."

They were very quick and efficient at Chunkley's Stores. They never waited for a customer to make his meaning clear.

"I say," howled Bunter, "not guinea-pigs—guinea puddings—"

But it was too late! The efficient operator on the telephone at Chunkley's Stores was already putting him through to the livestock department.

"Chunkley's Stores!" came another voice. "Livestock department—"

"Blow you!"

"Eh?"

"I mean, I want a pudding—"

"Wrong department, sir! This is the livestock department, sir! I will put you through to the confectionery department."

Bunter waited again. Safe as it was in Quelch's deserted study, he did not want to stay there longer than he could help. Really, he had no time for the up-to-date efficiency of Chunkley's Stores.

"Chunkley's!" came a third voice. "Confectionery department—"

"Mr. Quelch speaking—"

"Mr. Squelch?"

"No; Quelch!"

"Yes, Mr. Welsh; what can I do for you, Mr. Welsh?" asked the brisk, business-like voice from Chunkley's confectionery department.

"I said Quelch!" howled Bunter. "Q-U-E-L-C-H, Quelch!"

"Yes, sir! Q. U. E. L. C. H. Welsh! Quite! I shall remember those initials, sir! What are you requiring, Mr. Welsh?"

"The name is Quelch!" shrieked Bunter.

"Oh! Quite! Pray give your order, sir!"

"I want one of those guinea Christmas puddings—"

"That will be the special Christmas bargain department, sir. I will put you through."

They had over so many departments at Chunkley's Stores in Courtfield. It was quite like a London stores. A customer might spend an hour on the telephone before he got what he wanted.

Billy Bunter breathed hard over Mr. Quelch's telephone.

A fourth voice came through.

"Chunkley's! Special Christmas bargain department."

"I want one of those guinea Christmas puddings that you advertise!" hissed Bunter. "Mr. Quelch speaking from Greyfriars School"

"Very good, sir—early morning, sir."

"I want it delivered to-day—"

"Sorry, sir, delivery van gone, sir! We have no second delivery owing to war conditions. If to-morrow morning would suit you, sir—"

Snort, from Bunter! This was due to those beasts playing the goat in break. They had made Bunter miss the day's delivery!

"Oh, all right!" granted Bunter.

"Very good, sir—early morning, sir. Thank you, sir! Good-bye!"

"Hold on!" yelled Bunter. He had not finished yet.

But the efficient man at Chunkley's end had! He had rung off before the fat Owl could speak again! They did not waste a moment at Chunkley's.

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"Boast!" hissed Bunter.

And he rang up all over again.

"Chunkley's!" came the first voice of the four.

"Give me the special Christmas bargain department!" hissed Bunter.

"Yes, sir! Hold on, sir!"

"Chunkley's!" came the fourth voice over again. "Special Christmas bargain department, sir!"

"Mr. Quelch speaking from Greyfriars, about that Christmas pudding!" hooted Bunter.

"Yes, sir; order taken, sir! Good-bye!"

"It's about the delivery!" hissed Bunter. "Early morning won't suit me! I shall be in class—"

"Eh?"

"I mean, I shall be taking my class," amended Bunter hastily. "I want that pudding delivered soon after twelve."

"Soon after twelve! Yes, sir! Good-bye, sir—"

"Will you hold on, you idiot?"

"Eh?"

"I haven't finished yet!"

"Oh! Very good, sir!"

"I may be busy about my—hem—Form duties—the pudding is to be delivered to a member of my Form, who will be waiting to take it from your carman—his name is Bunter."

"Yes, sir—Hunter! I will make a note of the name, Hunter, and the carman will act accordingly."

"Not Hunter—Bunter!"

"Did you say Hunter or Punter, sir?"

"Bunter!" yelled the fat Owl.

"Very good, sir! Good-bye!"

"Will you listen to me, you dummy?"

"Oh! Eh? What? Certainly, sir!"

"The Christmas pudding is to be handed to Master Bunter, and to no one else! The bill will be sent to me—to me—Mr. Quelch—as usual! Have you got that clear?"

"Quite, sir! The guinea Christmas pudding is to be delivered to Master Bunter at the school, and the item to be placed to your account, Mr. Quelch. Quite so, sir! Good-bye!"

This time Bunter let the efficient man at Chunkley's ring off. He rose from the telephone rather tired, but satisfied.

He peered out of the study door, and, finding the coast still clear, rolled out of Mr. Quelch's study.

On the morrow, after third school, that Christmas pudding was going to be delivered. Bunter would be at liberty then to deal with the matter; he would take the pudding from the carman—and the bill, in due course, would be placed to Mr. Quelch's account.

Probably it would surprise Quelch when he found it there. Still, Quelch was away; it might be a long time before he came back—and Bunter could not help feeling that the longer it was the better. No doubt he would inquire into the matter—and the later that inquiry took place the safer the fat Owl would feel about it!

In the meantime, there was the Christmas pudding.

Bunter liked jam to-day better than jam to-morrow. But he had to wait—and there was, after all, pleasure in anticipation.

For the remainder of that day the Owl of the Remove had to make the most of the joys of anticipation.

#### A MIDNIGHT MYSTERY!

"READY, Skinner?"

"Oh, yes! But—"

Skinner sat up in bed in the Remove dormitory and blinked at the shadowy figure by his bedside.

Vernon-Smith had turned out with hardly a sound and half-dressed himself in the dark; then he shook Skinner quietly.

But Skinner did not need awakening; he was already awake.

"But what?" asked the Bounder in a sarcastic whisper. "Cold feet?"

"No! But—"

"Are you coming?" asked Smithy impatiently.

Skinner did not immediately answer, but he did not roll out of bed. He could not see the Bounder's face in the dark, but he knew that it wore a sarcastic, contemptuous sneer.

Ever since that swiping in the Remove room in third school Harold Skinner had been meditating vengeance on the Pet Lamb. Skinner had never had such a swiping before, and it made him feel sore—in a double sense.

It was all the more exasperating because the Lamb had never shown his teeth before, and Skinner and other ragers had been led to suppose that they could do practically as they liked. That fierce outbreak of temper on the part of the Lamb had been a very painful and very enraging surprise to Skinner.

It had been easy for him to get Smithy to join up in a scheme of ragging the Lamb; the Bounder was always ready for a rag. The big idea was to leave the dormitory quietly at a late hour and step silently along to the art master's room—formerly Mr. Woosey's room—and give the Lamb a midnight surprise in the shape of a sudden squirting of ink over his slumbering countenance.

Skinner quite rejoiced in the prospect till the time actually came to carry out the big idea.

But the chimes of midnight sounding dully through the December gloom seemed to have rather a discouraging effect on him. Planning that rag in the Bounder's study was one thing—carrying on with it at midnight's stilly hour was another. Skinner, in fact, was funkng.

The rest of the Remove were sleeping peacefully; Billy Bunter's snore rumbling like the mutter of distant thunder.

Only Smithy and Skinner were awake—and Skinner was wishing that the Bounder hadn't woke up.

"Don't hurry!" came the Bounder's sardonic whisper, as Skinner hesitated. "It's only twelve, and rising-bell isn't till seven! We've got hours and hours before us."

"The fact is, Smithy, I—I—I think we'd better chuck it," muttered Skinner uneasily. "It's horribly cold, and—"

"Didn't you expect it to be cold in the middle of December?"

"There'll be a fearful row if we're spotted out of dorm—"

"Didn't you know that this afternoon?"

"Well, look here, there's a burglar hanging about the neighbourhood, too; I'd forgotten that," muttered Skinner. "You jolly well know that when you went down at night a week or two ago you ran into a burglar, and—and—"

"Burglars are like lightning—they never strike in the same place twice," said Smithy.

"Well, you never know," mumbled Skinner. "From what they say of that blighter they call Slim Jim, he sticks to a neighbourhood when he starts—and he may try it on again, and—and—"

"And—and—and—" mimicked the Bounder. "Cut it short—you've got cold feet, and you're funkng!"



As Mr. Lamb bent forward, Skinner jerked his head up suddenly and crashed it fairly on the new master's nose. "Oh!" roared the Pet Lamb.

Skinner scowled in the dark without replying.

"What about that swiping he gave you this morning?" jeered the Bounder. "You were going to make him sit up for that."

"Well, after all, I did bang his nose," muttered Skinner. "Look here, Smithy, chuck it—I'm not going!"

And Skinner laid his head on the pillow again to settle the matter. He heard a contemptuous laugh.

"Funk it if you like!" said Smithy. "I'm going! I haven't turned out of bed for nothin'—and it will be a lark to make that soft ass Lamb jump out of his skin! Leave it to me—I don't want you."

"Please yourself," grunted Skinner.

He was more than willing to leave it to the Bounder. Herbert Vernon-Smith had nerve enough for anything. He had no particular dislike for the drawing master; he regarded him with contemptuous amusement. But he was not going to turn back, having once started—and he was going to make it clear that he did not funk it, like Skinner.

With a squirt in his hand, full of ink, the Bounder crept quietly to the dormitory door.

Skinner heard that door open and close softly. Smithy was gone.

In the corridor outside all was deep darkness. The Bounder groped quietly along to the landing and crossed it to the passage that led to the master's room.

Plenty of fellows would have disliked stealing about on tiptoe in the dense darkness at midnight, especially as it was known that a burglar had been active in the vicinity of late; but Smithy's nerve was of iron, and he was

not deterred even by the fact that he had actually run into Slim Jim, the cracksman, one night hardly more than a week ago.

In a dark passage, with blacked-out windows, the Bounder turned on a tiny gleam from a flash-lamp and picked out Mr. Lamb's door.

Shutting off the light, he turned the door-handle silently.

The door did not open.

Smithy realised that it was locked on the inside.

His lip curled. That rabbit of a man, Lamb, was just the man to lock his door of a night if he had heard that there had been a burglar about. Really he might have guessed that one!

It was an unexpected obstacle. The Lamb could not be surprised with a stream of ink over his face as he slumbered unless the ragger could get into the room.

"The silly, nerry ass!" muttered Vernon-Smith.

He was unwilling to give up the enterprise. He could see the sneering grin on Skinner's face if he did. Skinner would regard his explanation that the Lamb's door had been locked simply as an excuse for chucking it. But there was no way of dealing with a locked door.

It was intensely exasperating to Smithy. He stood in irritated thought, unwilling to chuck it, but quite at a loss how to carry on.

As he stood, there came a faint sound in the deep silence.

Smithy started.

That sound came from Lamb's room; it was the faint sound of a window softly opened.

The Bounder felt his heart beat.

Back into his mind came the memory

of the man in black—the masked man he had surprised in the Head's study in the middle of the night. He had told Skinner that the cracksman was not likely to repeat his visit. But what did that sound of an opening window at midnight mean?

The Lamb's window looked out at the back of the school buildings. There was, the Bounder knew, a sheer wall below; he would not have fancied that even a cat-burglar could climb to that window. But it was certain that the window had been opened.

Had the Lamb turned out at that hour and opened his window in the dark? It did not seem likely.

Smithy listened intently, with beating heart.

If Slim Jim had revisited Greyfriars his object could not be the room he was entering; there could be nothing worth his while there. This could only be his way into the house, his object the Head's study, where the safe was. In that case, he would pass through the room and out at the door, where the Bounder stood.

Smithy stood quite still. He waited, prepared to back away if the door opened from within.

But the door did not open. There was no sound from the room. Long minute after minute passed, but all was still.

Five—six—seven minutes, and still there was no sound.

It was clear now that a man was not passing through that room to gain entry to the House. If a midnight prowler had entered the Lamb's room he was still there. Why?

Did it mean, after all, that the Lamb was sleepless—that he had turned out  
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of bed and was at the open window? That did not seem likely on a bitterly cold December night, with light flakes of snow drifting on a cutting wind from the sea. Had the window been shut as well as opened? The Bounder could not be sure. He knew that he had heard the sash moving, that was all.

Smithy was not thinking of ragging now. If there was some thief of the night in the Lamb's room, perhaps going through his belongings while he slept, the Bounder could not leave him to carry on.

He made up his mind at last, raised his hand, and tapped at the door.

He gave a sharp tap, loud enough to wake a sleeper within, but not, he hoped, to wake sleepers in the other rooms along the passage.

Then he listened intently.

A midnight thief, undoubtedly, would have taken the alarm at that sudden knock on the door. A sleeper would have awakened. But there was no sound of a movement.

Knock!

The Bounder knocked again, more loudly than before. It was a loud, sharp knock. It could not have failed to awaken Mr. Lamb unless he slept like Billy Bunter or Rip van Winkle.

But it was followed by absolute stillness.

It was impossible to suppose that a midnight intruder was there, taking no heed of that plain evidence that someone was up and at the door. It must have been Lamb who had opened the window. But in that case he was awake. And why did he not heed such a startling thing as a knock at his door at midnight? It was quite mystifying.

Smithy could have fancied that the Lamb had gone out by the window if that had been imaginable. That, of course, would have accounted for it all.

But he could hardly fancy that the art master had climbed down from his bed-room window at midnight.

It was a sheer puzzle.

As he stood, utterly perplexed, there was a sound of an opening door up the passage. His second knock evidently had awakened one of the masters in one of the other rooms. A light flashed on.

Smithy did not wait to see which master was coming out of his room. He did not want to be called on the carpet before the Head in the morning. He scudded away swiftly but silently, and in hardly more than a minute was inside the Remove dormitory again.

There was a whisper from Skinner's bed in the dark.

"You've done it, Smithy?"

"No. The silly duffer's door was locked!" muttered the Bounder.

"Was it?" He detected the sneer in Skinner's voice.

"Yes, it was!" snarled the Bounder.

"Might as well have stayed in bed! I'm glad I never turned out if the door was locked!" Skinner chuckled. "Sure it was?"

"I've got the squirt here! Do you want what's in it?"

Skinner didn't. He said no more.

Vernon-Smith went back to bed, but it was some time before he slept. The rag on the Lamb was off, but he was not thinking about that. He was utterly puzzled and perplexed by the strange affair, and he puzzled over it till at last he fell asleep.

## FERRERS LOCKE AT GREYFRIARS!

"FERRERS LOCKE!"

"By gum!"

"The esteemed detective!"

In break the next morning Harry Wharton & Co. were in the quad  
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when a taxicab turned in at the gates and drove up to the House.

They glanced at it carelessly, and then with a fixed gaze as they saw the man with strong, clear-cut features and dark, keen eyes who sat in it.

They had seen Ferrers Locke, the famous detective, often enough to know him again.

"Jolly old Locke!" exclaimed Bob Cherry.

The Famous Five capped the celebrated detective as the taxi passed them, receiving a nod and a smile in response from Ferrers Locke.

"By gum!" said Bob. "I wonder why—"

Harry Wharton laughed.

"So do I," he agreed.

"The wonderfulness is terrific!" remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"Locke's a relation of the Head," remarked Johnny Bull. "He drops in once a term to see him. But I wonder—"

"Quech," said Frank Nugent.

"Yes; bet you that's it!" said Bob.

"Inspector Grimes, at Courtfield, has been looking for poor old Quelch ever since he was kidnapped on Courtfield Common, but he hasn't found a spot of him so far. He hasn't much chance, really, if Quelch was hiked off in a car."

"Might be a hundred miles away," said Frank Nugent. "They would hardly park him anywhere near Greyfriars."

"Hardly," said Harry Wharton.

"By Jove, I wonder whether this is just a visit or whether Ferrers Locke is here to look for Quelch?"

"He's the man to find him if anybody can," said Bob. "But I'm blessed if I can guess how he'll set to work. Why should anybody kidnap our jolly old Form-master, to begin with?"

"Goodness knows!"

"Somebody must have wanted to push him off the scene," said Bob. "But who—and why?"

"Ask me another!"

"It is a terrific story!" remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

"I say, you fellows"—Billy Bunter rolled up—"I say, was that the Head's relation, Ferrers Locke? I say, think he's come here to look for old Quelch?"

"Shouldn't wonder."

"Then I expect he'll want to see me," said the fat Owl complacently. "I'm the only chap that knows anything about it, as I saw Quelch collared. I may get off third school if he wants to see me now. It's English literature; I'd like to get off that. We're bound to have Shakespeare. I say, you fellows, do you think Ferrers Locke will find old Quelch?"

"He will if anybody can," answered Bob.

"Um! Anyhow, it will take time," said Bunter thoughtfully. "He couldn't possibly find him to-day, could he?"

"Hardly, I should think. Don't you want Quelch to be found, you fat villain?" demanded Bob.

"Oh, yes! Of course! But I don't see that there's any hurry," said Bunter. "It would be pretty awkward if he turned up to-day. After all, we're getting an easier time with the Lamb than we had with Quelch; he don't make a chap work like Quelch did. Anyhow, Quelch won't be found to-day; that stands to reason. It would be rather a jolt if he turned up now."

"You fat, foozling, footling fat-head!" hooted Johnny Bull indignantly.

"Oh, really, Bull! Of course, I'm sorry for poor old Quelch, getting a

cosh on the nut and all that. But if he turned up when that carman from Chunkley's came—"

"Wha-at?"

"Well, you can see that it would be awkward," said Bunter.

"You frabjous frump! Have you phoned for that pudding after we took the trouble to bump you?" demanded Bob.

"Oh, no! Never thought of it. But I can tell you fellows this—you ain't going to have any of the pudding after letting me down as you did! You can't expect it!" said Bunter emphatically. "If I take all the risk of taking the pudding off the carman—"

"So the pudding's coming?"

"Oh, no! Not that I know of. The fact is, I don't know whether Chunkley's have a special line of guinea Christmas puddings or not. If they have I've never heard of them."

"Oh crikey!"

"But you ain't going to have any, and you can bank on that!" declared Bunter. "If you wanted a whack in it you should have stood by a chap! You won't get a single plum out of that pudding! Not that I'm expecting a pudding," added Bunter cautiously. "So far as I'm concerned, I know absolutely nothing about any pudding, and I'm not going down to the back gate after third school to meet the carman there, or—or anything!"

And Billy Bunter rolled away, leaving the Famous Five blinking.

The bell rang, and the Remove went into their Form-room, to imbibe knowledge of English literature from Mr. Lamb.

During that school Billy Bunter gave little attention to Mr. Lamb. The lesson, as Bunter had feared, dealt with Shakespeare; but the fat Owl had little thought to waste on the Bard of Avon and his immortal works. Two much more important matters occupied Bunter's fat mind.

First, he was in hope, every minute, of being called away from the Form-room to see Ferrers Locke. Secondly, his fat mind dwelt with happy anticipation on the Christmas pudding that was to be delivered after third school.

Between the end of morning school and dinner there was a space of an hour—and that hour, to Billy Bunter, was a dreary and almost interminable desert.

Now there was going to be an oasis in the desert, in the shape of one of Chunkley's special guinea Christmas puddings!

But as the hour of twelve approached, Bunter's happy anticipations began to be mingled with anxiety.

If Mr. Locke was there on Quelch's case, it was fairly certain that he would want to see Bunter—the fellow who had witnessed the kidnapping of the Remove master. That would be very welcome as an interruption to third school.

But if Locke wanted to see him after third school, it would be fearfully awkward—for after third school Bunter had to meet Chunkley's carman and take that pudding off him!

Twelve o'clock chimed out, which marked the end of third school.

Mr. Lamb was in the act of dismissing the Form, when there was a tap at the door of the Remove room. It opened, and Trotter, the House page, looked in.

"Master Bunter to go to the Head!" said Trotter.

"Oh crikey!"

Mr. Lamb blinked round over his glasses.

"Bunter! You will go to Dr. Locke's study! The rest, dismiss!"



The Remove poured out of their Form-room—one of their number with an extremely worried expression on his fat face!

**A STRANGE CASE!**

**A** STRANGE case!" said Ferrers Locke.

The celebrated Baker Street detective sat in the headmaster's study, facing his venerable relative, Dr. Locke.

As the Famous Five had surmised, it was the mysterious disappearance of Mr. Quelch that had called Ferrers Locke to the school. Almost a week had elapsed since that strange disappearance; and the local police had, so far, made no discovery.

But that was only to be expected, as it seemed fairly clear that the kidnapped Form-master had been removed to a distance—far out of the radius of Inspector Grimes' activities.

"A strange case indeed!" said Dr. Locke. "I am glad, more than glad, that you have been able to find the time to come, my dear Ferrers. Mr. Quelch is not merely a member of my staff, but an old friend—a very valued friend—and you will understand my distress—"

"Quite!" said Locke.

"Not," continued the Head, "that I am able to see, in the least, what you can do in the matter. Mr. Quelch has vanished as if into thin air. Not the remotest clue exists to his present whereabouts. You have seen Inspector Grimes—a very keen and able man, but—"

Ferrers Locke nodded.

"I called on Mr. Grimes, at Courtfield, on my way here," he said. "I had a conversation with him, and he was good enough to welcome my assistance in the case. Now, sir, although we have no knowledge of what has become of Mr. Quelch, I am sure that the inspector's theory of the kidnapper's motive is correct!"

"The cracksman, who is called by the extraordinary name of Slim Jim—"

said Dr. Locke. "Exactly. It appears that one night, a week ago, Mr. Quelch was belated, in the lane by Popper Court, and he saw the man escaping over the wall after a robbery at Sir Hilton Popper's house. He saw him remove his mask—and was the only man who had ever seen Slim Jim unmasked. The next day he was kidnapped. This speaks for itself."

"I think so!" assented the Head.

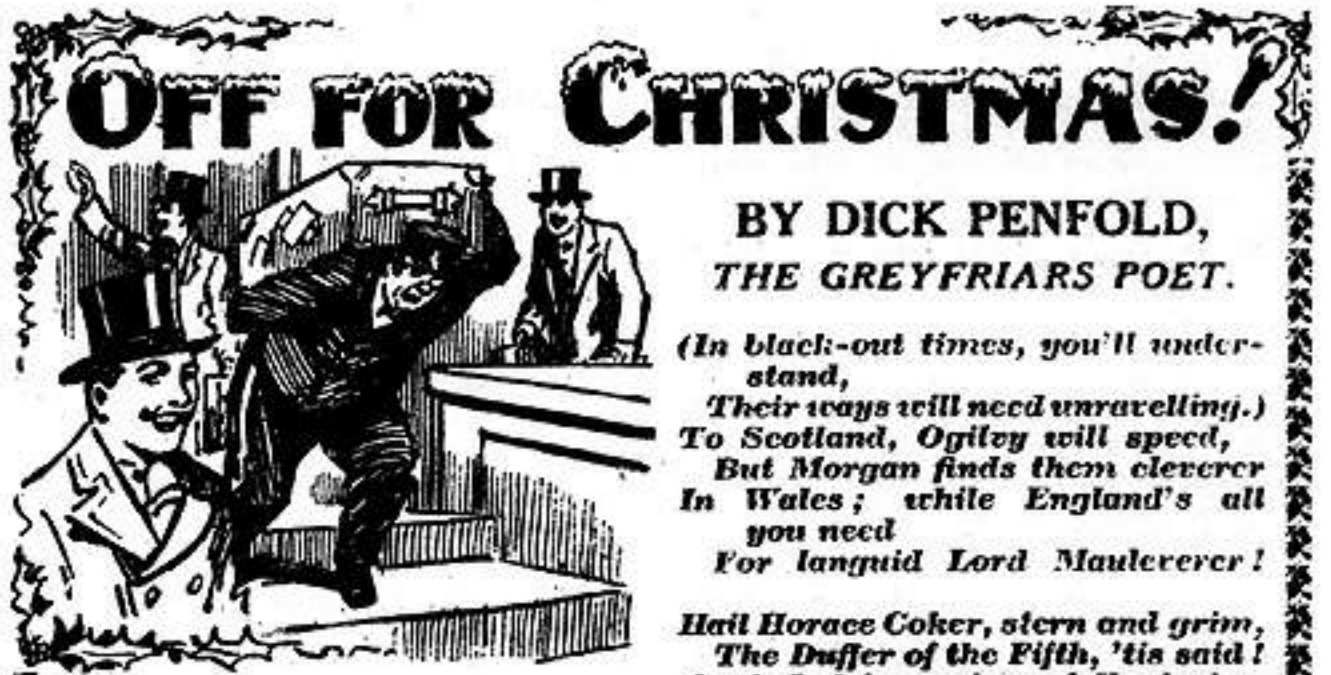
"It is fairly obvious," said Locke, "that the man whose face he saw that night did not care to run the risk of being seen again by him and identified. In some way he tricked Mr. Quelch to that lonely spot on the common the next day and kidnapped him. This seems to be clear!"

Dr. Locke nodded.

"How he learned, in so short a time, that the man who saw him late at night was a master at this school—how he learned his name—his residence—we cannot guess at present. But he must have done so."

Another nod.

"I am very well acquainted with the record of this man called Slim Jim!" went on Ferrers Locke. "It is five or six years since he first attracted the notice of the police. During that time he has brought off a very successful series of robberies—and when he has been seen nothing could be described but a slim man in black with a black mask over his face. What Mr. Quelch saw that night would have been in-



**OFF FOR CHRISTMAS!**

BY DICK PENFOLD,  
THE GREYFRIARS POET.

*(In black-out times, you'll understand, Their ways will need unravelling.)*  
To Scotland, Ogilvy will speed,  
But Morgan finds them cleverer  
In Wales; while England's all  
you need  
For languid Lord Maulreverer!

Hail Horace Coker, stern and grim,  
The Duffer of the Fifth, 'tis said!  
Aunt Judy's praises, full of vim,  
Will surely make him lift his  
head!  
Here's Temple joining in the queue;  
His looks are supercilious.  
Cry critics: "Though his blood be  
blue,  
He's 'up the loop'—a silly ass!"

A cheery bunch, the Famous Five,  
Whose larks are e'er delighting  
us,  
Dull cares away will quickly drive.  
*(We wish they'd be inviting us!)*  
A fat Owl's bound for Bunter Court;  
His stately home's alluring him!  
We fear that in another port  
Our pals will be enduring him!

The bus moves off, 'mid loud  
applause;  
Farewell to scenes familiar!  
*(A strange event of unknown cause;  
My spine feels somewhat  
chillier!)*  
There's joy in store for every lad;  
For school we'll never yearn  
again.  
And yet our hearts will still be glad  
The day that we return again!

**G**OOD-BYE to maths and  
famous dates!  
Farewell to Titus Livius!  
To-day all Greyfriars abdicates  
To spots where beaks can't  
chivy us!  
We're through with all that daily  
grind  
And, though we've had some  
jolly days,  
We're glad to leave the school  
behind  
And start our Christmas holidays.

O'er musty Form-rooms silence  
broods;  
No study rags now germinate;  
In empty dorms no step intrudes;  
All links with these we'll  
terminate.  
The chaps surround the station  
bus—  
Too crammed to be luxurious—  
"Get off that step! Make room  
for us!"  
They cry in accents furious!

In ev'ry corner of our land  
Will Greyfriars men be travelling.

valuable to the police—had he remained at liberty."

"You mean, if the man remained in this neighbourhood," said Dr. Locke. "Otherwise, Mr. Quelch was little likely to encounter him again."

"Precisely! But Slim Jim's record shows that it is his invariable custom to remain in one neighbourhood for a considerable time—never moving on, in fact, while a valuable crib remained uncracked in the vicinity!"

"So I have heard from Inspector Grimes!" assented the Head. "You believe, then, that he remained—"

"That is a certainty," said Ferrers Locke, "for he was at work again only last night."

"Last night!" ejaculated the Head.

"So I have learned from Inspector Grimes! There was a robbery at the Courtfield and County Bank last night, and every indication was of the skilful work of Slim Jim. There can be little or no doubt that the rascal, having got rid of the man who knew his face, remained in this vicinity to carry on—according to his usual and invariable system."

"That would seem to place the motive for the kidnapping beyond doubt."

"Quite!"

"I am no detective," said the Head, with a faint smile, "but it appears to me that in a country town like Courtfield the police should be able to make a list of all newcomers just before the first robbery—and one of them, I should suppose, must be the man they want." Ferrers Locke smiled, too.

"It is not so simple as that, sir!" he answered. "There can be little doubt that Slim Jim—when his mask is off—keeps up respectable appearances and is not the kind of man upon whom suspicion would easily fall. Otherwise he could not have had so long a run."

"Yes—"

"If he lives in Courtfield, it is undoubtedly as a respectable resident, with a respectable record open to investigation."

"Oh!"

"But he may be residing at Lantham, or Redclyffe, or any other town within easy reach of the beat he has marked out for his present scheme of operations. He may be staying in one of the villages—Friardale—Woodend—Green Hedges—there are many round about here."

"And yet—"

Locke smiled again.

"We must take it for granted, also, that he is a man very much on his guard," he said. "The first cracking of a crib by Slim Jim, whose methods are pretty well known, warns the police that he is in the vicinity—and no doubt they have a watchful eye for recent arrivals. But—"

"But—" said the Head.

"But," said Ferrers Locke quietly, "the man is wise to all that—and I feel sure that he cracks his first crib before he settles down in the neighbourhood—coming from a distance for the purpose."

"Oh!" exclaimed the Head.

"Unless I overestimate his wariness,"  
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that would be his ideal!" said Locke. "He would give the impression that Slim Jim had already arrived—but he would not actually settle down until, perhaps, a week afterwards. He would not be among the recent arrivals just before the first burglary."

"Oh!" repeated the Head. "I see your point! I suppose we may be sure that the man is as wary as that?"

"A man who has defied Scotland Yard for years is as wary and cunning as a fox!" said Ferrers Locke. "He would not leave a single point unguarded."

"Evidently I am no detective!" said the Head, smiling again. "I certainly did not think of that."

"We are dealing, sir, with a very uncommon man!" said Ferrers Locke. "His career is not that of a common crook! Under his own name, whatever it may be, and under his natural appearance, whatever that may be, he evidently leads a life above suspicion! This indicates, to my mind, that he is not a crook with the common criminal connections—but a man in a decent station of life who has taken to crime—the hardest kind of crook to trace."

He paused a moment.

"His skill with a safe, which is won-

derful and unmistakable, is a sort of natural gift!" Locke went on. "It may have been the discovery that he was in possession of this gift that led his mind to crime in the first place—added, of course, to greed for more money than he could earn by more reputable gifts. I imagine that it was by degrees that he adopted a regular career as a secret cracksmen—encouraged by success. At the same time, I have no doubt he kept up his original avocation, for appearance's and safety's sake."

"Then in his daily life he might be—"

"Anything!" said Ferrers Locke. "He may be a cashier in a bank, a private detective, a Civil Servant, a schoolmaster, an income-tax collector—indeed, he may be a member actually of the police."

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

"He may be the bookseller from whom you obtain school-books—he may be the man at the bank who cashes your cheque!" said Ferrers Locke. "He may be a man you have met at a headmasters' conference—he may be anybody or anything—when he has taken off his mask and his black suit."

"Then tracing him is a sheer impossibility!" said Dr. Locke. "Unless he is actually caught in the very act of robbery—"

"It would seem so! Certainly he has never been traced, or even suspected, so far!" said Ferrers Locke.

Dr. Locke sighed.

"That would appear to make the search for Mr. Quelch a hopeless one!" he said slowly.

"Not at all!" answered Ferrers Locke. "You may count as a certainty on the ultimate return of Mr. Quelch."

The Head started.

"How—why—I am glad to hear you say so, but—how—"

"I think I can make it clear," said Ferrers Locke. "Mr. Quelch has been kidnapped—to keep him out of the way. He is a prisoner in some place, most likely at a great distance. But it is hardly to be presumed that Slim Jim plans to keep him a perpetual prisoner—for years on end! That would scarcely be practicable. I think that Mr. Quelch is being kept out of the way for the period that the secret cracksmen intends to spend in this vicinity, where Mr. Quelch's presence would be a constant danger to him."

"But—"

"When the man, according to his usual system, has exhausted this district, and moves on—or when, as may be possible, some engagement he has taken up in his outward character comes to a natural termination—then, sir, Mr. Quelch will no longer be a danger to him—Slim Jim's next beat may be a hundred miles away, where Mr. Quelch certainly would never set eyes on him."

"True!"

"When that time comes, sir, I have no doubt that Mr. Quelch will be released!" said Ferrers Locke. "It may be weeks, or it may be months—three months at the outside, I think—that is the longest period that Slim Jim has ever been known to put in in a single district."

"I see! But—"

"Had he planned to keep Mr. Quelch permanently out of the way, sir, a surer method than kidnapping would have been adopted."

Dr. Locke shivered.

"No doubt!" he said. "But—"

"In all his career of crime, the man has never been known to use a deadlier weapon than a loaded stick!" said Ferrers Locke. "Possibly he shrinks

from worse deeds—or he may have a due regard for the safety of his neck, in case of discovery and capture. He has kidnapped Mr. Quelch—but keeping him a prisoner for life is scarcely within the range of practical politics. I do not doubt for a moment that he intends to let his prisoner go, after a safe interval following his departure from this quarter."

"That is at least, some comfort!" said Dr. Locke slowly. "Nevertheless, an imprisonment of weeks or months—what a Christmas for my poor friend."

"He will be found and saved, sir, if he can be found!" said Ferrers Locke. "And if he can be found, Slim Jim, incidentally, may have met his Waterloo in this case. It is very fortunate that the kidnapping was witnessed by a Greyfriars boy, unknown to the kidnapper—that is, at least, something to go upon. I have heard Bunter's story from Mr. Grimes—but I should like to see the boy—"

Dr. Locke glanced at his watch.

"Third school will be dismissed in a few minutes," he said. "Bunter is now in class. I will give directions for him to be sent to you here. No doubt you prefer to question him by yourself."

"Thank you!"

Dr. Locke left the study.

Ferrers Locke stood at the window looking out into the frosty quad, a thoughtful expression on his clear-cut face.

It was, as he had said, a strange case—such a case as had never come the detective's way before.

Somewhere in the vicinity, within a radius of a few miles, was Slim Jim, the cracksmen—hunted by the police, yet as likely as not rubbing shoulders with the officers of the law who hunted him, unsuspected.

Ferrers Locke himself might have passed him in the High Street at Courtfield for all he knew—might, for all he knew, have spoken to him! He might have been the man who sat in the railway carriage at his side—he might have been the man who was inquiring for a lost umbrella at the police station when Locke arrived there—he might, indeed, have been the taximan who had driven the detective to the school!

Slim Jim's real identity was buried deep—his face unknown save to the man who had vanished!

A rushing of feet, and a whooping of voices, told that the school was out after third lesson.

Locke smiled at the sight of a crowd of cheery faces in the quad—the faces of his old acquaintances, Harry Wharton & Co., among them.

Then there was a tap at the door, and he turned from the window as Billy Bunter rolled into the study.

### WHAT BUNTER KNEW!

**B**ILLY BUNTER blinked at Ferrers Locke through his big spectacles in a rather uneasy manner.

He was quite willing to see Mr. Locke! He was quite aware of his importance, as the fellow who had witnessed the kidnapping of Quelch. He was quite prepared to tell the Remove fellows, later how Locke had consulted him, and asked his advice, and generally treated him as the important fellow he was! But—

But there was another matter on Bunter's fat mind.

Almost any minute now, Chunkley's van might stop at the back gate, and Chunkley's carman step in with a guinea Christmas pudding to be handed to Master Bunter!

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Send postal order for the amount stated for each novelty required to Dept. H., Waddy Productions, 27a, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4.

Bunter wanted to be on the spot to take it off his hands.

It would be frightfully awkward if that carman had to hand it to somebody else, with details leaking out that it had been ordered by Mr. Quelch!

At Chunkley's, no doubt, they knew nothing about Quelch's mysterious disappearance! But at Greyfriars it was a perpetual and exciting topic! Anybody who heard that the order had been given by Mr. Quelch would jump! The whole thing would come out!

Billy Bunter did not in the least realise what a serious thing it was. But he realised that the pudding was in danger!

So it was a fearful worry to the fat Owl; and his podgy face revealed his state of worry.

"Come in, my boy!" said Ferrers Locke kindly. He shook hands with Bunter. "Probably you remember me, Bunter."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Locke!" mumbled Bunter. "I—I'm glad to see you, sir! If you'd like a little chat after dinner, I—"

"I should like a little chat now, Master Bunter!" said Ferrers Locke. "You may close the door and sit down."

Bunter unwillingly closed the door. Still more unwillingly he sat down on the edge of a chair.

Ferrers Locke regarded him curiously. He could see that something was on the fat junior's mind; though even the keen Baker Street detective did not deduce that it was a Christmas pudding!

"Now, Master Bunter, I desire you to tell me all you know upon the subject of your Form-master, Mr. Quelch!" he said. "It seems that you were on the spot—"

"Oh! Yes! A man knocked him on the head and yanked him off," said Bunter hurriedly. "That's all, sir! C-c-can I go now?"

"That is scarcely sufficient," said Ferrers Locke, staring at him. "Are you in a hurry, Master Bunter?"

"Oh! No! I mean, yes!" stammered Bunter.

"There is some important matter of a personal nature transcending in importance the matter to which I am referring?" asked Mr. Locke.

"That's it!" gasped Bunter, deaf and blind to sarcasm. "Exactly! I'll see you another time, Mr. Locke."

"I regret," said Ferrers Locke, "that my time is of some value, Master Bunter, and that this other matter, no doubt of the first importance, must be set aside for the present."

"Oh!" Bunter, who had half-risen, sat down again.

"Kindly give me your attention!" said Ferrers Locke sharply. "It seems that you were in the hut by the pond on Courtfield Common last Wednesday afternoon when the kidnapping took place—and you witnessed it."

"Oh! Yes."

"Why were you there in such a solitary spot on a half-holiday?"

"If you don't believe I was there, like that beast Skinner—"

"Please answer my question."

"That's all very well!" mumbled Bunter. "But if the Head knew, he might give me that six—"

"I can reassure you on that point, Master Bunter!"

"Well, you see, the Head told me to go to Quelch for six!" explained Bunter. "I was in the Lamb's classroom with a pineapple, you see, when he came there. I think he must have fancied that it was the pineapple

Coker of the Fifth was making a fuss about—anyhow, he told me to go to Quelch for six—"

"Well?"

"Well, what would you have done?" argued Bunter. "I suppose you've been at school in your time, Mr. Locke! Would you take six if you could help it?"

"Probably not," said Ferrers Locke, with a smile. "But go on."

"Well, I never went to Quelch, see? And—and I thought if I kept out of sight the Head might forget all about it!" explained Bunter. "As Quelch has been kidnapped, it's all right so far as Quelch is concerned—but I don't want the Head to be reminded—"

"I will not remind him, Master Bunter. Proceed."

"So I cleared off and went to that hut," explained Bunter. "I had some grub—I never pinched it from the studies while the fellows were playing football, you know—"

"We will not inquire into its origin," said Ferrers Locke gravely. "I am not here to inquire into the disappearance of doughnuts or toffee. So you went to the hut—"

"Of course, I never dreamed anybody would come there," said Bunter.

### WILL READERS PLEASE NOTE

that the next issue of the **MAGNET** will be on sale **FRIDAY, December 15th?**

"Nobody ever comes near the place in the winter. Then I heard somebody coming, and saw Quelch through a crack in the door. Of course, I thought the Head had spoken to him about that six and that he was after me."

"Quite a natural thought!" assented Ferrers Locke. "But—"

"But he wasn't!" said Bunter. "He just stood outside the hut, and I was wondering what the thump he was sticking there for, like a graven image, you know, and whether he had come to see somebody, when the other man turned up."

"You saw him?"

"Yes, through a hole in the door, you know! He never saw me, any more than Quelch did. He said something to Quelch about having kept him waiting—so I knew that it was an appointment, see?"

"Quite! And then—"

"Then they walked off together, and I was jolly glad to see them go," said Bunter. "And then"—the fat Owl shuddered at the recollection—"then the awful villain stepped behind Quelch and gave him a cosh on the nut with something he had in his hand—and Quelch went down—whop!"

"He was stunned?"

"He must have been, because he never moved or spoke."

"And then—"

"Then that awful villain fetched a hand-barrow out of the thickets—I suppose he had it hidden there ready, see?—and tied Quelch up, and tied something over his mouth, and stuck him in the barrow, and covered him up with sacks—and wheeled him away across the common!"

Billy Bunter's ruddy face paled at the recollection.

For the moment he had forgotten even the Christmas pudding!

"And after that?" asked Locke.

"I—I—I just stuck there," mumbled Bunter. "I—I wasn't frightened, you know—nothing of that kind—still, I didn't want that awful beast to see me. Then I heard a car from that little lane across the common—and—and I guessed that the beast was gone, so—so I got out and cut back to the school."

"You saw the man clearly who assailed Mr. Quelch?"

"As clear as I see you now."

"You think you would know him again?"

"Yes, rather—the minute I see him."

"What was he like?"

"He was a beaver—"

"Wha-a-at?"

"I mean, he had beard and whiskers all over his face," said Bunter.

"There was nothing to be seen except hair all over his face, between his coat-collar and his hat! I'd jolly well know him again all right!"

Ferrers Locke smiled faintly. It had not occurred to Bunter's powerful brain that the man who had attacked Mr. Quelch was in disguise.

"Did you observe none of his features?" asked Mr. Locke. "Suppose, for instance, that he shaved off that beard and whiskers, do you think you would know his face again?"

"Oh!" said Bunter. "Um! Of course, he would look jolly different with his beard and moustache off."

"What was his nose like?"

"Oh! A—a nose," said Bunter.

"What colour were his eyes?"

"I didn't notice."

"Was he short or tall?"

Bunter reflected.

"I—I don't know," was the result of his reflections.

"Was he as tall as Mr. Quelch?"

"Oh, no—a good bit shorter! Quelch's a bit of a hop-pole, you know," said Bunter. "I bet he was a head taller than the other man."

"Then the hairy man was about medium height?"

"Just about," agreed Bunter.

"About the height of Capper or Lamb?"

"Capper or Lamb?" repeated Locke.

"Capper's the Fourth Form beak here, and Lamb's the art master," said Bunter. "They're about the same height. Hacker's rather taller. So is Lascolles. Old Wiggins is about the same height, though."

"I have met Mr. Capper and Mr. Wiggins—though I have not had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Lamb," said Ferrers Locke. "So the hairy man was about the same height as Mr. Capper or Mr. Wiggins?"

"Just about the same," said Bunter.

"Did you notice his hands?"

"I noticed he had two, of course!"

"Dear me!" said Ferrers Locke.

"Did you really, Master Bunter? You are an observant lad!"

"Well, I generally see as much as most fellows, or a little more," said Bunter complacently.

"Did you notice anything else about his hands—as well as their number?" asked Ferrers Locke, with a sarcasm that was a sheer waste on Billy Bunter.

"N-n-no, I can't say I did."

"Had he gloves on?"

"Oh, yes! I remember now—he had!"

"Did his hands strike you—"

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"Oh, no—he never saw me! He struck Quelch—"

"Please let me finish my question, Bunter! Did his hands strike you as being large or small?"

"I never noticed."

"His feet—"

"I never looked at them."

Ferrers Locke breathed hard. Obviously, the kidnapper had been in disguise; but there were many physical points that could not have been disguised—had Bunter noticed them!

But Bunter hadn't! One item of information had been extracted from the fat Owl—the man's height. He was about the same height as Mr. Capper, Mr. Wiggins, and Mr. Lamb. Locke had met two out of those three gentlemen, and knew that both were a little under the medium height. It was something to learn, if not much.

There were other details that he could deduce. The man who had packed a good-sized gentleman like Mr. Quelch into a hand-barrow and wheeled him away must be fairly strong and active—and presumably young. He was a man who had a car, as there could be no doubt that Quelch had been taken away in a car. It was no doubt a large car, for Inspector Grimes had found no trace of the hand-barrow, beyond marks of its wheels. The barrow must have been brought in the car, and taken away with it. That required space. But it was all little enough to go upon.

Billy Bunter blinked at the Baker Street detective's thoughtful face. He slid off the edge of the chair.

"M-m-mum-may I go now?" he mumbled. "I—I've got to see Quelch—"

"What?"

"I—I mean, Lamb—Lamb's taking us now Quelch is away. I—I've got to see Lamb!" amended Billy Bunter hastily. "I'm not expecting a man in a van, or—or anything. I—I've just got to see Quelch—I mean, Lamb—"

"Thank you, Master Bunter—I think I am finished now!" said Ferrers Locke.

Billy Bunter made one bound to the door.

As he reached it, it opened from without, and Dr. Locke hurriedly entered.

### A SURPRISE FOR MR. LAMB!

"COME in!" said Mr. Lamb.

Mr. Lamb was in his study after third school. He had a drawing-board on the table by the window, with a sheet of cardboard pinned on it, and was standing at it at work on a pen-and-ink drawing.

He glanced round as the door opened, and raised his eyebrows in surprise at the sight of Mrs. Kebble, the house dame, and, behind that buxom dame, a man in uniform, on whose cap was the word "Chunkley's" in gilt letters.

Mrs. Kebble had a surprised and flustered expression on her face, and the man from Chunkley's had a large package under his arm.

"My dear madam, what—" asked Mr. Lamb, gazing in surprise at the two over his gold-rimmed glasses.

"Mr. Lamb, sir I cannot understand this!" said Mrs. Kebble. "Perhaps you can, sir. This man will tell you, sir—"

The man from Chunkley's touched his cap.

"Parcel for Master Bunter, sir," he said.

"Bunter?" repeated Mr. Lamb, in

astonishment. "There is a boy of that name in the Form of which I am in charge, but he is not here. Why—"

"But that is not all, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Kebble. "Where Master Bunter is now I do not know, but this man says that the parcel was ordered by Mr. Quelch—"

"What?"

Mr. Lamb jumped almost clear of the floor.

"That's on the order, sir," said the man from Chunkley's. "Phone order, sir; ordered by Mr. Quelch, to be delivered to Master Bunter. My instructions are to deliver it to Master Bunter personally, which I explained to this good lady, sir, such being the instructions given by Mr. Quelch over the telephone."

"By Mr. Quelch—on the telephone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you mad?" exclaimed Mr. Lamb.

Chunkley's man blinked at him.

Mr. Lamb's expression was quite extraordinary. What the carman had said seemed to have shaken him from head to foot. Mrs. Kebble was in a state of flustered surprise and perplexity, but the art master seemed to be startled almost out of his wits.

"I don't understand, sir," said Chunkley's man. "Mr. Quelch has an account with us, and has often ordered goods by telephone; I have been here often enough. In this case the goods—a Christmas pudding—were ordered to be delivered to Master Bunter."

"Not by Mr. Quelch?"

"Yes, sir; by Mr. Quelch."

"Impossible! Absurd!"

"It is marked on my order paper, sir," said the astonished carman. "Ordered by Mr. Quelch, for delivery to—"

"That is why I have brought the man to you, sir, as you are in charge of Mr. Quelch's Form now," said Mrs. Kebble. "If Mr. Quelch has come back—"

"Come back!" repeated Mr. Lamb.

"If he has I have not heard of it," said the house dame.

"He has not come back. He cannot have come back—I—I mean, I have certainly heard nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Mr. Lamb. "If—if he is back at Greyfriars— But it is impossible. I—I should certainly have been informed."

"So I should think, sir," said Mrs. Kebble. "But, then, what does it mean? How can Mr. Quelch have given an order—"

"He cannot," breathed Mr. Lamb.

"He has been away nearly a week," said Mrs. Kebble. "I was so astonished, Mr. Lamb, when this man said that the order had been given by Mr. Quelch—What can it mean, sir?"

"I—I hardly know," said Mr. Lamb.

"It is quite beyond my understanding. Really, it is quite useless to come to me."

"As you are now in Mr. Quelch's place, sir—"

"Oh, yes, quite! But, really, I know nothing of the matter. I do not understand it in the least. Perhaps you had better go to the headmaster"

Mr. Lamb took hold of his door with the evident intention of shutting it.

The man from Chunkley's backed

away, the house dame stepped back into the passage, and Mr. Lamb shut the door.

As the footsteps faded away down the passage the new art master of Greyfriars turned the key in the lock.

Then he stood panting for breath.

The Remove fellows who knew Mr. Lamb as a mild and rather sleepy-looking man would have been startled if they had seen him now.

His face was white, his eyes dilated, his lips quivering.

Mrs. Kebble was in a state of astonishment and perplexity. But Mr. Lamb's look expressed much more than that. There was deep disquietude—indeed, fear—in the face of the art master.

The possibility that Mr. Quelch had



"Release my arm!" snapped Mr. Lamb. "What do you want?"

"My name is Locke!" said the Baker Street detective.

sufficiently

somehow turned up at Greyfriars School seemed to be a stunning blow to Mr. Lamb.

"If he is here"—he breathed the words half-aloud—"if he is here— But he cannot be—he cannot! But if he is, and I never knew—"

Tap!

Mr. Lamb spun round towards the door. There was something like terror in his pale face. He had to make an effort to keep his voice calm as he spoke.

"Who is there?"

"Wharton, sir," came the reply; and the door-handle turned.

The captain of the Remove naturally expected to be able to enter the study.

"I am busy now, Wharton. But what is it?" called out Mr. Lamb.

"The Form papers, sir," answered Wharton, with a very noticeable note of surprise in his voice.

Wharton had a sheaf of papers in his hand. They were papers that the head boy of the Remove had to collect in the Form-room and take to his Form-master's study—Mr. Lamb's, now that Quelch was away.

"Oh, yes! Thank you, Wharton! Another time!" Mr. Lamb had quite forgotten those Form papers. "Leave them on my desk in the Form-room."

"Very well, sir."

"One moment!" added Mr. Lamb, as Wharton was turning away. "Have you heard that your Form-master, Mr. Quelch, has returned?"

"No, sir."

"You have not seen him?"

"No, sir. I don't think he has come back; we should have seen him if he

Several times he approached the telephone, but paused.

At last, however, he lifted the receiver and asked for a trunk call.

He waited with feverish impatience until he was given his number—Redgate 202.

A voice came through at last:

"Hallo!"

"Hallo!" replied Mr. Lamb. "Is the wind in the same quarter still?"

Anyone who had heard Mr. Lamb ask that question on the telephone would probably have been surprised.

Redgate, in Surrey, was a good eighty miles from Greyfriars, and it would have seemed very singular that Mr. Lamb should be interested in the state of the weather there.

But the strange question did not seem to surprise the man at the other end. The answer came at once:

"No change."

"I have a special reason for asking," said Mr. Lamb. "Go and look at the weather-vane, and then tell me again."

"Hang on!"

There was a pause. Then the same voice came through again:

"No change."

"You've looked?"

"Sure!"

"O.K.!" said Mr. Lamb.

He hung up, and turned from the telephone. That brief and curious conversation seemed to have entirely relieved him of his uneasiness. He was still puzzled, but he was no longer alarmed. He unlocked the study door.

"Some trick!" he muttered. "The man's name has been used. But why—how? It is inexplicable! Who—"

He gave a little start as he remembered that the house dame had mentioned Bunter.

His eyes gleamed over his gold-rimmed glasses.

Mr. Quelch was supposed to have phoned an order to Chunkley's, which he certainly never had done. That order was for the delivery of goods to Bunter, of the Form of which Mr. Lamb was now in charge.

Mr. Lamb put a cane under his arm, and left the study—to look for Billy Bunter!



How dare you intervene! Who the dickens are you Street detective. "That boy has been caned!"

had," said the captain of the Remove, in astonishment.

"I have spoken to Mrs. Kebble; she appears to think that Mr. Quelch is now in the school, Wharton."

"I've heard nothing of it, sir, and I don't think any man in the Remove has. I think Mrs. Kebble must be mistaken, sir."

"Very well, you may go."

Harry Wharton went, rather astonished at the art master talking to him without opening the door.

He was not likely to guess, however, that Mr. Lamb had his own reasons for sporting his oak while there was a possibility that Mr. Quelch might be in the school. For reasons best known to himself, Mr. Lamb did not want to meet the Remove master of Greyfriars.

After Wharton had gone, Mr. Lamb moved about his study restlessly, his face lined with troubled thought.

**BAD LUCK FOR BILLY BUNTER!**

"OH!" gasped Billy Bunter.

He backed in haste as the door of the Head's study opened and Dr. Locke came in. The headmaster's manner was hurried, and there was a trace of excitement in his usually calm face.

"My dear Ferrers—" exclaimed Dr. Locke.

The Baker Street detective gave him a curious glance.

"Is there any news?" he asked.

"I hardly know," answered Dr. Locke. "But there has been a most singular occurrence—very singular indeed! I have just seen the house dame, and a man who came from Chunkley's Stores—"

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter uttered that ejaculation quite involuntarily.

He had feared that the delay in the Head's study might cause trouble in the matter of the Christmas pudding. It looked as if it had!

Dr. Locke glanced at the fat junior.

"What—what did you say, Bunter?" he exclaimed.

"Oh, nothing, sir!" stammered Bunter. "I—I mean—n-n-nothing, sir!" The fat junior edged round towards the doorway.

"Remain here, Bunter!" said the Head.

"Mr. Locke's finished with me, sir—"

"Remain here!"

"Oh, yes, sir!" moaned Bunter.

"It is possible that this boy may be able to throw some light on the matter, Ferrers," explained the Head. "It is a very singular occurrence, in view of Mr. Quelch's absence. It appears that an order was telephoned to Chunkley's Stores in Courtfield by, as they supposed, Mr. Quelch—"

"By Mr. Quelch!" exclaimed Ferrers Locke. "When did this occur?"

"The order was telephoned yesterday, for delivery to-day. Obviously it cannot have been telephoned from here, as Mr. Quelch is not here."

"Oh lor'!"

"Will you be quiet, Bunter?"

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"If Mr. Quelch has been released, or has effected his escape, he might, of course, have telephoned," said the Head. "But in such a case I should naturally have expected to hear from him immediately; and it is very singular that he should have telephoned an order to a stores—especially for such an article as a Christmas pudding—"

"A Christmas pudding!"

"Yes—a Christmas pudding!" said the Head. "It appears scarcely possible that it can have been Mr. Quelch who telephoned such an order, in the circumstances—"

"Quite impossible, I should say," remarked Ferrers Locke dryly.

"Yet if some other person has used Mr. Quelch's name on the telephone, it seems more singular still," said the Head.

"Very singular indeed!" said Ferrers Locke. "But in what way is this boy Bunter connected with the matter?"

"That is the most surprising circumstance of all!" said the Head. "This order, which Chunkley's took for granted came from Mr. Quelch, who has an account at their stores, was for a Christmas pudding to be delivered to this boy Bunter here—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Mr. Locke.

"Bunter, therefore, may know something on the subject, which appears to me quite inexplicable," said the Head.

Ferrers Locke, with his keen eyes fixed on the fat Owl's dismayed face, smiled faintly.

Perhaps the mystery did not seem quite so inexplicable to the Baker Street detective as it did to Dr. Locke.

"If this means that Mr. Quelch is at liberty, it is very welcome news, amazing as it is that he has not communicated with me," said Dr. Locke. "Can it mean that, Ferrers?"

"I fear not," answered Ferrers Locke. "I am afraid that the simple explanation is that Mr. Quelch's name has been used on the telephone by some person who was aware that he had an account at Chunkley's Stores."

"But for what reason—for what motive?" asked Dr. Locke.

"Possibly, as you remarked, Bunter may be able to throw some light on the subject."

"I hope so—I trust so! Bunter—"

"Oh crikey!"

"Dear me! The boy seems quite alarmed!" said Dr. Locke, staring at Billy Bunter. "There is nothing to be alarmed about, Bunter."

"Oh!" gasped Bunter. "Isn't there, sir? Yes, sir! Oh dear!"

"You have simply to tell me whether you know anything about this strange occurrence," said the Head reassuringly. "You have nothing whatever to fear, Bunter. There is no occasion whatever for alarm."

"Oh, yes, sir!"

"Have you any knowledge of this, Bunter?"

"Oh, no, sir! Mum-mum-my mind's a perfect blank!" gasped Bunter. "I—I never knew there was a Christmas pudding coming from Chunkley's, sir. I—I never heard of their special guinea Christmas puddings, and—and—and I—I don't like Christmas puddings, sir—"

"There is no doubt that the carman had instructions to deliver the goods to you, Bunter. Did you know nothing whatever about the matter?"

"Not a thing, sir!" moaned Bunter. "It—it's quite a surprise to me. I—I don't know anything about it at all, sir."

Ferrers Locke stood with his eyes fixed on the fat face, but he did not speak. Mr. Locke was at Greyfriars to take up the case of the vanished Form-master, not to hand over a fat and fatuous Owl to a well-deserved whopping.

"Are you quite sure of this, Bunter?" asked the Head.

"Oh, yes, sir! Absolutely sure!" mumbled Bunter. "I never knew that a pudding was coming from Chunkley's, and I certainly wasn't going to wait at the back gate for the van."

The Head started.

"You were not going to wait at the back gate for the van!" he repeated.

"Certainly not, sir—not knowing anything about the pudding! Besides, I couldn't, as Mr. Locke kept me here talking—"

"Bless my soul!" said the Head blankly.

"C-c-can I go now, sir?" asked Bunter anxiously.

"You may not, Bunter! It appears to me that you certainly do know something of this matter if it was your intention to wait at the back gate for the carman—"

"Oh, no, sir! I wasn't going to wait for the carman, as I never knew he was coming at all! I didn't want to get away while Mr. Locke was talking to me, sir! I—I enjoyed a chat with him! I wasn't thinking about that pudding all the time—"

"You were not thinking about that pudding all the time?" said the Head dazedly.

"No, sir—never having heard of it! I wasn't just going to cut down to the back gate when you came in, sir. I—I was going to Mr. Quelch—I mean, Mr. Lamb—"

"Bunter!" thundered the Head.

"Oh crikey! I—I mean, yes, sir!" gasped Bunter.

"Tell me the truth at once! It is obvious to me that you know about this matter. Speak!"

Billy Bunter's fat knees knocked together. Thunder in the headmaster's brow deprived him of what little wit he had.

"Oh, yes, sir!" he stuttered. "It wasn't me, sir!"

"What?"

"I—I mean, I—I never!" gurgled the fat Owl. "If anybody phoned from Quelch's study yesterday, it wasn't me. I—I can't guess who it was, sir; but—"

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but I know it wasn't me! I—I hate Christmas puddings, sir! I certainly never phoned to Chunkley's for one, and if they thought it was Mr. Quelch, it wasn't my fault, sir, as—as I never phoned!"

"Bless my soul!" said the Head.

"C-c-can I go now, sir?" groaned Bunter.

"You utterly unscrupulous boy!" exclaimed the Head. It was as clear to Dr. Locke now as it had been all the while to Ferrers Locke. "Is it possible, Bunter, that you took advantage of Mr. Quelch's absence from the school to give an order in his name for a—a—a Christmas pudding—"

"Oh, no, sir!" spluttered Bunter. "I never phoned, sir, and I never told them to deliver it after twelve, either! I wasn't in Mr. Quelch's study at all, sir, when I phoned—I mean, when I didn't phone; and I wasn't going to wait at the back gate, sir, if Mr. Locke hadn't kept me here, because I never knew anything at all about it—"

"If you were not an extraordinarily stupid boy, Bunter, I should administer a severe flogging for this unscrupulous act—"

"Oh, thank you, sir! M-m-may I go now?"

"You may not! I shall cane you very severely, Bunter!"

"Oh lor'!"

"Ferrers, perhaps you would care to walk in the quadrangle before lunch?" suggested the Head.

"Certainly!" said Ferrers Locke, and he left the study.

As he went down the corridor the sound of a swiping cane followed him, accompanied by a series of fearful yells.

Billy Bunter, after all his astute scheming, was getting something much less agreeable than a Christmas pudding.

### FERRERS LOCKE INTERVENES!

"I SAY, you fellows—wow!" "Whopped?" asked Bob Cherry.

"Ow! Yes! Wow!"

Billy Bunter wriggled. His fat face was full of woe when he rolled out of the House after that painful interview with the Head.

"Lamb's looking for you," said Frank Nugent.

"Blow Lamb! Ow! Wow!"

"He seems to want you."

"Let him want! Wow! That idiot, Locke!" hissed Bunter. "That silly fool, Ferrers Locke—ow! That dummy—wow!"

"What on earth has Ferrers Locke done?" asked Harry Wharton, in astonishment.

"Wow! Keeping a fellow jawing and wasting time!" groaned Bunter. "It would have been all right if I'd met the carman from Chunkley's at the back gate—wow! But that silly idiot—wow!—had to keep a fellow jawing! So—"

"You fat villain!"

"Ow! Wow! I shan't get it now!" moaned Bunter. "I expect they'll send it back after this. Ow! You see, as I never saw the carman, the silly fool must have asked the house dame—wow! Anyhow, it all came out—wow! I suppose Mrs. Keble guessed that Quelch had never ordered that pudding, as he isn't here—ow!"

"Yes, I think she may have guessed that one," chuckled Bob Cherry.

"The guessfulness was probably terrific!"

"I don't see why she wanted to speak to the Head about it," groaned Bunter. "She could have gone to the Lamb,

as he's taken old Quelch's place. No need to jaw to the Head—wow!"

"By gum!" exclaimed Harry Wharton. "I fancy she did, you fat ass! That must be why Lamb asked me if I'd heard that Quelch had come back."

"Oh! And that's why the Lamb wants Bunter!" exclaimed Bob.

"Look out for squalls, you fat spoofer!" said Johnny Bull. "The Lamb had a cane under his arm when he asked us where you were."

"Why, the beast!" exclaimed Bunter indignantly. "He can't lick me, when the Head's licked me! They can't lick a fellow twice for the same thing!"

"Better tell the Lamb that—quick—when he spots you!" grinned Nugent. "He looked as if he was going to handle that cane."

"Blow him!" groaned Bunter. "I say, the Head laid it on! He seemed annoyed, though I told him that I never phoned, and that I wasn't in Quelch's study at all when I phoned. But he couldn't take my word. Ungentlemanly, I call it—making a fellow out to be a liar before a visitor to the school! Ow!"

"Oh, my hat!"

"Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here comes the Lamb!" exclaimed Bob Cherry, as he spotted a gleam of gold-rimmed glasses in the distance.

"Oh crikey!"

Billy Bunter promptly rolled away.

He did not want to see Mr. Lamb—after just seeing the Head. It was true that a fellow couldn't be licked twice for the same misdeed. Still, Bunter preferred not to see Mr. Lamb, if Lamb had a cane under his arm.

The fat Owl rolled off into the Cloister, which was a nice secluded spot, with the idea of remaining out of sight at least until the dinner bell rang. He disappeared from the view of the Famous Five.

But the old Cloister was not untenanted. A rather tall, athletic figure was pacing there. And Billy Bunter, as he spotted it, gave it an inimical blink from his big spectacles.

His feelings towards Ferrers Locke were deep and bitter. It was all the fault of the Baker Street detective, Bunter considered, that his great scheme had gone so hopelessly awry. But for that unspeakable idiot, Ferrers Locke, Bunter might have been scoffing Christmas pudding at this very moment, instead of wriggling in anguish from the effects of his headmaster's cane.

Ferrers Locke glanced at him, and smiled faintly.

Bunter gave him the bitterest of blinks, and leaned on one of the old stone pillars.

Locke walked on, and passed out of sight along the Cloister.

"Beast!" hissed Bunter, as he went.

A minute later there was a step.

The fat Owl blinked round in dismay at a glimmer of gold-rimmed glasses and a velvet coat.

"Oh crikey!" he ejaculated.

Mr. Lamb had run him down. He had, in fact, spotted Bunter in the quad, and followed him to his retreat.

The art master's face was far from wearing its usual placid, sleepy, almost docile look. His lips were set, and his eyes glinted.

"Bunter!" His voice was hard and sharp.

"Oh, yes, sir!" moaned Bunter.

He was startled and alarmed by that grim look on the Pet Lamb's face, and still more by seeing Mr. Lamb slip his cane down into his hand.

He remembered the sad case of Skinner, and realised with dismay that

the Lamb was now in as savage a temper as when he had so unexpectedly given Skinner beans in the Form-room.

"I require an explanation from you, Bunter," said Mr. Lamb, in concentrated tones. "Someone appears to have used the name of your absent Form-master on the telephone to order certain eatables—to be delivered to you. What does this mean?"

"Oh, I—I don't know, sir!" gasped the wretched Owl. "I—I never ordered the Christmas pudding, sir."

"You appear to be aware that it was a Christmas pudding," said Mr. Lamb grimly. "How do you know that, Bunter, if it was not you that used Mr. Quelch's name on the telephone?"

"I—I don't, sir. I—I never dreamed that it was a Christmas pudding—"

"What?"

"I—I hadn't the faintest idea, sir!" groaned Bunter. "Besides, the Head's found out, and whopped me!"

"Indeed!" said Mr. Lamb, shutting his lips hard. "Indeed! As I am at present in the place of your Form-master, Bunter, it is my duty to punish you for this act of unscrupulous dishonesty. I shall do so with the utmost severity."

"I say, the Head's whopped me already!" yelled Bunter. "You can't whop a fellow twice—I say—Yaroooh!"

Mr. Lamb did not tell him to bend over. He caught the fat Owl by the collar, twirled him round, and laid on the cane.

He laid it on hard and fast. Billy Bunter hopped and bounded and bellowed. But the grip on his collar was like iron. He was held as in a vice, and the cane whopped and whopped.

"Ow! Wow! Stoppit!" roared Bunter. "Leave off! I tell you the Head caned me for it! Will you leave off? Yaroooh! Yoo-hoop!"

Whack, whack, whack!

"Ow! Wow! Stoppit! Beast!" shrieked Bunter. "Yaroooh! Oh crikey! Leave off! Wow! Yow! Yoo-hoop! Wow!"

The cane was suddenly arrested in its descent. Mr. Lamb had been unaware that anyone else was in the Cloister till that grip fell on his arm, stopping the cane as it lashed.

He stared round savagely. He stared at a clear-cut, calm face, with a faint expression of contempt on it.

"Release my arm!" he snapped. "How dare you intervene! Who the dickens are you? Release my arm at once!"

"My name is Locke!" said the Baker Street detective quietly. "I am a relative of the headmaster here! I think you forget yourself a little, sir. That boy has been caned sufficiently."

"That is no concern of yours!" snarled Mr. Lamb. "I request you to mind your own business, Mr. Locke, if that is your name! Will you let go my arm instantly?"

"You will kindly release that boy first," said Ferrers Locke. "His headmaster has already caned him for his offence, as I heard him tell you. You have no right, sir, to inflict a second punishment."

"That is my business! I am in charge of the Form, sir, to which this boy belongs, and it is for me to judge."

"I gather that you are Mr. Lamb," said the Baker Street detective. "I am sorry, Mr. Lamb, to have to intervene, but I cannot see a boy beaten in that manner, of which you must be aware that Dr. Locke would not approve."

"I never did it!" wailed Bunter.

"And the Head's licked me for it, too. Oh crikey!"

"Please release the boy, Mr. Lamb!" said Locke.

"I refuse to allow you to interfere, sir! I shall deal with this boy precisely as I think fit!" snarled Mr. Lamb. "He has been guilty of an act of unscrupulous dishonesty—"

"His headmaster has judged him, and punished him, sir."

"That is no concern of yours."

"I make it my concern," said Ferrers Locke. "I am sorry to interfere with a Greyfriars master, but I will not allow that boy to be touched again!"

The fat Owl tottered away, squeaking with anguish. Never had Bunter had such a whopping and it would have gone on, but for Ferrers Locke.

"You had better go, Bunter," said Ferrers Locke.

Bunter did not need telling twice. He shot away, squeaking and squealing as he went.

Mr. Locke released that steely grip on the master's arm. He stepped back.

"I am sorry for this, Mr. Lamb," he said, "but I feel sure that, on reflection, you will realise—"

"Are you here, sir, to teach Grey-

## The Ghost of the Fifth!

By WILLIAM WIBLEY

I OVERLOOKED one thing when I disguised Coker as a ghost. Apart from that, the job was as good as any I have done in the course of my theatrical career! Coker's requirements were clear enough.

"I want you to rig me up as a ghost," he said. "And I want it done so that nobody can recognise me."

"Easy as rolling off a log," I said. "What's the idea? Have they given you a part in Hamlet?"

Coker, who doesn't know the difference between "Hamlet" and a ham roll, frowned severely.

"No cheek, now, or I'll whop you!" he said. "This is just a Christmas joke of mine. Christmas is the time when people talk about ghosts—and I'm going to give 'em a ghost to talk about. see? Jump out on chaps and scare the life out of 'em! Funny, what?"

"Fearfully!" I said, in dutiful agreement. "Ha, ha!"

"Now get on with the job and don't jaw!" growled Coker. "Do it well, and I'll buy you some lollipops or whatever it is you scrubby kids like!"

"Oh, thank you, Coker!" I gasped.

I took him to the box-room where we keep the Remove Dramatic Society's props, and turned him into a fearsome-looking ghost. Nobody, I felt sure, could recognise the awful object that at last emerged from the box-room as Horace Coker!

Mr. Lamb gave a fierce wrench at his arm.

But he might as well have tried to wrench it out of the grip of a steel vice.

Ferrers Locke's face was stern, and his lips set. This man, for whatever reason, was in a fierce and savage temper, and wreaking it on the wretched Owl. Obviously what Bunter had done did not in itself account for that angry thrashing.

It was an awkward position for Ferrers Locke; but he was quite determined that Bunter was going to have no more.

"If you desire to refer the matter to Dr. Locke, sir—" said the detective.

Mr. Lamb released Bunter's collar at last.

I followed the Fifth Form Ghost. Half-way down the stairs, he started waving his arms and uttering blood-curdling howls. When I looked over the banisters, I saw that this was being done for the benefit of Brown, who was approaching.

Brown, of course, should have turned tail and fled. But, instead of that, he stood still and stared.

"What are you doing all this for, Coker?" he asked.

Coker stopped waving and howling. He booted Brown instead; and Brown started doing the waving and howling, while Coker sought fresh victims!

Amusing as it seemed, the others all recognised Coker as easily as Brown! It baffled me, but there it was. I saw him jump out in turn on Bolsover major, Temple, Hoskins and Blundell. They asked: "What's the idea, Coker?" and went on, tapping their foreheads significantly!

Coker came raging back to me at last.

"I should have known better than to trust the job to an inky-fingered jag!" he hooted. "They know me everywhere—yet you're supposed to have disguised me beyond recognition! I shouldn't have thought it a difficult feat—"

"Got it!" I yelled.

"Got what?"

"The explanation! Your saying 'feat' reminded me! It's your feet that give you away! I forgot to disguise them: yet everyone knows they're the biggest in the school—here, wharrer you doing?"

Coker didn't stop to explain what he was doing. He rushed at me instead and started using the biggest feet at Greyfriars for footer practice—with me as the ball!

I headed for safety at top speed. Coker the ghost was a little too energetic for my taste!

friars masters their duty?" asked Mr. Lamb, his voice husky with rage.

"Not in the least," said Ferrers Locke. "I am here as a detective, which is my profession. But, in the circumstances—"

"A detective!"

"You may possibly have heard my name, sir," said the Baker Street detective. "It is fairly well known."

"Locke—Locke!" repeated Mr. Lamb. The angry excitement had died out of his face, and he looked intently at the clear cut face before him. "Do you mean Ferrers Locke, the celebrated detective?"

"I am Ferrers Locke, certainly."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Lamb. His manner had quite changed. The

Removites would have recognised the Pet Lamb again now. "It is a pleasure, sir, to meet so celebrated a man! My dear Mr. Locke, I regret extremely—more than I can say—any disagreeable words that I may have uttered! Please forget them! I will add that I am obliged to you—very much obliged to you! I fear that I had quite lost my temper with that boy."

"I fear that you had, sir," said Ferrers Locke dryly.

"I am afraid I have given you an erroneous impression," said Mr. Lamb. "I am in charge of the Remove during Mr. Quelch's absence, and all the boys in that Form could tell you that the cane is never used in their Form-room. Pray do not judge me, Mr. Locke, by one unfortunate outbreak of temper!"

"Not at all, sir," said Ferrers Locke politely.

"I am glad that you intervened, sir! I thank you for it!" said Mr. Lamb; and, with a polite bow to the Baker Street detective, he walked back to the quadrangle, Ferrers Locke gazing after him very curiously as he went.

### GOING TO BE GORGEOUS!

"CHRISTMAS——"

"Help!"

"Christmas——" repeated Billy Bunter.

"Roll away!"

"Oh, really, Wharton——"

"Avaunt!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

It was two or three days later, and the Famous Five were at tea in Study No. 1 when Billy Bunter's ample figure filled the doorway.

Bunter had a letter in his hand, and a cheery grin on his face.

Five hands were waved at him, waving him off like a troublesome blue-bottle. Just on break-up nobody seemed to want to hear Billy Bunter on the subject of the Christmas holidays.

"I was going to say——" roared Bunter.

"Shut the door before you say it!"

"Beast! I was going to say, Christmas is going to be awfully jolly at Bunter Court."

"Eh?"

"I believe I half-promised to give you a look-in, Wharton, in the Christmas hols," said Bunter, blinking at the captain of the Remove.

"I'm afraid you did!" admitted Wharton.

"Well, I shan't be able to now!" said Bunter, his fat lip curling. "After all, you can't expect it!"

The Famous Five all looked at Bunter. They had taken it for granted that the fat Owl had barged in to fix up for the Christmas hols. The chums of the Remove were all going to be at Wharton Lodge together for the festive season, and they seemed quite blind to the fact that William George Bunter's presence was required to make any party a real success.

But it seemed, from Bunter's words, that he had other views! It was quite a pleasure to hear it.

"Roll in and have a sausage roll, old fat man!" said the captain of the Remove cordially. If Bunter had not come there to fix up the Christmas hols, the juniors were prepared to be hospitable.

"Oh, all right!" Bunter rolled in and helped himself to a sausage roll. "I say, you fellows, I'm going to have a topping time, from what the pater says

in this letter! Sorry I shan't be able to give you a week or two, Wharton."

"Oh, don't mēch!"

"I mean to say, you can't really expect it!" argued Bunter. "You'll have Bull there, and I can't stand Bull."

"Good!" said Johnny Bull.

"And Bob Cherry barging about like a hippopotamus—not the sort of thing a fellow can stand."

"Good again!" remarked Bob.

"And Inky—I can't say I'm keen on niggers."

"The goodfulness is terrific!"

"Nugent ain't so bad—but he's a bit of a milksop."

"Hear, hear!" said Frank.

"And you, yourself, Wharton, you're a bit of a stuck-up ass, you know—if you don't mind my mentioning it."

"Not at all! Carry on!"

"Well, I'll have another of these sausage rolls. Well, I'd like to ask you to Bunter Court, but there's difficulties in the way."

"It isn't built yet?" asked Bob.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"There's some difficulties in the way!" repeated Bunter, unheeding. "You'd be rather out of place—a mob of noisy schoolboys. Still, you can think of me having a gorgeous time, Wharton, when you're pottering about in your humble home!"

"I will!" said the captain of the Remove gravely. "But we shan't have really a bad time at Wharton Lodge—if you're at Bunter Court."

"Bunter's going to make it a happy party at Wharton Lodge," remarked Bob.

"Eh? I shan't be there!"

"Yes—that's how!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Beast! I say, I'll have another of those sausage rolls—they're not bad! Not like those I get in hampers from home—but not bad! I say, you fellows, I'll let you see what the pater says in his letter."

"Carry on!"

Evidently, Billy Bunter had had some great news in that letter from home, and was anxious to let the fellows know what a gorgeous time he was going to have!

The Famous Five were affably interested! They were glad if Bunter was going to have a good time—especially if it would keep him at a safe distance from Wharton Lodge.

"Read that!" said Bunter. "I'll have another sausage roll while you read it."

The Famous Five looked at the letter. It ran:

"Bunter Villa,  
Redgate,  
Surrey.

"Dear William, — I have made arrangements for your Christmas vacation which will, I think, be a very novel and beneficial experience for you. As your brother Sammy and your sister Bessie will be away, I have made this arrangement with a view to you only. As it seems unlikely that you will have any time to spare, I may request your Form-master to excuse you the usual holiday task on this occasion.—Your affectionate father, W. S. BUNTER."

"Sounds good!" remarked Bob Cherry.

"What-ho!" grinned Bunter. "Fancy getting out of the holiday task, you know—no time to spare for it! Parties and shows all the time—what?"

"Looks like it!" said Harry.

"Gratters, old fat bean!"

"The gratterfulness is terrific!"

"The pater doesn't give any particu-

lars," remarked Bunter. "But you can see it's going to be gorgeous! Sorry you fellows ain't getting something like it—he, he, he!"

"Oh, we'll worry along somehow!" said Harry, laughing.

"You can think of me, rolling round dozens of shows and having the time of my life while you're pottering around in your little place," smiled Bunter. "I say, got any more sausage rolls?"

"You've had the lot!"

"Well, I think you fellows might have laid in more than half a dozen sausage rolls when you ask a fellow to tea."

"Nobody asked you, sir, she said!" chanted Bob Cherry.

"Well, I'm not asking you to Bunter Court, anyhow!" retorted Bunter. "You can have your mob all to yourself at your humble home, Wharton."

"Thanks!"

"If I have a spare evening, I might give you a ring!" said Bunter. "I dare say you could get your uncle to run you across in his Ford—it is a Ford, isn't it?"

"No—it isn't a Ford!"

"Oh, I thought it was, old fellow! Sorry! Don't come over unless I give you a ring, though—I don't want a crowd of louts butting in unexpectedly when I may have nobby friends there."

Johnny Bull picked up half a loaf! But he laid it down again! After all, it was Christmas-tide; and they weren't going to see Bunter again till next term!

"If I can give you an evening, I'll let you know!" said Bunter. "It may be possible! I can only say I'll do my best!"

"Don't bother, old fat man! The fact is, we'd rather forget you till next term, if you don't mind."

"I mean to say, on second thoughts, I couldn't possibly have you over—not with my nobby friends about! It would hardly do."

"You fat ass——"

"Sorry, and all that—but it wouldn't do!" said Bunter firmly. "I can know you at school—a chap can know anybody at school! In the home circle it's a different matter! A chap has to draw the line somewhere! I draw it there! I shall have to give you a complete miss these hols! You can't expect to stick on to a chap——"

"Like this half-loaf, Bunter?" asked Johnny Bull, picking it up again.

"Eh? No!"

"You're going to have it, if you're still inside this study when I've counted three."

"You cheeky beast——"

"One!" said Johnny.

"You needn't get your back up simply because I'm going to have a gorgeous time while you——"

"Two!"

"While you're pottering about in Wharton's measly little place——"

"Three!"

"And while I'm on the subject, I can jolly well say—— Wow!"

Bang!

The half-loaf, smiting the best filled waistcoat at Greyfriars School, cut short Bunter's remarks. Bunter roared.

"Ow! Yow! Wow! Beast! Look here——"

"Now let him have the teapot!" said Frank Nugent.

Billy Bunter did not wait for the teapot! He quitted Study No. 1 in one bound and slammed the door after him.

Then a fat voice squeaked through the keyhole:

"Yah! I'm going to have a gorgeous time, and you're going to be left out in the cold, so yah to you!"



After which, Bunter departed; the fat Owl ceased from troubling and the weary were at rest!

### BUNTER THE SNOWBALLER!

"WHO'S that for?"  
"Eh? Oh! That beast Lamb!"

Greyfriars School gleamed with white on the morning of break-up day. Snow had fallen steadily throughout the night; and in the frosty December dawn roofs and walls, and leafless branches, were white and gleaming.

Plenty of fellows were snowballing—but it was rather surprising to Bob Cherry to come on Billy Bunter carefully kneading a huge snowball by the corner of the gym. Bunter, generally, preferred a warm frowst by a fireside, on a cold and frosty morning.

"Lamb!" repeated Bob. "Snowballing our Pet Lamb?"

"Pet Lamb be blowed!" grunted Bunter. "Look how he pitched into me the other day—whopping me like billy-ho, when that man Locke butted in and stopped him! I owe him one, see!"

"He hardly ever whops," said Bob. "He's quite a harmless ass, old fat man! Give him a miss!"

"I'll watch it!" said Bunter. "He's gone round that corner, see? I'm waiting for him to come back!"

"But—"  
"Don't jaw—I don't want him to hear anybody here!" said Bunter irritably. "I want to get him right in the chivvy as soon as he shows up—and cut, see, before he sees who it was."

"But—"  
"Oh, shut up!" urged Bunter. "I believe I can hear him coming!"

Bunter gripped his big snowball and watched, his eyes, and spectacles, fastened on the corner of the building round which he expected Mr. Lamb to appear.

Bob Cherry obligingly shut up! Really, he did not quite approve of snowballing the Pet Lamb. True, the Lamb had, once or twice, shown that he had a fierce temper hidden under his sleepy, docile manner.

Since the affair of Skinner, the Remove had not ragged the Lamb quite so unmercifully. But, as a rule, Lamb was the easiest-going master at Greyfriars; and the Remove generally had an easy time with him.

Still, it was Bunter's business; and Bunter, undoubtedly, had a grievance against the Lamb. So Bob shut up and looked on.

Bunter watched the corner! He had seen Mr. Lamb, taking a little walk in the frosty morning, pass that corner—so it was natural to suppose that when he turned back he would pass it again.

Bunter was going to get him with that snowball as soon as he appeared and then bolt round the other corner before he was spotted. A big snowball, smashing right in his face, would, Bunter considered, cramp the Lamb's style long enough for him to get clear.

A sound of tramping in the snow approached the corner.

Billy Bunter lifted the big snowball high in the air.

The tramping sounded as if the unseen one was coming at a trot! The Lamb might, perhaps, be trotting, that freezing morning, to keep himself warm. But Bob Cherry was smitten by a doubt.

"Hold on—" he began.  
"Shut up!" hissed Bunter. "You'll warn him!"

"But—"  
"Shut up, you fathead!"

A trotting figure shot past the corner of the gym.

Bunter's fat arm swept through the air and the snowball whizzed.

It was a short range! Even Bunter could not miss at the distance. That snowball crashed on the side of a face.

There was a roar of surprise and rage as the trotting figure went spinning.

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Bob Cherry. "Smithy!"

Bunter was already running! He

## CHEERY CHATTER!

By BOB CHERRY

*William Wibley, our tame actor, is taking up cooking in his spare time and has invented a new jelly. He wishes, however, to deny the rumour that he is changing his name to William Wobbly.*

*Micky Desmond has tried to help himself to Mrs. Mimble's prize roast turkey on two occasions without success. It is thought that at the third attempt he is almost certain to get the "bird."*

*In the course of an argument on the merits of coal and wood for the Yuletide fire, Bolsover major said he preferred to keep warm by means of a punch-ball. He evidently favours the Christmas "log"!*

*Smithy and Redwing have bought a box of Christmas crackers. Optimists believe that they are at present making another attempt to "pull together."*

*I have been asked if Gostling seemed scared when he was buried under a fall of snow from the School House roof. Well, he certainly turned very white.*

*Dire penalties are threatened to the purloiner who has been pinching sage and onions from Loder's study. It is understood that Loder intends to knock the stuffing out of him!*

*Billy Bunter expresses the view that the more eggs you put in a Christmas pudding, the better it is. They certainly take a lot of beating.*

*Stott hopes to celebrate end-of-term by helping Skinner to fix up a booby-trap in the prefects' room. Go ahead, Stott! You're almost bound to get a "kick" out of it!*

*Skinner recently put mustard and pepper in Temple's mince pies. He must have felt like wishing him the condiments of the sneeze-on!*

*Here's wishing you all the brightest and best yourselves, chums!*

had not even observed that it was Herbert Vernon-Smith he had got with that snowball.

Mr. Lamb, if he was coming back that way had not yet come. Smithy, taking a trot in the keen morning air, had turned up on that spot at an unfortunate moment.

"Oh! Ooogh! What—who—" roared the enraged Bounder as he rolled headlong in snow, up-ended by that sudden and unexpected crash

"Oh, that fat goat!" gasped Bob. "Ha, ha, ha!"

Bunter vanished round a corner of the building, going strong.

Vernon-Smith scrambled to his feet, gouged snow from his eyes, and glared round in towering wrath for the snowballer.

Bob Cherry was there—grinning! Nobody else was there—a fat figure had just vanished!

The Bounder made a rush at Bob.

"Think it's funny, knocking a chap over with a snowball!" he roared. "You can have some yourself."

And he grasped Bob and hooked him over, rolling headlong, and jammed his face in piled snow.

"Ooogh!" gasped Bob. "Stop it, you ass!"

"Have some more!" growled Smithy, gripping Bob by the back of the neck and grinding his face in snow.

"Urrrgh!" Bob struggled frantically. "Gurrgh! Woooooogh!"

"Like it yourself?" grinned the Bounder.

"Wurrgh! Leggo! You mad ass, it wasn't me buzzed the—grooogh—snowball—ooogh—you blithering idiot—grooogh!"

"Oh, my hat! Wasn't it?" gasped Smithy.

Bob sat up, spluttering. He clawed at snow, in which he was clothed like a garment! He was of the snow snowy. He sat and scraped snow off his features and cut of his hair and his ears. Herbert Vernon-Smith stared down at him.

"Who was it, then?" he demanded.

"Find out, blow you! Ooogh! Don't go—I'm just going to smash you, as soon as I get up—grooogh!"

But Smithy, grinning, cut off. Bob was left spluttering for breath and combing off snow.

Billy Bunter had made good his escape. Bunter did not stop running till he was at a safe distance; then he came to a breathless halt in the quad with a cheery fat grin on his face.

"Been taking exercise, old fat bean?" asked Harry Wharton.

Bunter chuckled.  
"He, he, he! I had to cut pretty fast!" he grinned. "I've got that rotten cad with a snowball near the gym—Lamb, you know—"

"Lamb!" ejaculated Harry Wharton.

At a little distance—unobserved by the short-sighted fat Owl—Mr. Lamb, in coat and hat, was ambling sedately—not looking at all as if he had been recently snowballed.

"Yes—that swab Lamb!" grinned Bunter. "Got him right in the chivvy with a snowball, you know! He never saw me! He, he, he! The beast—"

"He will see you now—and hear you, too, if you don't shut up, you fat ass!" exclaimed Wharton. "He's almost behind you—"

"Oh, don't be funny!" said Bunter. "You can't pull my leg! I left him sprawling—knocked end-wise by a snowball! He, he, he! I dare say he's still rolling over by the gym! He, he, he!"

"You fat ass, I tell you—"

"He, he, he! That rotten swab Lamb—I'll teach him to pitch into a chap!" grinned Bunter. "The cad was whopping me no end, and Ferrers Locke grabbed him and stopped him—the rotter! That sneaking swab Lamb—"

"Shut up!" breathed Wharton. "He can hear you—"

"He, he, he! Don't be a goat, you know! Lot I care if he hears me!" said Bunter, valiant in the assurance that Lamb was nowhere near at hand.

"Think I'm afraid of that cad Lamb? Let him speak to me; I'll let him have a snowball right in the eye! Fat lot I care for a sneaking worm like Lamb!"

"Bunter!" came a sharp voice. "Oh!" gasped the fat Owl. He knew that voice.

Bunter spun round like a fat humming top. His little round eyes seemed to leap through his big round spectacles at the sight of Mr. Lamb.

"Oh crikey!" he gasped. How Lamb had got there with no sign of snow on him when Bunter had left him—as he believed, at least—sprawling in snow on the other side of the gym, was a deep mystery to the fat Owl. He simply goggled at the art master.

"Bunter, I heard you——"  
"Oh lor! I—I wasn't saying anything, sir!" spluttered Bunter. "I never opened my mouth—I mean, I wasn't calling you a sneaking worm, sir! I—I was speaking about another sneaking worm, sir—not you!"

"Kindly come to my study, Bunter!" said Mr. Lamb.  
"Oh scissors!"  
Five minutes later Billy Bunter emerged from the House again wriggling. He did not appear to have enjoyed that visit to Mr. Lamb's study. He wriggled, he gasped, and he mumbled and moaned.

Herbert Vernon-Smith, coming to the House, paused to look on at the performance.

"Licked?" he asked.  
"Yes! Wow! Yes!" moaned Bunter. "That awful beast Lamb! He heard me calling him a—wow, wow, wow—a sneaking worm—Wow! I never knew he was there! Wow! I thought he was the other side of the gym! Wow! But it can't have been him I got with that snowball! Ow!"

"Eh? Did you get somebody with a snowball at the corner of the gym?" asked Smithy with interest.

"Ow! Yes! I thought it was Lamb, but it must have been—ow!—somebody else; I don't know whom! Yaroooh! Wharrer you kicking me for, you beast?" yelled Bunter.

Why Smithy kicked him Bunter had no idea; but he knew that Smithy did—hard!

### THE MAN IN THE DARK!

"COLD!" remarked Harry Wharton.  
"The coldfulness is terrific!" agreed Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, with a shiver.

"We shall get warm walking."  
"The warmfulness would be a boonful blessing!"

It was almost as dark as a hat. The little town of Wimford, in Surrey, was blacked out, like all other places. It was yet early, but after the fall of the winter evening all was dark and gloomy.

Greyfriars School had broken up that day. Greyfriars fellows were scattering to the four corners of the kingdom—most of them, probably, finding rather unusual difficulties in transit under war conditions on the railways.

Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh had arrived at Wimford station considerably later than they had expected—or, at least, hoped. Night had fallen grim and dark and snowy.

Looking out of the station into the darkened street, the snow-packed road, and heavy flakes whirling on the bitter wind, they did not find it an attractive prospect.

No car could get out on such roads; no taxi was to be had for love or money; and clearly the car had not been able to push through from Wharton Lodge, for there was no sign of it in the street—or of any other car.

"We shall have to leave our bags here, to be sent on, and walk," said Harry.

"The pony of esteemed Shanks is the sine qua non!" agreed Hurree Singh.  
"I'll cut in and phone to uncle."

Wharton went back into the station to telephone to Colonel Wharton at Wharton Lodge and tell him that the two were walking; then he rejoined his dusky chum.

The two had travelled together. Johnny Bull, Bob Cherry, and Frank Nugent were to join them later for the holidays.

"Real Christmas weather, anyhow," said Harry, as he turned up the collar of his coat.

"Terrifically so!" murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. Real Christmas weather was not the kind enjoyed most by the junior from India's coral strand.

"Might be worse," said Harry, laughing. "Might have Bunter to roll along through this!"

"That would be preposterously worse!" agreed the Nabob of Bhanipur.

"We can cut off a good bit of the distance, too, by going Redgate way," said Harry, as they started. "As we're walking, there's no need to stick to the road; it's a good bit longer round by the road. I know every inch of the way; we can cut across country by short cuts."

"The shortfulness of the cuts will be preposterously welcome, my esteemed chum!"

The two schoolboys tramped away in the gloom. For a short distance they followed the Wimford road, and then Harry Wharton opened a field gate—thick with snow—and they followed a path.

It was dark enough in the town; outside the town it was black. Not a star was to be seen in the sky; the blackness of the night was only relieved by the glimmer of endless snow stretching away across fields and hedges.

The field path led into a lane—pleasant and shady in summer weather, now black as a hat, thick with snow, lined by white-carpeted hedges.

"Know this place, Inky?" asked Harry.

"The knowfulness is not great," admitted Hurree Singh.

Harry Wharton laughed.  
"We've cycled through here often enough in the summer hols," he said. "This is Redgate Lane. If you follow it far enough it leads you into the Redgate road, where that gorgeous residence Bunter Court dominates the landscape."

Hurree Singh chuckled. He had seen Bunter Court—which diminished to Bunter Villa on close inspection.

"But that's miles and miles," added Harry. "We shan't go anywhere near Bunter Court. The only building we shall pass is that old moat house that I showed you last summer."

"I remember," assented the nabob. "The haunted house," said Harry, laughing. "But we won't stop to look at the giddy ghosts this time. We should see the old place from the lane if it was light; perhaps we may now if the jolly old ghost is walking—it's said to have a spectral light."

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh came to a pause and looked back. Wharton stopped also.

"What's up?" he asked.

"I think somebody else is on this

road," said the nabob. "I think I heard—Yes! Listen!"

Wharton listened.  
From the darkness behind them came a sound of tramping feet—distant, but drawing near. Someone, as yet unseen, was on that lonely road in the thick snow and darkness.

"Blessed if I expected to see a soul on a night like this!" said Harry. "This is about the loneliest spot in Surrey in the winter. Nothing but pastureland for miles. Nobody's lived at the old moat house for centuries; it's mostly in ruins. Come on!"

"If it should be some esteemed and execrable tramp in this lonely spot," murmured the nabob.

"Oh!" Harry Wharton nodded. It was not a pleasant spot for two schoolboys to fall in with some roadside rough in the dark. "May as well let him pass, whoever he is. Stand back in the hedge."

They backed into a gap in the snowy hedge, to wait for the unseen wayfarer to pass.

The tramping feet came steadily nearer, and in the blackness of the lane a shadow loomed up against the white snow.

They made out dimly a man muffled up in a thick overcoat and muffler, with his hat pulled low over his brows. What he was like, if they could have seen him more clearly, they did not know. He was little more than a shadow.

He tramped on, but as he passed the spot where they stood in the hedge some faint sound seemed to reach him, and he stopped and turned to face the gap in the hedge where they stood.

"Is that you, Rat?" he asked.

The two juniors started.  
Evidently the man in the dark had heard some faint rustle in the hedge, and knew that someone was there, and it seemed he expected to see someone in the vicinity, whom he called by the peculiar name of "Rat." But what made the juniors start was the familiarity of the voice.

It was a voice they were sure they had heard before a good many times in the past week or two—a voice they had heard only that day at Greyfriars School.

"Well, my hat!" exclaimed Harry Wharton, in astonishment. "Is that Mr. Lamb?"

He stepped out of the hedge.  
He heard a muffled exclamation as he did so. But the shadowy figure did not speak again. It passed on quickly, and disappeared into the darkness ahead.

"Mr. Lamb!" called out Wharton, in surprise. "It's all right; we're Greyfriars fellows going home. I'm Wharton."

There was no reply, and the hurried tramping died away into silence.

The two juniors stared at one another.

"Nervous ass, whoever he is!" said Harry. "We seem to have frightened him. But wasn't that the Pet Lamb's bleat, Inky?"

Hurree Jamset Ram Singh nodded.

"I think so," he said. "I am sure that it was the bleat of the esteemed Lamb."

"I'd bet on it!" said Harry. "He was about the Lamb's size, too, from what I could see of him. Blessed if I can make out why he didn't stop! He must have heard me call out who we were."

The half-seen wayfarer, whether it was Mr. Lamb or not, had disappeared into the winter night.

Both the juniors were sure that it was Mr. Lamb, the art master of Greyfriars, who had passed them in the dark.



“Who-oo-whoooooop!” howled Bunter, as he pitched backwards and sat down in the snow with a bump. A moment later the door of the caravan opened and a man looked out. “Who are you, and what the dickens do you want?” he snapped, in a voice as sharp as his features.

“I suppose he lives about here somewhere,” said Harry. “May be walking to Redgate.” He chuckled. “May have taken us for tramps—same as we did him—and was too nery to hear what I said. Bet you it was Lamb!”

The two juniors pushed on. Of the shadowy wayfarer they saw and heard nothing more.

At a little distance from the spot where they had stopped Harry Wharton came to a halt again at a place where a crumbling old wall, thick with snow, replaced the hedge by the lane. In that old wall was a wide open space, where a gateway once had been.

“Look!” said Harry, in a low voice. From the darkness off the road, came a glimmer of light.

The captain of the Greyfriars Remove stared at it, startled.

“A cottage?” asked the nabob.

“There’s no building anywhere near here, except the old moat house,” answered Harry. “That light must be in the old moat house, or near it. But nobody’s lived there for donkey’s years. Who the dickens is wandering round the haunted house on a night like this?”

“Perhaps the esteemed ghost,” murmured the nabob.

“Rot! But it’s jolly queer!”

For a long minute the two juniors stood staring at the light that glimmered in the distant darkness through the falling snow. Then they resumed their way, and the glimmer faded into the blackness behind them.

Half an hour later they tramped into Wharton Lodge, where Colonel Wharton and Aunt Amy, and a bright fire and a cosy supper, welcomed them—

glad to get in out of the darkness and the wind and the snow.

### GORGEOUS!

“WILLIAM!”

“Oh, yes!”

Billy Bunter was cracking Brazil nuts and chewing the same as fast as a pair of nut-crackers and a pair of fat jaws could work.

But he transferred some of his attention to Mr. Bunter as that plump gentleman addressed him.

Supper was over at Bunter Villa, or, as the fat Owl would have described it, dinner was over at Bunter Court.

No stately butler had marshalled a corps of well-trained footmen, though Billy Bunter had often alluded casually to such things at school. Butler and footmen had unfortunately no existence outside Billy Bunter’s fertile imagination.

Still, it had been quite a good supper, which was the chief thing. All the more ample, perhaps, because Brother Sammy and Sister Bessie were not present.

Sammy had gone to an uncle and Bessie to an aunt for Christmas, and if Billy missed them it was not to such an extent as to affect his appetite.

Now, having still a little space to fill, Bunter was filling it with nuts, while Mr. Bunter sat by the fireside and smoked a cigar.

Bunter, deep as was his interest in the nuts, was quite interested in what his plump parent was going to say. He was going to hear something about those special arrangements for the

vacation, and he was quite keen to hear.

So far, he knew nothing of those special arrangements, except that he was likely to be too busily occupied to have time for a holiday task.

Visions of innumerable shows, of trips here and trips there, parties where there would be lots of grub floated before Bunter’s fat mind.

For once he had not been keen to plant himself out for Christmas.

Lord Mauleverer of the Remove had not had to dodge the fat Owl. Harry Wharton & Co. had been told where they got off. Bunter had no use for them with this bright prospect before him.

“Now, William, give me your attention,” said Mr. Bunter, crossing one plump knee over the other, and taking the cigar from his mouth.

“Oh, yes, I’m listening!” assented Bunter, cramming another Brazil into his mouth. “I’m awfully keen to know what we’re doing this Christmas.”

“I hope you will continue to be keen, William.”

“Oh, rather!” said Bunter.

“In present circumstances,” said Mr. Bunter, “I am not in a position to undertake expenditure of any kind.”

“Eh?”

Bunter blinked at him. Money was often tight in the Bunter household. Since income tax had gone up to seven-and-six, it had naturally been tighter than before.

Bunter had already observed that there was no longer a gardener about the place, and that two maids had been reduced to one. Money, of course,

could not be spent twice. If the Chancellor of the Exchequer collected it in the form of income tax, obviously it could not be paid out in wages.

Still, if Bunter was going to have that gorgeous time he had been anticipating, clearly there would have to be some expenditure. So he gave his plump parent a puzzled blink.

"Your brother Samuel," said Mr. Bunter, "will pass the Christmas vacation with your Uncle George. Your sister Bessie will pass it with Aunt Amelia, where your mother is now staying."

He paused.

"But you, William, are at home. Have you had any experience in digging, William?"

"Digging!" repeated Bunter blankly.

"Or hoeing?" asked Mr. Bunter.

"Hoeing?"

"Or planting vegetables?"

"Pip-pip-planting vegetables!" repeated Bunter dazedly. "N-n-no! They've fixed up some allotments at the school, and some of the fellows grub about on them. I haven't done anything."

"Are you lazy, William?"

"Eh? Oh, no!"

"It is rather unfortunate that you have not taken part in such very useful and meritorious work when you had the opportunity, William. The experience would have been very useful to you now."

"W-w-w-would it?"

Bunter could only blink. He was not in the least eager to acquire experience in the line of digging, hoeing, or planting vegetables. Neither could he see how such experience would have helped him to enjoy a gorgeous time in the hols.

"I have had to part with the gardener, William. His wages now go in increased taxation. At the same time, I have decided, like many other persons in these distressful days, to grow vegetables for the household, so far as may be practicable."

"Oh! Yes!" mumbled the puzzled Owl. "Have you?"

"At this season of the year," continued Mr. Bunter, "little can be done except in the way of preparing the ground. But as the garden is to be turned into a kitchen garden, growing the largest possible quantity of vegetables, there is an immense amount of digging to be done."

"How is the digging going to be done without a gardener to do it?" asked Bunter, quite mystified.

"You are going to do it, William."

"Eh?"

"That is what I have planned for you, this vacation."

"What?"

"It will, as I mentioned in my letter, be a novel and beneficial experience for you, William."

Bunter gazed at his parent.

"Had you, as is so often the case, spent the holidays with some of your school friends, it would be a different matter," remarked Mr. Bunter. "But I am glad you will spend the holidays at home this time, William. The healthy exercise of digging will be, I think, a great benefit to you."

"Oh crikey!"

"There is nearly an acre to be dug."

"Oh lor'!"

"I shall see that you are excused your holiday task, in view of the fact that you will be so busily occupied."

"Oh gum!"

"To-morrow morning," said Mr. Bunter, "you will commence. I shall mark out a space which I shall expect

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you to turn over during the day—"

"Oh!"

"And I trust, William, that you will set yourself to the task cheerfully and contentedly and find real enjoyment in this useful work."

Words failed Billy Bunter.

This was the gorgeous time he was going to have!

He was going to wield fork and spade from early morn till dewy eve, getting an acre of ground ready for vegetables!

It was for this—this—that he had turned down Wharton Lodge for the Christmas holidays!

He could not speak.

He could only gaze at his cheerful parent.

"In war-time," said Mr. Bunter, "everyone must expect to exert himself. All useless expenditure must be cut down. Luxuries must be dispensed with." Mr. Bunter paused to select another cigar and light it. "No selfish indulgence of any kind, William!" he continued. "Spartan simplicity and hard work, William—that must be the watchword."

"I—I—I say—"

"I hope you look forward to this prospect with pleasure, William?"

"Oh! Yes! Fine!" groaned Bunter.

"I—I—I don't think there's anything I—I should really enjoy more! But—but I promised Wharton—"

"What?"

"You—you see, he begged me so hard to go to Wharton Lodge, I—I felt that I couldn't refuse!" gasped Bunter. "I—I hardly know how he'll take it if—he doesn't see me at Wharton Lodge to-morrow. He—he's relying on me to—to make his Christmas party go, you know. I—I don't see how I can let him down."

"If such is the case, William, I shall, of course, not expect you to break an arrangement made with your school friends—"

"You—you see, I—I can't let the chap down—a—a—a Public school man never lets a chap down!" gasped Bunter.

"Quite so!" agreed Mr. Bunter. "In that case, of course, I shall place no obstacle in the way of your joining your friends, William. If this has been definitely settled—"

"Oh, absolutely definitely! If—if I turn him down I—I shouldn't like to face him next term."

"Very well, the matter is settled," said Mr. Bunter.

The matter being settled, Billy Bunter ought really to have looked relieved and pleased. Instead of which he looked worried. He was going to get out of that gorgeous time at Bunter Court if he could plant himself out at Wharton Lodge. But could he?

There was a doubt. It was a worrying doubt. Bunter was almost too worried to continue operations on the Brazil nuts. But not quite. Worried as he was, those Brazils disappeared to the last nut!

#### COMPLIMENTS OF THE SEASON

"MASTER HARRY!"

"Yes, Wells?"

"The telephone, sir," said the butler of Wharton Lodge, with a slight smile.

"Oh, all right!"

Harry Wharton and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh were standing before the log fire in the hall at Wharton Lodge, in the morning, discussing plans for the day.

Wharton, remembering that mysterious glimmering light at the ruined moat house in Redgate Lane, was

rather keen to visit the old place and scout round, as he expressed it, and the nabob agreed.

But the weather was far from propitious. Snow had turned to a sleety drizzle, and the outlook was unattractive. They had agreed that that excursion should be left till later in the day, when the weather would have had a chance of mending, and at that point Wells came to announce that Master Harry was wanted on the telephone.

Wharton went to the telephone cabinet, which opened off the hall. He picked up the receiver, expecting to hear the voice of Bob Cherry, Frank Nugent, or Johnny Bull.

But it was none of those voices that came back in response to his cheery "Hallo!" What came back was a familiar fat squeak.

"That you, Harry, old chap?"

"Is that Bunter?"

"Yes, old fellow!"

"Merry Christmas, Bunter! Don't punish the turkey too severely!"

"Oh, really, Wharton—"

"And keep down the mince pies to a hundred a day, old fat man!"

"Look here—"

"Have a gorgeous time, old fat bean! Getting on with it already?"

"Oh! Yes! I mean, no! The fact is—"

Harry Wharton grinned over the telephone. He fancied he could guess what the "fact" was before Bunter told him. That gorgeous time that the fat Owl had been expecting had missed fire somehow!

"Well, good-bye, old chap. Merry Christmas!" he said.

"I say, don't ring off! I—I want to—"

"To wish me a merry Christmas! Thanks! Good-bye!"

"Yes! No! Hold on! I say, old fellow, dear old chap, the fact is, I—I've got a day or two to spare—"

"I was afraid so."

"Beast! I—I mean, do listen to a chap, old fellow! I'm going to have a gorgeous time, as I told you—simply terrific! Expenditure is simply nothing to us! The pater hasn't sacked the gardener or anything of that kind. There's two new gardeners—I mean, three—as well as several new footmen since I was home last."

"Fine! Good-bye!"

"Hold on! There's going to be great things here—a terrific time—money flowing like water. But—but it isn't starting just yet, and—and as the matter stands, I could give you a couple of days—perhaps three—"

"Don't bother!"

"I suppose you could send the Ford over—"

"Sorry, we haven't a Ford."

"Well, whatever the thing is—I never notice the make of a car unless it's a Rolls-like ours. Can you send it over for me?"

"Hardly!"

"I suppose you'd like to see me, Wharton?"

"Not at all!"

"Beast!"

"Thanks! Good-bye!"

"Hold on! Of course, you know I was only joking the other day in the study. I said I couldn't stand Bull. Well, I can, you know; that's all right!"

"It isn't! Bull couldn't stand you!"

"I may have said that old Bob charged about like a hippopotamus! The truth is, old fellow, I'm longing to hear his voice again!"

"You'll hear it next term."

"I may have said I wasn't keen on niggers—but old Inky, after all, isn't what you'd call a nigger, is he?"

"Not what I should call a nigger, certainly. I shouldn't call anybody a nigger, not being a fooling, footling, frabjous fathead!"

"Beast! I mean, what time would it suit you for me to pop in?"

"Well, say Christmas, 1999!"

"You silly idiot!"

"Not before then! Good-bye!"

"Hold on, you silly rotter—I mean, don't ring off, old fellow. Look here, to tell you the truth—"

"Don't crack the telephone!"

"Eh? How could I crack the telephone, you fathead?"

"By giving it such a shock!"

"You—you silly blithering idiot! Look here, to tell you the truth, I'm a bit fed up with all this wild gaiety and splashing money about—I really should prefer a quiet time with my old pals under a humble roof!"

"Better ring off, then—"

"Eh? Why?"

"And ring up those old pals. Who are they? Anybody I know?"

"Beast! I've a jolly good mind to turn you down altogether and accept old Mauly's invitation to Mauleverer Towers."

"Do!"

"Well, it's rather too late now—"

"Better late than never!"

"If you can't send over the Ford, or the Austin, or whatever the thing is—"

"I certainly shan't send over the thing, whatever it is!" agreed the captain of the Remove. "Good-bye!"

"Hold on a minute! Look here. I can't walk ten miles—"

"Hardly! You can't walk ten yards."

"I've got to get over somehow, fathead, if I'm coming at all."

"That's an easy one; you're not coming at all!"

"He, he, he! I don't mind your little jokes, old chap—still, you might be serious for a minute. I could take a ticket to Wimford, but—but—"

"But it would have to be paid for! I know—frightfully awkward!"

"If you will meet me at Wimford Station it will be all right!"

"Suppose you get copped travelling without a ticket before you get as far as Wimford? Don't risk it, old fat man! Suppose they sent you to Borstal?"

"Beast!"

"I've heard that one! Good-bye!"

"Hold on! I'll manage it somehow, old chap, rather than let you down over the hols. I shall have to walk the last bit—but after all, I'm a good walker. I suppose it will be all right if I don't carry a bag—you can lend me some things."

"I can lend you a boot! Inky will lend you another boot! Nothing else."

"Beast!"

"Good-bye!"

"Rotter!"

Harry Wharton put up the receiver. Apparently he had had enough of William George Bunter's entertaining and genial conversation.

He rejoined Hurree Janset Ram Singh in the hall.

The nabob's dark eyes turned on him inquiringly.

"The esteemed Bob?" he asked.

"No; the unesteemed Bunter!" said Harry Wharton, laughing. "Something seems to have skewed with that gorgeous time, and he has remembered his old pals. Luckily, he hasn't the fare to Wimford, so it's all right."

Buzzzzzz!

"Oh, my hat, there's the phone again! Bob this time, I expect!"

Harry Wharton went back to the telephone.

"Hallo, that you, Bob?" he called.

"Eh? It's me, old fellow!" came a fat squeak. "We seem to have got cut off somehow, Harry, old chap."

"You fat idiot—"

"I thought I'd mention about getting my room ready—you're so jolly forgetful you might forget it—"

"No 'might' about it—I shall forget it!"

"I can't say exactly when I shall blow in, old chap. All I can say is that you'll see me to-day—"

"Look out for a boot, if I do!"

"Remember me to the old fossil and the old frump—"

"What?"

"I mean, Uncle James and Aunt Amy—"

"Oh, you mean Uncle James and Aunt Amy, do you? I wish you were at this end of the wire, Bunter!"

"Do you really, old chap?"

"Yes—I'd kick you all the way back home!"

"Beast!"

Wharton jammed back the receiver. Billy Bunter, at the other end, did not ring up again. He was making his preparations for starting.

### INHOSPITABLE!

"OH crikey!" groaned Billy Bunter.

The fat Owl of the Remove blinked round him, with a weary and dismal blink. The view of the surrounding landscape seemed to afford him no comfort or satisfaction whatever.

Bunter had started after lunch. He had packed in a good lunch, to last him until dinner at Wharton Lodge. In the circumstances, he could not quite tell how long the journey was likely to take.

Cash was short. Mr. Bunter had left for the City before Billy turned out in the morning so there was no chance of renewing supplies in that quarter. But after Mr. Bunter's remarks on the subject of expenditure, there did not seem a chance, anyhow.

Bunter planned carefully. He took a ticket to Greenford, which was about two-thirds of the distance. That exhausted his financial resources. Probably he entertained a hope of sticking in the train, running on to Wimford, and dodging out at that station unnoticed. "Bilking" was not a new experience to the unscrupulous fat Owl. But a railway official had wanted to see the tickets at Greenford—and Bunter, with deep feelings, had had to alight.

After that, it was Shanks' pony for the remaining few miles.

It was worth the walk, even in such wintry weather, to escape making himself useful in the agricultural line during the hols. Nevertheless, it was awful.

Bunter plugged through snow and slush. But now, as the early December dusk shadowed the fields and hillocks of snow, he had come to a halt!

He was in Redgate Lane. But exactly where, in that long, winding, almost endless Surrey lane, he did not know. He blinked round for a landmark.

He had stayed at Wharton Lodge often enough, and fancied that he knew the country round about. But it seemed altogether different in its snowy mantle. Snow-covered earth, snow-carpeted hedges, frozen trees, all looked much the same to the hapless fat Owl's eyes and spectacles. And he wanted to get in before dark!

Sleet, which had fallen all day, had ceased towards sunset; there was a brief spell of almost fine weather comparatively. But that brief spell was deceptive. It was followed by a tremendous fall of snow.

Snow came down in lumps—in masses!

Bunter blinked round through whirling snow and groaned.

And then, to his relief, he sighted a familiar object.

In the distance was an ancient building—mainly roofless, surrounded by an old moat now banked with snow. Bunter had seen that building, or remnant of a building, before, when he had been at Wharton Lodge in the summer.

It looked different in its winter garment, but he recognised it—it was the ruined and deserted old moat house, said to be in Chancery—at all events, never occupied, reputed to be haunted, and seldom or never visited.

He knew where he was now, and the distance he had still to cover.

It was hardly half a mile to Wharton Lodge—if he could trundle through piles of snow in the fast-falling, heavy flakes.

He restarted after the interval, dragging one foot after another, slipping and stumbling, progressing at a snail-rate pace.

If there had been any habitation at hand, he would have asked for shelter. But he knew that the nearest building to the old moat house was Wharton Lodge. He plugged on desperately.

But as he came to the spot where Wharton and the nabob, the previous night, had been brought to a halt by the glimmering light, he stopped.

In the daylight, dim as it was, Bunter could see what had been hidden from the two juniors in the darkness.

In the old, uncared for grounds of the moat house, between the building and a fringe of frosty trees, a caravan stood.

Bunter blinked at it.

It would not have been surprising to find a caravan there in the summer. But in the depth of winter, it was very surprising indeed. Certainly it was no weather for caravanning.

There was no sign of a horse or a motor. The caravan seemed to be a fixture; indeed, as he blinked at it, Bunter could see that a telephone-wire ran overhead.

That van was on the telephone, which looked as if somebody had taken up a permanent residence in that lonely spot without intending to move on.

Bunter had heard of people who lived in caravans and house-boats to dodge rates and taxes, so that explanation occurred to his mind.

Anyhow, it was plain that the caravan was occupied, for smoke was curling from the chimney. There was a stove inside, and a fire.

The mere thought of a fire drew the cold and shivering Owl like a magnet. He turned off the lane.

It was a very attractive idea to get shelter till that heavy flurry of snow passed off. And caravanners are often hospitable; they might stand Bunter something warm to park inside. In such a solitary spot, in such weather, they might be glad for a fellow to look in—Bunter hoped so, at least.

A trampled track in the snow, though partly obliterated by new flakes, led up from the lane to the caravan.

Bunter tramped along it hopefully.

He reached the steps of the caravan, banked round with snow. From the

interior, a murmuring sound of voices reached his ears.

More than one person was in the van. The fat Owl clambered up the steps. They were slippery with snow, and he stumbled.

He had intended to knock at the door. But he did not reach the door. He gave a loud howl as he pitched backwards, and sat down in the snow with a bump. "Woo-oo-whooooop!"

The sound of conversing voices in the caravan died away as that loud howl broke the silence.

A moment later the door was opened, or rather partly opened, and a man looked out. He wore a thick woollen jersey, a woollen muffler, and a cap. He stared down at Bunter.

Bunter blinked up at him. The man did not look much like an hospitable caravanner. He had a sharp face and a sharp nose and sharp eyes that reminded one of a rat. His sharp, rat-like eyes glinted at the blinking fat Owl.

"Who are you, and what the dickens do you want?" he snapped, in a voice as sharp as his features. "Get out of it!"

Bunter scrambled up. "I—I say, it's snowing!" he gasped. The man stared at him. Really, he did not need telling that, as the snow was coming down in masses, dashing on him, on the wind, as he looked out of the van.

"You come 'ere to tell me that?" he asked.

"Oh! No! But I say, can I sit down in the van a bit till it blows over?" gasped Bunter. "I've got half a mile or more to go—"

"No, you can't!" "I say, don't shut that door!" squeaked the fat Owl. "I say, it won't

hurt you to let a chap sit in the van for ten minutes or so— Beast!"

The door slammed.

### THE PHANTOM!

**B**ILLY BUNTER stood blinking at the snow-covered caravan with an enraged and exasperated blink.

"Beast!" he groaned.

The rat-faced man did not look a pleasant sort of customer. But, really, any man might have given a fellow shelter out of that blinding snowstorm. Such inhospitality was rather unusual, as well as unfeeling.

But the slam of the door told that there was nothing doing.

The fat Owl turned wearily away to resume his tramp.

But he stopped again. Hardly a dozen yards away was the old ruin; and though much of it was open to the weather, there was some sort of shelter to be had. The snow was coming down, as it seemed to Bunter, in cart-loads, and he had to get out of it, if he could.

Turning his back on the caravan, he plugged through thick snow towards the old moat house.

The ancient moat that surrounded it was, he remembered from having seen it in the summer, choked with rubble and earth—now hidden from sight under snow. It was easy enough to scramble across.

The front of the old house looked dismal and uninviting enough. Empty apertures showed where doors and windows had been—but of doors and windows hardly a trace remained.

Uninviting as it looked, it offered shelter.

Billy Bunter started scrambling across the old choked moat.

He slipped and stumbled, and rolled over two or three times, but he got across and dragged himself wearily into a flagged courtyard—now a sheet of snow.

Ahead of him was a great arched doorway giving admission to the building.

The weary fat Owl tramped in.

In the failing light he blinked round him. Most of the roof over the ancient hall was gone, and stacks of snow lay piled within. Heavy flakes were descending all round him.

"Oh crikey!" groaned Bunter.

This was not much better than the open air. But, dim as it was, he discerned a corner by an old shattered window where a portion of the roof seemed to be still intact.

He plugged across to that corner.

Here he was under shelter. The old worn flagstones of the floor were bare of snow, save for stray flakes carried there by the wind.

The shattered window formed a sort of seat; and Bunter sat in it, glad to rest his weary legs.

From this spot he could look out towards the lane, watch the weather, and wait for that wild flurry of snow to ease off.

He could see nothing of the caravan now, the rat-faced man's camping-ground being away to the right of the building.

He sat and watched the fast-falling snow, while the last gloam of the wintry sunlight disappeared and the dusk deepened.

Bunter wanted to get in before dark. But every time he blinked out into the snowstorm, he decided to wait a little longer. There was half a mile of lane to plug through before he reached the road on which Wharton Lodge stood—and half a mile in that blinding down-fall of snow was dismaying to think of. It could not last for ever.

Dusk deepened over the landscape, and within the ruined moat house the darkness was already black.

The fat Owl cast rather uneasy blinks round him in the thickening shadows.

So long as the light lasted, he had thought only of getting out of the heavy snowfall. But as the shadows deepened, and the wind howled eerily through old cracks and crannies, and masses of snow-laden ivy stirred and rustled, other thoughts came into his fat mind.

He remembered that the moat house was reputed to be haunted. Billy Bunter did not believe in ghosts—in the daytime, at least. But solitude and darkness and the wailing winter wind made a difference.

He had heard the legend, during a stay at Wharton Lodge; and it came back rather unpleasantly into his mind now—of an old miser who had once lived in the moat house, who had been robbed of his hoard, and whose phantom lurked in the dim old ruin, searching for his lost gold with a ghostly lamp, and rattling a bunch of ghostly keys!

Blinking round him in the dark, the fat Owl could almost imagine that he could discern a ghostly light twinkling in the gloom.

He blinked from the shattered casement again. It was now dark outside, though not so black as inside. But the snow was still falling thickly, and he was unwilling to venture out.

"Oh!" gasped Bunter suddenly.

The interior of the old building was now a black mass; he could not make out a single object; old walls, and fallen masonry, fragments of roof, were lost

# The Sneak of Rookwood



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No. 392

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in darkness. Through that blackness a light twinkled.

Bunter gazed at it, with palpitating heart.

Was it fancy?

It was not! The harder he stared, the more clearly he saw the light—moving slowly along in the darkness.

The fat junior shuddered from head to foot.

Of the figure that carried the light—if indeed it was a human figure at all, and not a bodiless phantom—he could see nothing. Nothing was visible save that slowly moving light in the blackness.

His teeth chattered.

Then, suddenly, it flashed into his mind—suppose it was somebody who, like himself, had pushed into the ruined mansion for shelter from the snow?

At that thought, the fat junior was relieved. Very likely that was it—and what he saw might be a pocket-torch. He called out:

"I say, who's that?"

The moving light came to a sudden stop. Whoever it was, he had heard the call and ceased to move.

"Who's there?" called out the fat Owl desperately.

The light disappeared.

Impenetrable blackness reigned. Not a sound came from the dark—not a voice—not a whisper! Dead silence, save for the eerie wail of the wind among the ruins, lay on the old moat house.

Billy Bunter felt his fat flesh creep.

Whoever it was, why did he not answer, if it was a being of flesh and blood?

Bunter had got off his seat in the window, and now stood leaning against the old stone, trembling in every fat limb! The heaviest snowstorm was better than this, but to get to the doorway he had to pass the spot where he had seen the light—and he dared not. The unfortunate fat Owl stood shaking from head to foot.

After what seemed an age, a sound came through the silence—a strange, metallic sound, like the clinking of a bunch of keys!

Clink, clink!

Bunter gave a gasp of utter terror.

It was said that the old miser's ghost clinked ghostly keys to unlock a phantom chest when it wandered with a spectral light seeking the vanished hoard. Now, echoing eerily in the gloom, the clinking of iron keys came to Bunter's fat ears.

The sound was between him and the dark doorway. It—whatever "it" was—was there, between him and escape.

Bunter leaned on the cold stone, almost palsied with fear.

Clink, clink, clink!

In utter terror he realised that the sound was approaching him in the darkness.

Clink, clink!

Slowly but surely that strange, eerie sound drew nearer. He heard no footsteps—he saw nothing in the blackness—but it was coming nearer, the ghostly keys rattling as it came.

A shriek of terror escaped the fat Owl. He turned to the shattered casement, and scrambled madly out. Terror lent him strength and energy; in a moment, or little more, he was outside and rolling over in the snow below.

Clink, clink!

The ghostly rattle of keys followed him. But he did not heed or hear it—he scrambled frantically up and rushed away—tearing at top speed through the darkness and the snow.

He stumbled in the old, choked moat, and rolled headlong—but he dragged

## COME INTO THE OFFICE, BOYS AND GIRLS!

**GREETINGS, chums!**  
*Here's to a very merry Christmas!*

*Thirty-one years—and thirty-one Christmas numbers—have passed by, and here we are with another—the greatest number of the whole year!*

*I do not propose to dwell upon the contents of this bumper number, but I feel that I cannot let it pass without saying a few words to my vast number of chums scattered the world over. My sincere wish to you all is that you will enjoy a merry Christmas, with lots of presents, good Christmas fare, and jolly parties. I am looking forward to being in the thick of festivities myself, and hope to pull a cracker with the youngest of 'em! If only it were possible for my vast army of chums to sit down at one big festive table, wouldn't we have the time of our lives? Nevertheless, although this cannot take place, I shall be with every one of my loyal readers in spirit, if not in the flesh, during this Christmas of 1939. Although, as I have said, I hope to make merry this festive season, I shall not lose sight of the fact that I have to prepare another programme of yarns for the new year. Take my word for it, too, chums, they're going to be better than ever. Frank Richards was never in better fettle than he is now!*

*I would like to mention a very important matter before I go any further. If you want it to be a really happy Christmas, the solution is—to buy a copy of the "HOLIDAY ANNUAL"! It's the best Christmas Annual bar none. Juniors of Greyfriars, St. Jim's and Rookwood figure in its splendid stories. Their exploits are exciting and amusing. There are many other topping features, too, calculated to delight the hearts of every boy and girl. This bumper feast of fun and fiction is now on sale at all newsagents and bookstalls at five shillings.*

*Now to wind up with a word or two about next week's programme. The piece-resistance will be*

**"THE MAN OF MYSTERY!"**

*the next yarn in our grand Christmas series. Billy Bunter has safely ensconced himself at Wharton Lodge for the holidays. With our "Billy" in the offing, especially at Christmas-time, you can bank on some real good fun. You'll have plenty of thrills, too, when you read about the Famous Five's exciting visit to the haunted moat house. Other Christmas features will add to the attractions of this grand number, so take a tip from me and order your copy RIGHT NOW!*

*Here's wishing you and yours a right royal Christmas.*

**YOUR EDITOR.**

himself out somehow, on the other side, and tore back to the lane.

Heedless of darkness, heedless of thick-falling snow, the terrified Owl raced along the lane—slipping, stumbling, panting, spluttering, but never pausing for a moment.

Crash!

Something—somebody—was before him in the darkness. A hand touched him—and Bunter, with a gasping shriek, collapsed, and fell in a dead faint in the snow.

## HAPPY LANDING!

**HARRY WHARTON** staggered. Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh uttered a startled exclamation. "What the thump—" gasped Wharton.

"Who the esteemed dickens—" exclaimed the nabob.

The two juniors were tramping along Redgate Lane, towards the moat house, when it happened.

That brief interval of clearing weather, at sunset, had encouraged them to start, and then the heavy snowfall had followed.

But they were not going to turn back; they tramped on, slowly but resolutely, through the snowstorm.

It was heavy work and slow work, and darkness fell before they were near the moat house. But they trudged on determinedly, anxious chiefly to reach the old ruin, and get some sort of shelter.

They had flash-lamps in their pockets with which to explore the old place—if they felt like exploring, after that heavy tramp through the snow.

But they were still a couple of hundred yards short of the moat house when something from the darkness crashed into Harry Wharton and sent him spinning.

He spun, and sat down in the snow. Something unseen rolled at his feet. Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh came to a halt, peering at him in the dark.

Wharton scrambled up.

"Some howling ass ran into me!" he gasped. "What blithering idiot was rushing along in the dark like that? Who—"

He stumbled over something in the snow.

"Oh, my hat! He's here! Get up, you ass!"

Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh groped in his pocket, and drew out his flash-lamp. A sudden beam of light shot out in the darkness.

It rested on the figure that lay huddled in the snow. It showed a fat figure muffled in overcoat and scarf, with a pallid fat face, and eyes closed behind a big pair of spectacles.

The two juniors ejaculated together: "Bunter!"

They stared down at the fat Owl of Greyfriars.

"That fat chump!" exclaimed Harry. "Must have been walking it—you can guess where he was heading for!"

"The guessfulness is an easy one!" grinned Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

"Get up, Bunter, you ass!"

Bunter did not stir. He did not speak. He lay like a log in the snow. It dawned on the juniors that he was unconscious.

Harry Wharton dropped on his knees beside him, puzzled and alarmed.

That sudden crash in the darkness had hurled him over, and shaken him considerably; but he was not much hurt, and it seemed extraordinary if Bunter was!

"What on earth's the matter with him?" exclaimed Wharton. He lifted Bunter's head. "Bunter, old fat bean—buck up!"

The boot that was to have greeted Billy Bunter, if he arrived at Wharton Lodge, was forgotten now. Both the juniors felt concerned about the fat Owl, as well as perplexed.

"The esteemed ass has fainted!" said Hurree Janset Ram Singh, as he held the light on Bunter's pallid face.

"But why—" gasped Harry.

A faint, quavering sigh came from the fat junior. His eyes opened behind his spectacles.

Then a sudden, terrified yell burst from him.

"Owl! Keep off! Keep off! Help! Don't touch me! Keep off! Oh, help!"

He strove to struggle to his feet.

"Bunter, old man!" exclaimed Harry, in alarm.

"Don't touch me!" shrieked Bunter. "Keep off!"

"It's all right, old chap—it's Wharton—Wharton and Inky! It's all right. Buck up, old bean!"

It was clear that something had frightened Bunter—frightened him out of his fat wits. The juniors could only wonder what it was.

But in the gleam of the pocket-lamp Bunter could see Wharton's face, and he realised that it was not the phantom of the moat house that had him in its grisly clutches.

"Oh!" moaned Bunter. "Stick to me, you fellows. Oh dear! Keep it off! Can you see it? I say, you fellows, help me away. I—I—I think it's after me! Can you hear it—rattling those keys! Oh crikey!"

Leaning on the captain of the Remove, Bunter cast terrified glances round him in the darkness, shuddering from head to foot.

"Nobody here but us, old man!" said Harry.

"Have you seen it?" gasped Bunter.

"It! What?"

"The gig-gig-gig-gig-ghost!" stammered Bunter. "Oh crikey! It—it nearly had me! I say, you fellows, stick to me! I say, let's get out of this! Oh lor'!"

He scrambled up, and started—stumbled over, and would have fallen, had not Harry Wharton caught him.

"Hold on!" gasped Harry.

"I won't! I'm getting away from this! Oh dear, I wish I hadn't started—oh crikey! Lemme go—I'm going on—Lemme get away!" howled Bunter.

"But—"

"Lemme gerraway!" spluttered Bunter. "Oh, crikey! The gig-gig-ghost—"

"Come on, Inky!" said Harry Wharton. "We'd better chuck it, and get back! We can't leave that fat chump alone in that state!"

"I say, you fellows, don't you leave me! I say—"

"We're coming, fathead!" said Harry.

"Oh lor'! It—it nearly touched me, you know—in that beastly moat house

—it—it nearly had me— Oh dear!" moaned Bunter.

"In the moat house!" repeated Harry. "Oh, my hat! He fancies he has seen the ghost of the moat house—"

"I didn't fancy it!" yelled Bunter. "I saw the light, and then—then it rattled the keys— Oh crikey, and—and—and then it came towards me, and—and—and it was going to touch me, and—and— Oh lor'!"

"Well, it won't touch you here, old fat man!" said Harry soothingly. "Take his other fin, Inky—we shall have to help him."

The two juniors took a fat arm each.

Bunter needed a lot of help—his fat legs were sagging under him, as he stumbled through the snow.

It was heavy work getting back to Wharton Lodge, with the tottering fat Owl to support all the way. The snowfall had diminished, fortunately; but the flakes, were still falling thick and fast, and the tramping feet sank deep into a carpet of snow.

But they reached the house at last, and never had Harry Wharton been so glad to see Wells open the door, and to see the cheery glow of firelight.

Colonel Wharton came towards them as they led the tottering Owl in. He stared at the pallid face of the fat Owl.

"Is that Bunter?" He grunted.

"What is the matter with him?" "He fancies he's seen the ghost of the moat house!" answered Harry, with a smile.

"Young ass!" grunted the old colonel.

Bunter was piloted to an armchair before a roaring log fire. He collapsed into it. For several minutes he sat there, silent. Then, at last, he blinked round at the juniors.

"I say, you fellows!"

"Well?"

"I'm hungry!"

Bunter was recovering!

Billy Bunter turned in that night, at Wharton Lodge, in quite a contented frame of mind.

He still shivered when he thought of the awful experience in the haunted moat house. But, really, the ghost of the moat house had done him a good turn.

He was landed at Wharton Lodge, and, having once penetrated the defences, so to speak, Bunter was the man to consolidate his position. It was a happy landing—and Billy Bunter looked forward cheerfully to a Merry Christmas!

THE END.

(Whatever you do, chums, don't miss next week's issue of the MAGNET, which will contain another Yuletide story of the chums of Greyfriars, entitled "THE MAN OF MYSTERY!" And don't forget that this special issue will be on sale FRIDAY, December 15th. If you're wise, you'll ORDER YOUR COPY TO-DAY!—ED.)

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