



**BILLY BUNTER
AND THE BANK ROBBER**

COPYRIGHT FLEETWAY PUBLICATIONS LTD.

This edition first published
in 1968 by **THE HAMLYN PUBLISHING GROUP LTD.**
HAMLYN HOUSE, THE CENTRE,
FELTHAM, MIDDLESEX and printed by
Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press) Ltd.,
Bungay, Suffolk, England

FRANK RICHARDS

**BILLY
BUNTER
AND THE
BANK
ROBBER**

PAUL HAMLYN

CHAPTER I

Asking for it!

‘**VERNON-SMITH!**’

Mr. Quelch’s voice was sharp and acid.

Herbert Vernon-Smith, the Bounder of Greyfriars, smiled sarcastically.

He was ‘for it’ again; his Form-master’s voice and look left no doubt on that point.

It was third lesson in the Remove Form-room at Greyfriars. The Remove were all in

their places, after morning break, when Mr. Quelch rustled in. One glimpse of Mr. Quelch's face was enough to warn the Removites that there was trouble in the air. Sometimes Mr. Quelch smiled, though not frequently. Oftener, he frowned. But on the present occasion his frown was portentous.

Many of the fellows glanced at the Bounder as the Remove master addressed him. They were not surprised that Smithy was 'for it' again. All that term the Bounder had been in trouble of one kind or another, and he had tested Mr. Quelch's patience almost to breaking-point. It seemed to be the Bounder's object to give his Form-master as much trouble as he possibly could, and certainly he succeeded in giving Mr. Quelch a great deal. But he did not escape scatheless in the process; lines and lickings fell to Smithy's share as thick as leaves in Vallombrosa of old.

'Vernon-Smith!'

'Yes, sir!' drawled the Bounder.

'Step out before the class.'

'Certainly.'

The Bounder moved out of his place with leisurely deliberation. If it was his object to fan the flames of Mr. Quelch's wrath, he was successful. The Form-master's eyes glinted under his knitted brows.

Vernon-Smith stood before him, calm and cool. He met Mr. Quelch's eyes with an air of unconcern.

'Vernon-Smith!' Mr. Quelch's voice was very deep. 'I have had reason to keep you under observation for some time.'

'Thank you, sir!'

'What? What?'

'It's very kind of you, sir,' said the Bounder, unmoved.

'I say, you fellows, Smithy's asking for it!' murmured Billy Bunter, with a fat grin.

'Silence in the class!' hooted Mr. Quelch.

'Oh, yes, sir! I didn't speak!' exclaimed Bunter in a great hurry. 'I never opened my lips, sir. I only said to Cherry—'

'Take a hundred lines, Bunter!'

'Oh, lor'!'

Billy Bunter relapsed into silence. Nobody else in the Remove had ventured even upon a whisper. They knew better than to whisper when Mr. Quelch had that expression on his face.

The Remove master turned his attention to Herbert Vernon-Smith again.

'You are impertinent, Vernon-Smith,' he said. 'But let that pass. I repeat that I have kept you under close observation. You are not a boy I can trust. I have good reason to believe that you break many of the rules of the school, and only a few minutes ago I received proof of the fact.'

'Indeed, sir!' said the Bounder.

The Removites listened with redoubled attention now.

There were few in the Remove who did not know the kind of fellow the Bounder was, and what his manner and customs were. Especially since his former friend, Redwing, had left Greyfriars the Bounder had gone downhill. If his wild ways had been discovered there was no doubt that the matter was serious; if Mr. Quelch had learned that Smithy crept out of school bounds after lights-out and sneaked in at the back door of the Cross Keys on half-holidays; that he smoked and played banker in his study. Less than this was needed to cause a Greyfriars man to be 'bunked'.

But the Bounder did not seem concerned.

He only raised his eyebrows a little and waited for the Remove master to proceed.

There was no doubt that the Bounder of Greyfriars had plenty of nerve.

‘A few minutes ago,’ continued Mr. Quelch, ‘I was in my study. I saw you in the quadrangle, Vernon-Smith. You were speaking to Skinner.’

Harold Skinner shifted uncomfortably in his seat.

‘I often speak to Skinner, sir,’ said the Bounder. ‘Skinner’s my study-mate in No. 4. Is there anything wrong in speakin’ to Skinner, sir?’

‘This insolence will not profit you, Vernon-Smith,’ rapped out Mr. Quelch. ‘Under my eyes, as I looked from my study window, you took a packet from your pocket and showed it to Skinner. It was a packet of playing-cards. I saw it distinctly.’

‘Oh!’ murmured the Remove.

The juniors were not surprised to hear that the Bounder had cards in his possession. Most of them knew that already. But they were distinctly surprised to hear that he had displayed them where a Form-master’s eyes might fall upon him. That was far beyond the Bounder’s usual recklessness.

‘This packet you replaced in your pocket,’ said Mr. Quelch. ‘Doubtless it is there now.’

‘Probably,’ said the Bounder.

‘As for Skinner—’

‘I was not to blame, sir,’ said Skinner, looking very alarmed. ‘I can’t help a fellow coming up to me in the quad, sir, and showing me something. It wasn’t my fault. I never asked Smithy to show me the cards; I never knew he had them. He never opened the case, sir. I didn’t—’

‘You may be silent, Skinner. I was about to say that I do not blame you in this matter.’

‘Oh!’ gasped Skinner. He was exceedingly glad to hear that, at all events.

‘Vernon-Smith, you replaced that packet in an inside pocket under my eyes. Take it out.’

‘Yes, sir.’

Smithy slid his hand into his pocket and drew out a little cardboard case. It was such as playing-cards are often kept in, the inner case containing the cards sliding into the outer case. On the outside appeared the printed words: ‘De la Blue’s Pneumatic-backed Playing Cards’—quite expensive cards; the Bounder ‘did himself well’, in these little matters. Smithy held up the cardboard case.

‘Is that it, sir?’

‘That is it, Vernon-Smith.’

The Bounder waited with irritating calmness.

‘I have had cause to punish you very severely of late, and very frequently, Vernon-Smith,’ said Mr. Quelch. ‘On this occasion I shall send you to your headmaster.’

To the amazement of the Remove, and of Mr. Quelch, the Bounder grinned. The Form-master breathed hard.

‘You will go to Dr. Locke’s study now, Vernon-Smith, before he goes to the Sixth Form-room,’ said Mr. Quelch. ‘You will place that packet in his hands and tell him that I request him to deal with the matter.’

‘Very well, sir.’

‘Go!’ snapped Mr. Quelch.

And the Bounder went. But his manner was entirely unconcerned as he swung out of the Form-room.

‘Well,’ murmured Bob Cherry, ‘Smithy’s got a nerve!’

Harry Wharton nodded. He could not understand the Bounder asking for trouble in this way.

Mr. Quelch's eyes glinted over the class, and there was silence. Third lesson commenced in the Remove-room in an electric atmosphere.

CHAPTER II Not a Licking!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH strolled along the passages with a smile on his face. He was heading for Dr. Locke's study, but he was in no hurry to arrive there. The door of that apartment was open. The bulky figure of Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth, was visible there. Mr. Prout was standing with his back to the open doorway, in talk with the Head, who was invisible to Vernon-Smith as he came up. Mr. Prout's rich and fruity voice was going strong. There was only one pair of ears at Greyfriars that never tired of Mr. Prout's sonorous voice. They were Mr. Prout's own ears. 'I shall be very pleased, sir!' Mr. Prout was saying. 'It will be a pleasure, Dr. Locke.' 'As you mentioned that you intended to walk down to Courtfield this afternoon, Mr. Prout—' came the Head's quiet voice. 'Quite so, sir! It will be no trouble at all to call at the station and meet Mr. Spencer.' 'Captain Spencer.' 'Quite so. It will be a pleasure, sir, to show any little polite attention to your guest, sir.' 'Thank you, Mr. Prout!' 'Not at all, sir—not at all! And the train?' 'Captain Spencer arrives at Courtfield by the five o'clock express, Mr. Prout. I should go myself, but Mrs. Locke desires me to accompany her to the vicarage, and therefore—' 'It will be a pleasure to me, sir. I presume I shall have no difficulty in recognising the young man?' 'No more than I should have, I think, as I have not seen him for very many years. I informed him in my letter that he would be met at the station, so there should be no difficulty. Moreover, Captain Spencer, I understand, still has a limp, the result of a wound received in the war, and so—' 'The matter will be quite simple, sir.' Mr. Prout seldom allowed an interlocutor to complete a sentence. Even the Head himself was not safe from Mr. Prout's desire to dominate a conversation with his own powerful voice. 'I will meet Captain Spencer and accompany him to Greyfriars. I—' 'I think I am due in the Sixth Form-room now, Mr. Prout,' said the Head gently. The Bounder understood, if Mr. Prout did not, that Dr. Locke had heard the Fifth Form-master's ponderous voice for a sufficient length of time. He grinned behind Mr. Prout's portly back. 'Quite so, sir!' said Mr. Prout, and he made a movement at last. Then he became aware of Vernon-Smith. He blinked at him. 'Boy, what are you doing here?' 'Mr. Quelch sent me to the Head, sir,' said the Bounder cheerfully. 'Oh, very good!' Mr. Prout vacated the doorway, and the Bounder was able to enter the study. 'What is it, Vernon-Smith?' asked the Head, looking at the Bounder over his glasses a little impatiently. 'Mr. Quelch sent me, sir,' said the Bounder demurely. 'He told me to hand you this, sir.'

Smithy took the card-box from his pocket and laid it on the Head's writing-table.

Dr. Locke looked at it in astonishment.

'A box of playing-cards!' he said. 'I do not understand. Why has Mr. Quelch sent this to me, Vernon-Smith?' Then the Head frowned. 'Do you mean that these playing-cards were found in the possession of a member of the Remove?'

'Mr. Quelch saw me show the box to Skinner, sir, and he ordered me to bring it to you and ask you to deal with the matter,' said the Bounder meekly.

'Hand me that cane, Vernon-Smith!'

'Yes, sir.'

The Bounder picked up the cane and passed it to the Head, who rose to his feet.

'I shall punish you very severely, Vernon-Smith. Bend over that chair.'

'May I ask, sir, why I am to be punished?' asked the Bounder. 'What? You are perfectly well aware, Vernon-Smith, that no Greyfriars boy is allowed to have playing-cards in his possession,' exclaimed the Head sharply.

'I know, sir. But I have nothing of the kind.'

'What?'

'If you will kindly open the box, sir.'

The Head looked at the Bounder, and then picked up the box and slid out the inner case. That case, which was made for containing a pack of playing-cards, contained nothing of the kind now. It contained a number of small pieces of cardboard, upon which were carefully written notes of Latin conjugations. The Head looked at the top card and read a few words. He turned to the next, and read: 'Ablative absolute—example, Horace: Teucro duce et auspice Teucro.' On the third was written: 'sto, steti, statum,' etc. With more and more surprise on his face, the Head glanced through the dozen or so little cards.

'Bless my soul!' he said at last. 'What—what does this mean, Vernon-Smith? This is your handwriting?'

'Yes, sir,' said Vernon-Smith. 'Mr. Quelch has found fault with my Latin, sir, so I wrote out those exercises to keep about me. They're useful to refer to at odd times, sir.'

'Very commendable indeed!' said the Head. 'I did not know you were so studious, Vernon-Smith.'

'I'm afraid, sir, that I've been a little slack this term, and I was trying to pull up,' said the Bounder. 'I should like to get a higher place in class, and there are the exams coming on, too, sir.'

'Very true,' said the Head, 'but I am sure your Form-master would not find fault with such a commendable desire. Has Mr. Quelch seen these notes?'

'He did not open the case, sir.'

'Then no doubt he concluded that it contained playing-cards, which was its original purpose,' said the Head. 'I must ask you, Vernon-Smith, where you obtained this case, which undoubtedly at one time contained cards.'

'I picked it up, sir,' said the Bounder calmly. 'I happened to see it, and thought it would be useful to keep my notes in.'

'Dear me!' said the Head.

He paused.

'Mr. Quelch undoubtedly drew a false impression from—from the nature of this box and the printed words on it,' said the Head, at last. 'You should have explained to him at once, Vernon-Smith.'

'Mr. Quelch did not ask me, sir. I did not understand why he was angry,' said Smithy innocently.

The Head pursed his lips.

‘Well, well, it is a—a—a misapprehension, and you are not to blame in the matter. You may return to your Form-room, Vernon-Smith.’

‘May I take my notes, sir?’ asked the Bounder demurely. ‘It’s a half-holiday to-day, and I was thinkin of going through them, sir, when I’m out for a walk this afternoon.’

‘Assuredly!’ said the Head.

He replaced the cards in the box, and handed it back to Smithy.

‘I advise you, however, to find some other box for keeping your notes in, Vernon-Smith. This is liable to cause misapprehension, if seen.’

‘I will throw it away, sir, and buy a new box in Courtfield this afternoon,’ said the Bounder.

‘Very good. You may go.’

And the Bounder went.

He winked into space as he sauntered down the passage.

CHAPTER III Not Guilty!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. looked at the Bounder as he came back into the Remove-room. Third lesson was half-over when he reappeared. The Removites expected to see the Bounder come in wriggling after a severe application of the Head’s cane. Instead of which, the Bounder walked into the room in quite a careless and casual manner; and, still more surprising, the offending card-box was in his hand. Mr. Quelch’s gimlet eyes were on him at once.

‘Vernon-Smith.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘You have been to your headmaster?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Did you hand him that box as I instructed you?’

‘Certainly, sir.’

‘I am forced to doubt your statement, Vernon-Smith, as I see that the box is still in your possession,’ rapped out Mr. Quelch.

‘The Head told me I might keep it, sir!’

‘What! What!’

‘Dr. Locke told me that I might keep it, sir.’

‘How dare you say so!’ thundered Mr. Quelch. ‘It is quite obvious to me, too, that you have not been punished, Vernon-Smith.’

‘That is correct, sir! The Head did not see any reason for punishing me,’ said the Bounder calmly.

The Removites gasped, and Mr. Quelch’s eyes seemed almost to start from his head.

‘You—you unscrupulous, untruthful young rascal!’ spluttered Mr. Quelch. ‘How dare you say anything of the kind! You have not been to the headmaster at all. You are speaking falsely.’

Mr. Quelch threw down his book, strode towards the Bounder, and grasped him by the shoulder.

‘I shall take you to Dr. Locke myself, Vernon-Smith. Wharton, you will keep order in this

Form-room while I am absent.’

Mr. Quelch, with a wrathful face, marched the Bounder along the passages to the Head’s study. But when he got there the cupboard was bare, so to speak. Dr. Locke

had already gone to the Sixth Form-room.

Still gripping the Bounder's shoulder, Mr. Quelch started on a fresh voyage. He arrived at the Sixth Form-room, where the Head was just beginning to take the Sixth on a personally-conducted tour among the delights of Sophocles. Dr. Locke paused, and raised his eyebrows in surprise, as Mr. Quelch marched the Bounder in. The Sixth, at least, were not sorry for the pause; few of them really enjoyed Sophocles. They looked on with interest as the Head turned to the Remove master.

'Dr. Locke,' gasped Mr. Quelch, 'I am sorry—exceedingly sorry—to interrupt. But I must tell you that I sent this junior to your study some time ago, and he has had the audacity to return to the Form-room without coming to you.'

'Really, Mr. Quelch, I do not quite understand. Vernon-Smith came to my study as you directed him.'

'He—he—he came—?'

the Remove master almost babbled.

'Certainly.'

'Then he did not hand you that box, as I commanded him—the box the boy now has in his hand—'

'Certainly he did.'

'Dr. Locke! I—I am quite amazed. You have seen the contents of that box, and yet you allow this wretched boy to keep it in his possession!' stuttered Mr. Quelch.

'There is a mistake in the matter, sir,' said the Head coldly. 'The contents of that box are quite harmless.'

'Playing-cards——'

'The box does not contain playing-cards.'

'What! What?'

'Vernon-Smith, you should have shown Mr. Quelch the contents of the box. Open the box at once.'

Vernon-Smith calmly opened the box. Mr. Quelch's face as he looked at Smith's precious Latin notes, was a study in scarlet. His expression was, as Walker of the Sixth told Loder afterwards, worth a guinea a box. The Remove master could scarcely believe his eyes. Mr. Quelch, with a crimson face, almost tottered from the Sixth Form-room. He was only too conscious of the broad grin from end to end of the Sixth. The Bounder followed him out.

Mr. Quelch did not speak to him, or glance at him, on the way back to the Remove room. The Form-master's feelings were much too deep for words.

He had been made to look utterly and hopelessly ridiculous. He knew, though the Head did not, that the astute Bounder had planned the whole thing. It had not been by chance, or through recklessness, that Vernon-Smith had shown Skinner that card-box in sight of his Form-master's study window in morning break. Mr. Quelch knew now that Smithy must have known that he was looking from the window. The whole thing had been a 'plant.' The audacious young rascal had been pulling his Form-master's leg all along the line, with the deliberate intention of making him look ridiculous.

CHAPTER IV

Detained!

'I SAY, you fellows, you're jolly well not going with Mauly!' Billy Bunter spoke almost accusingly.

He blinked at Harry Wharton & Co. through his big spectacles with a severe blink.

'Mauly!' repeated Wharton.

It was after dinner, and the juniors had the bright July afternoon to themselves. The

Famous Five stood in a cheery group near the House steps, discussing plans for the afternoon. Bunter's plans, apparently, were already made, and involved Lord Mauleverer, the dandy of the Remove.

The Famous Five had decided on the bikes for the afternoon, but had not yet decided on the route. But they broke off the discussion as Bunter addressed them. His words rather surprised them. Not possessing Billy Bunter's great gift of knowing everything that did not concern him, they were quite unaware of the whacking remittance that had arrived for Lord Mauleverer, and would not have been much interested, anyway. 'You're jolly well not going with Mauly!' repeated William George Bunter, a five pairs of surprised eyes were turned on him. 'I'm going with Mauly. Mauly's a pal of mine. You can't say he's a pal of yours. You let him alone.'

'What is this fat idiot burbling about?' asked Bob Cherry, addressing space.

'Oh, really, Cherry—'

'We're going to Lantham!' said Nugent.

'You're not!' roared Bunter.

'And why the thump shouldn't we?' demanded Harry Wharton, in amazement.

'I tell you I'm not going to have it!' howled Bunter. 'You let Manly alone. I'm going with him to Lantham.'

'Mauly going to Lantham!' ejaculated Bob Cherry. 'Why, it's ten miles. Mauly would perish on the way!'

'The perishfulness of the lazy and esteemed Mauly would be terrific!' grinned Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

'Oh, come off!' snapped Bunter. 'Mauly can't cash the cheque without going to Lantham, as it's drawn on a Lantham bank. And I'm going with him to—to see that he gets the money safe home—see?'

'To see that he blows some of it in the Lantham bunshop, you mean!' chuckled Bob Cherry.

'I disdain to take any notice of that insinuation, Cherry,' said the Owl of the Remove, with a great deal of dignity. 'As Mauly's friend, I'm going to see him through. You fellows can keep off the grass. Sickening, I call it, flocking round my pal Manly just because he's got a cheque from his uncle. You keep clear—see?'

'Bump him!' said Johnny Bull.

'Oh, really, Bull—'

'You fat idiot!' said Harry Wharton, in measured tones. 'This is the first we've heard of Mauly's cheque.'

'Oh, really, Wharton—'

'But if Mauly's really going to Lantham we'll take him along with us. If he's going to carry money about he'll be safer with us.'

'Where is he?'

'Why, you—you beast—'

'Where's Mauly?' demanded Bob Cherry.

'I—I say, you fellows, Manly hasn't really got a cheque!' gasped Bunter, his fat brain assimilating the knowledge that he had said too much. 'I—I thought you were fixing it up to go with Manly when I heard you mention Lantham. There isn't any cheque—' 'You said there was.'

'Only a—a joke—pulling your leg, you know,' said Bunter, with a feeble chuckle.

'Manly hasn't had a letter from his uncle, and I didn't watch him open it, and there wasn't a cheque in it drawn on the Lantham & County Bank.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'



'Quelchy can go and eat coke for all I care!' said the Bounder calmly

'I suppose you fellows can take my word!' said Bunter. 'The cheque wasn't for twenty pounds!' he added, by way of clinching matters.

'Where's Mauly?' demanded the captain of the Remove.

'He's gone home for the afternoon. Yaroooh! Leggo my ear, Bob Cherry, you beast!'

'Where's Mauly?' grinned Bob.

'He's ill—gone to bed because he feels seedy! Yoooooop! Leggo!'

'Where's Mauly?'

'Yaroooh! In his study, you beast! Wow!'

And the Famous Five, heedless of Bunter's spluttering indignation, went into the House to find Lord Mauleverer.

'Beasts!' gasped Bunter.

Vernon-Smith, who was standing nearby, chuckled. William George Bunter turned on him with a glare.

'What are you cackling at, you cheeky rotter? Yah, you'd grin the other side of your face if Quelchy knew your little game this afternoon!'

'Shut up, you fat fool!' snapped the Bounder.

'You let Quelchy get a chance at you, and you'll come a cropper!' jeered Bunter.

'Think he doesn't know how you pulled his leg this morning? He knows it all right, and knows you worked it all out to make an ass of him. You'll get it hot when you give him a chance.'

'You can go and eat coke, and Quelchy can do the same!' answered the Bounder carelessly.

'Vernon-Smith!'

The Bounder started, and bit his lip.

Mr. Quelch, in hat and coat, evidently going out that afternoon, came down the steps of the School House as Smithy spoke.

The Bounder had not subdued his voice in the least, quite unaware that his Form-master was about to emerge from the House.

Mr. Quelch turned on him, fixing his eyes on the Bounder with a deadly glint in them. Billy Bunter, with a fat grin, turned and rolled away. His opinion was that Smithy was 'for it,' and he was right.

The Bounder looked sullenly at his Form-master. He had given Mr. Quelch the chance for which he knew the Form-master had been watching. That chance was not

to be let slip.

'I heard your words, Vernon-Smith,' said Mr. Quelch, with ominous calmness. 'I know now the way you speak of your Form-master. Go into the House!'

The Bounder breathed hard.

'It's half—holiday, sir!' he muttered.

'You are detained for the afternoon.'

Smithy's eyes glittered.

'You will go into the Form-room,' said Mr. Quelch. 'You will occupy yourself until five o'clock in writing out Latin conjugations—an occupation which will be quite to your taste, according to the story you told Dr. Locke this morning,' added the Remove master bitterly. 'Go in at once. As I cannot trust you not to break detention while I am absent, I shall request Loder, of the Sixth, to keep you under observation.'

The Bounder did not stir.

'Do you hear me, Vernon-Smith?'

Slowly, reluctantly, the Bounder obeyed. Mr. Quelch grimly followed him in. Inside the House they came on Skinner, who called to Vernon-Smith.

'Ready when you are, Smithy! Oh!' added Skinner, as he noticed Mr. Quelch.

The Remove master paused.

'I presume from your remark that you were going out with Vernon-Smith, Skinner.'

'Ye-es,' stammered Skinner. 'We—we were going to—to have a boat out, sir.'

'Vernon-Smith is detained until five o'clock,' said Mr. Quelch. 'If you hold any communication with him whatever before that hour, Skinner, I shall punish you with the utmost severity.'

'Oh!' gasped Skinner. 'Certainly, sir—I mean, certainly not.' Vernon-Smith went into the Form-room, and sat down at his desk with a black brow.

CHAPTER V Mauly Decides to Bike!

'HALLO, hallo, hallo!'

Bob Cherry's voice boomed in at the doorway of Study No. 12 in the Remove passage.

Lord Mauleverer gave a jump.

'Falling asleep?' demanded Bob.

'Yaas!'

'According to Bunter, you've got a cheque from your uncle.'

'Yaas.'

'Going over to Lantham to cash it?'

'Yaas.'

'We're going. Come with us.'

'You're awf'ly good!' said Lord Mauleverer. 'I—I—I wasn't thinkin' of startin' just yet, though.'

'Then it's time you did,' said Nugent, laughing. 'It's a good step to Lantham, and you want to get back for call-over, Mauly.'

'Yaas.'

'Come on, then!' said Johnny Bull. 'We'll see that you don't lose the money, Mauly, or get held up by a footpad, or leave the currency notes strewn around the countryside.'

'Thanks no end, old bean!' said Lord Mauleverer, sitting up on the sofa. 'But I've been wonderin' whether I wouldn't ask Mr. Quelch to cash the cheque, after all.'

‘And send it back to your uncle?’ grinned Bob. ‘Quelchy doesn’t approve of kids having large amounts of pocket-money.’

‘But it isn’t a large amount,’ said his lordship innocently.

‘Bunter said it was twenty pounds.’

‘Yaas.’

‘Well I think Mr. Quelch would think that a large amount, if you don’t, Mauly,’ chuckled Bob. ‘Come on! We’ll see you through. A little exertion will do you good, too. Get a move on!’

Lord Mauleverer sighed, and detached himself from the study sofa.

‘Seen my topper?’ he yawned.

‘You don’t want a topper on a bike.’

His lordship looked alarmed.

‘Good gad! I’m not goin’ on a bike! There’s a train from Courtfield.’

‘Trains cost money.’

‘That’s all right—I’ll stand the tickets, dear boys. Jolly glad to have you with me,’ said Mauly. ‘We shall just fill a carriage, and keep any botherin’ outsiders from gettin’ in.’

The Famous Five chuckled. They were not likely to travel in a stuffy railway carriage that sunny July afternoon.

‘We’re biking it,’ said Bob. ‘So are you, Mauly. It will do you worlds of good.’

‘I—I—say—————’

‘Come on.’

‘But—’ Lord Mauleverer got no further than ‘but.’ Bob Cherry grasped his arm and waltzed him out of the study. His lordship gasped as he went.

‘Here’s your cap, old bean,’ said Harry Wharton, laughing.

‘But—I say—’ stuttered his dismayed lordship.

‘Get a move on!’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

Lord Mauleverer was walked down to the bicycle shed. On the way the juniors encountered William George Bunter. The Owl of the Remove gave them a glare that almost cracked his spectacles.

‘I say, you fellows, leave Mauly alone. You’re not going with these rotters on a bike, are you, Mauly?’

‘No!’ gasped Mauleverer.

‘Come on!’ grinned Bob.

Lord Mauleverer was assisted to the bike-shed. There his handsome jigger was lifted off the stand for him, and the Famous Five took down their machines. Billy Bunter stood in the doorway with a fat face purple with indignation.

‘Look here, you beasts!’ he bawled. ‘You let Mauly alone. Mauly doesn’t want to bike it.’

‘Shut up, Bunter!’

‘I’m standing by my pal, Mauly!’ hooted Bunter. ‘You’d rather go by train, wouldn’t you, Mauly?’

‘Yaas!’ gasped Mauly.

‘I’ll come with you if you go by train, old chap.’

‘Oh, will you, by gad?’

‘Certainly, old fellow!’

‘That’s a lot of trouble for you, Bunter.’

‘I don’t mind the trouble, Mauly, old fellow. I’d do more than that to oblige a pal,’ said Bunter affectionately.

Lord Mauleverer blinked at him.

‘Look here, Bunter, if I go by train, are you really comin’?’

‘Yes, rather!’

‘Oh, dear! I think I’ll bike it, after all, you chaps,’ said Lord Mauleverer.

‘Ha, ha, ha’

‘Why, you—you—you cheeky beast!’ splintered Bunter. The juniors chuckled as they wheeled out the machines. The prospect of Bunter’s company on a long railway journey had quite reconciled Lord Mauleverer to the exertion of biking it.

‘This way!’ grinned Bob. ‘Goodbye, Bunter!’

‘I—I—I’ll bike it, too!’ gasped Bunter. ‘One of you fellows can lend me a bike and stay behind—’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Look here, you rotters—’ roared Bunter.

But the chums of the Remove did not look there. They wheeled on their bikes and went out into the road, and William George Bunter was left to waste his sweetness on the desert air.

Lord Mauleverer sighed and mounted. The juniors rode away cheerfully in the sunshine.

Mile after mile glided under the wheels. Only at one hill was Mauly allowed to dismount and push his bike, the Famous Five doing the same. The rest of the way he spent in the saddle; and rather to his surprise, arrived at last at Lantham feeling none the worse for it.

CHAPTER VI A Hot Chase!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH rose from his desk in the Remove room with a black scowl on his face.

Mr. Quelch was gone out; the Bounder had watched him go, from the Form-room window. Loder of the Sixth had glanced over the room, and found the Bounder at his task, Latin conjugations reeling from his pen.

Loder had no intention, however, of wasting time in keeping an eye on the Bounder. He frowned in at the doorway.

‘Oh, you’re here!’ he grunted.

The Bounder looked up.

‘Yes, Loder. I’m detained,’ he said meekly.

‘Your Form-master seems to think you might bolt,’ grunted Loder.

‘What a suspicious mind!’

‘Eh—what? Well, I’m seeing that you don’t bolt,’ said Loder. ‘I’m keeping an eye on this Form-room, and if I see you outside it I’ll jolly well lay the ashplant round you till you howl, see? That’s a tip!’

Having given Smithy that tip, Loder of the Sixth retired.

The Bounder went on writing out conjugations.

He was quite well aware that the sportsman of the Sixth had gone back to his study, where it was extremely probable that he would be playing bridge with some other choice spirits of the sporting set in the Sixth. Certainly Loder was not likely to give him another look-in. Loder exercised all the rights of his prefect-ship, and a little over, but he took the duties lightly.

The Bounder left his task at last. Mr. Quelch was out of the school, and Loder was unlikely to trouble about him further. Only one consideration could prevent the

Bounder from clearing off. The punishment was certain to be very severe if his truancy was discovered.

But the Bounder, as usual, was reckless of consequences.

It was quite probable that he would be able to get back into the Form-room unnoticed later on; and at all events, he was prepared to take the chance. As soon as he was satisfied that Loder was quite off the scene, Vernon-Smith coolly walked out of the Form-room.

He did not venture to go down to the gates. He was fairly certain that Mr. Quelch had spoken to Gosling the porter. Smithy strolled away to the Cloisters, clambered over a wall in a secluded spot, and dropped into the road.

Then he walked away towards Friardale.

But his luck was out. Hardly fifty yards from the school, he came face to face with Wingate of the Sixth. Wingate was on his bicycle, but he jumped down at once.

‘Vernon-Smith! Stop!’

The Bounder stopped, his teeth coming together hard.

‘You’re detained this afternoon, Vernon-Smith,’ said the head prefect of Greyfriars.

‘Mr. Quelch told me so specially.’

The Bounder did not answer, but his look was bitter.

Obviously, Mr. Quelch had passed the word round among the prefects that Smithy was under detention that afternoon, more than suspecting the Bounder of intending to ‘bolt.’

It was not much use eluding Loder of the Sixth if all the other Sixth Form prefects had an eye open for him.

‘Get back!’ snapped Wingate.

The Bounder’s eyes glittered. It was in his mind to disobey and chance the consequences. Detention was bad in itself, but to be marched back to the Form-room by a prefect, under the eyes of scores of fellows, was a humiliation that seemed to the angry Bounder intolerable. But disobedience was scarcely practicable, for Wingate would have run him down in a very few minutes had he attempted to ‘cut.’

The Bounder scowled sullenly.

He was still thinking of bolting, and a gleam came into his eyes at the sight of Ogilvy of the Remove at a little distance ahead, standing with his hand carelessly on the handle-bars of his bicycle while he talked to Peter Todd in the road. With a good bike under him, the Bounder was in the mood to take the chances of a race with Wingate.

‘He, he, he!’

Billy Bunter’s fat chuckle came to Smithy’s ears. The Owl of the Remove was seated on a fence beside the lane, and he seemed greatly entertained by the sight of Smithy being marched back to the school. Vernon-Smith gave him a fierce look.

‘He, he, he!’ chortled Bunter. ‘You’ve broken bounds, Smithy! I’m shocked at you! You’re a bad hat. Smithy! No wonder Mr. Quelch is down on you! Are you going to lick him, Wingate?’

Wingate made no reply to that; he walked his bicycle on by the side of the scowling Bounder. Bunter yelled cheerily after Vernon-Smith:

‘Put some exercise-books in your bags, Smithy! He, he, he!’ The Bounder set his teeth.

Ogilvy of the Remove, apparently interested in his discussion with Peter Todd, had leaned his machine against a tree by the roadside. Smithy’s eyes were on that machine. If he could get a start—

He was utterly reckless now. He would not and he could not be marched in across the quad by the head prefect, under grinning glances from all the fellows who saw him.

Ogilvy and Toddy sighted him and turned their eyes on him and smiled. The Bounder gave them a savage look in reply for their smile, and they smiled more broadly. A moment later Smithy had acted with a suddenness that took Wingate of the Sixth quite by surprise. Certainly the Greyfriars captain never would have anticipated a junior bolting when once in his official custody, so he was quite unprepared for the Bounder's move.

With a sudden rush Vernon-Smith reached Ogilvy's bicycle, dragged it away from the tree, and threw his legs across it.

An instant more and he was pedalling away desperately up the road.

Wingate stood petrified for a moment or two. Peter Todd stared, and Ogilvy roared indignantly.

'My bike! You cheeky rotter! Bring my bike back!'

The Bounder was already almost beyond the sound of his voice—not that he would have heeded it. The pedals fairly flew under his grinding feet. He raced along the high road at a lightning speed. It was fortunate that the road was clear ahead!

'Vernon-Smith!' roared Wingate.

The captain of Greyfriars stared blankly for some seconds, taken utterly by surprise. Then he mounted his bicycle and pedalled in pursuit, his rugged face crimson with anger.

'My only hat!' ejaculated Peter Todd. 'What a nerve! Smithy seems bent on asking for trouble these times!'

'My bike!' stuttered Ogilvy. 'He's got my bike!'

'Wingate's bound to run him down,' said Toddy. 'He's twice Smithy's form on a jigger, and he's got a much higher gear. That race won't last three hundred yards!' The Bounder was as well aware of that as Peter. But Smithy knew what he was about. He flew past the school buildings in the direction of Courtfield and vanished round a bend in the road. Once round the bend, he jammed on the brakes with a suddenness that almost made the bicycle dance, and leaped off. With frantic speed he dragged the machine and himself over a stile that gave access to a footpath. He did not mount there; he knew he would be in sight if he did as Wingate passed. He dragged the machine into the trees and remained there, breathing in great gasps.

Less than a minute later Wingate came racing round the bend in the road and shot past the end of the footpath towards Courtfield.

Through the trees the Bounder watched him go, with a breathless grin.

As soon as Wingate was past he drew the bike into the footpath and mounted and rode on through the leafy wood.

Meanwhile, Wingate of the Sixth was pedalling on furiously towards Courtfield; but as he came out into a long straight stretch of road he realised that the fugitive was no longer ahead of him.

Wingate set his teeth as he realised what had happened. He remembered the stile and the footpath, which he had already left half a mile behind in his hurry. He whirled round in the road, and pedalled back faster than before. But he had lost time, and when he reached the stile the Bounder had long been out of sight through the wood. Wingate paused a few moments.

He lifted his machine over the stile and remounted and pedalled along the footpath.

If the Bounder had dismounted and taken to the wood the pursuit was hopeless; but Wingate determined to ride at least as far as the Lantham road. He covered the ground rapidly, though he did not ride at full speed on the footpath, when there was danger of running down pedestrians. The Greyfriars captain could not afford to be so reckless as the rebel of the Remove.

For three miles he rode steadily, and then he jumped down at the stile on the Lantham road.

He lifted his machine in the road, and stood there looking about him. The Bounder was not in sight. But a road-mender was at work there, and Wingate called to him.

‘Have you seen a schoolboy pass on a bicycle just lately?’ The man looked up.

‘Yes, he came out of the footpath.’

‘Which way did he go?’

‘Straight on to Lantham.’

‘Thanks!’

Wingate mounted and pedalled on.

On the open road he could let himself go, and his machine fairly flew.

Vernon-Smith, in the meantime, had slackened speed a little. He was breathless and almost aching with his efforts. He was two-thirds of the way to Lantham, and some of the highest buildings in that town were in sight over the trees. Riding at a more leisurely pace, the Bounder looked back over his shoulder every few minutes, prepared to put it on again if he sighted pursuit.

He grinned, as, glancing back once more, he sighted Wingate on the road behind him, and drove at the pedals again.

But the stalwart senior was coming on fast. Again and again the Bounder glanced back, and saw Wingate closer and closer.

Vernon-Smith set his teeth hard.

It was too late now to dodge into a turning and vanish. Wingate had him in sight, and would not have lost him again. But there were other ways.

A mile out of Lantham a path led up from the road into a thick wood. The Bounder turned into the path.

Wingate turned into it after him. He was not twenty yards behind the Removite now. Smithy jumped off the machine.

If he had remained mounted, it was a matter now only of minutes. But he was very far from being at the end of his resources. Leaving Ogilvy’s bicycle in the path, the Bounder plunged into the trees.

Wingate came up with a rush, and jumped down.

The Bounder had vanished.

Wingate stood, breathing hard and deep, his hand on his bicycle. He looked into the trees, but the underwoods were thick. Leaving his machine at last, the Sixth-Former plunged into the wood.

For half an hour he sought the elusive junior, his anger growing more and more bitter. Had he found him, Vernon-Smith’s punishment would not have been left till he reached the school.

But he did not find him.

He returned to his machine at last, what time the Bounder, stretched on a leafy branch a score of feet above, watched him coolly through interstices in the foliage.

Wingate, in deep wrath, rode away, wheeling Ogilvy’s bicycle with one hand, and disappeared from the Bounder’s eyes.

Vernon-Smith shrugged his shoulders. He was left without a mount, nine or ten miles from Greyfriars, yet he cared little. But he did not immediately descend from the tree. It had occurred to his mind, always keen and suspicious, that Wingate’s departure might be only a pretence to induce him to show himself. If that was so, the Bounder was not the fellow to be trapped so easily. He settled himself comfortably in a fork of the high branches, and lighted a cigarette.

CHAPTER VII

The Hold-up at Lantham!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. dismounted at the railway station in Lantham. The machines were to be put up at the station, while the chums of the Remove walked with Lord Mauleverer to the bank to cash the cheque which had so interested William George Bunter, and which was gone from Bunter's gaze like a beautiful dream. After the visit to the bank, the Famous Five intended to call in at the Lantham Ramblers' cricket ground to watch the game there; Lantham Ramblers being engaged with a county fixture that day. Lord Mauleverer did not object to watching the cricket so long as he was allowed to sit down while he watched it.

The bicycles having been disposed of, the six Removites walked cheerily along the old High Street of Lantham towards the big stone corner building, where the Lantham and County Bank had its quarters.

As the group of juniors stood before the bank entrance, a cyclist stopped at the pavement.

He dismounted from his machine, which he left lodged against the kerb, and came across to the big double doors of the bank.

'Let me pass, please!'

'Oh! Sorry!' said Wharton, and he shifted out of the way at once to allow the stranger to pass into the building.

He glanced at the man carelessly as he passed. The man walked with a quick, springy step, like a young and active man, but in looks he was a man well on in middle life.

He was dressed in black, and had a rather bulky figure, and his face was almost hidden by a grizzled beard, a thick grey moustache, and a pair of large horn-rimmed spectacles.

Wharton's glance was quite careless; he had never seen the man before, and took no interest in him. He was not likely to guess, at that moment, what an extremely interesting person the man in the horn-rimmed spectacles was to become.

Bang!

It was the report of a firearm.

It was followed by a loud and fearful cry.

'Why, what—what——' stuttered Bob Cherry.

The juniors, halting in their tracks, stood almost petrified. Someone had fired a pistol in the bank; someone had been hit. Such a happening in the prosaic branch bank in the sleepy old market town was amazing—in fact, unnerving.

'What—what on earth—?' exclaimed Wharton.

'It was a pistol!'

'Somebody's hurt.'

Two or three passers-by had heard the shot and stopped, and stood staring towards the bank entrance.

'Let's see!' exclaimed Bob.

He ran towards the entrance, his chums following him. Just as they reached it the swing doors were dashed violently open, and a man came running out.

It was the bearded man in the horn spectacles.

There was a little bag clutched in his hand. He came through the swing doors with a desperate rush and burst upon the juniors like a battering-ram. They went spinning right and left under the rush, and the spectacled man fled past.

'Stop him!' yelled Wharton, comprehending now what had happened. 'It's a hold-up! Stop him!'

The spectacled man in a breathless rush had reached his bicycle. Before the words were out of Wharton's mouth he had mounted and was riding furiously up the street. Bob Cherry picked himself up dazedly. The rush of the bank robber had sent him sprawling on the pavement.

'A hold-up! It's a bank robber!' he gasped. 'Stop him! After him!'

The juniors rushed into the road after the fleeing rider.

But the bank robber had a good start, and he was on a cycle. From the way he rode it was obvious that he was a young and athletic man, that the grey beard and moustache were a disguise. He rode like the wind, dashed across the market square, and flew away down the farther street towards the open country.

'After him!' panted Bob.

But the reckless rider was already out of sight. The old, sleepy streets of Lantham resounded with shouts. In a few minutes a dozen cyclists had joined in the hunt, and five or six cars. The chase swept out on the Lantham road, and the Greyfriars juniors, breathless, stopped.

'Nothing doing on foot,' said Wharton, with a gasp. 'If we'd had our bikes we might have got him.'

'Might have got something,' said Johnny Bull. 'That rotter's got loaded firearms about him. We might have got more than we bargained for.'

'They'll get him all right,' said Bob. 'The cars will run him down if he keeps to the road.'

'He won't, unless he wants to be caught,' said Nugent. 'If he knows the country he will get clear by taking to the woods. He's got a start long enough to give him a chance. My hat! Fancy a hold-up in Lantham!'

'Even Lantham's moving with the times at last!' grinned Bob. 'We're getting quite up-to-date.'

'The up-to-datefulness is too terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. 'I hope they will catch that esteemed and ridiculous rotter. Let us go backfully for the esteemed Mauly.'

The chums of the Remove walked back. It was useless to take further part in the distant pursuit, and they were anxious to know what had happened at the bank. The desperate man had fired his revolver there, and a man had been hit; they knew that much. They found Lord Mauleverer resting against a buttress of the bank building. His lordship had started to run after the bank robber with his comrades, but perhaps he had realised the futility of it before they did, or perhaps he had tired. Anyhow, there he was, taking a much-needed rest.

'Catch him?' he inquired.

'No, ass! Why didn't you follow on?'

'Tired.'

'Fathead!'

'The police are in the bank now,' said Lord Mauleverer, with a nod towards the swing doors. 'I believe they want to speak to anyone who saw that gun merchant. Did you fellows see him?'

'Didn't you, ass?'

'Well, not to notice, you know—sort of impression of a johnny in black, with goggles twice as big as Bunter's. They're saying that a man's wounded in the bank—not killed, luckily. Poor chap! It's frightfully excitin', isn't it?' yawned Mauleverer. 'I used to think I'd like to be a bank manager; they have a cosy room, you know, with a settee, where a chap could go to sleep. But it seems to be a more excitin' life than it looks these days. What about the cricket?'

‘Blow the cricket now!’

And the chums of the Remove joined the excited throng that was surging before the swing doors of the bank, where a constable stood on guard.

CHAPTER VIII What the Bounder Saw!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH chuckled softly—very softly. He was careful not to make a sound—very careful indeed. He had remained in the thick branches of the oak, hidden by leafy foliage, with the suspicion in his mind that Wingate was not really gone at all, but was lying ‘doggo’ and waiting for him to show up. The Bounder had no intention of falling into so simple a trap, if trap there was. He was quite comfortable in the fork of the thick branches, and he sat there and smoked a cigarette or two. And after some little time he heard a rustling in the underwoods beneath him, and chuckled softly. His idea was that Wingate had been watching all the time, after a pretence of riding away with the two bicycles, and had now lost patience and was resuming his hunt for the elusive junior.

Smithy leaned over the branch, and watched keenly, through the foliage. The rustling of the underwoods came closer and clearer, and he knew that the unseen comer was approaching the big oak, in the branches of which he had taken refuge. So far, the newcomer was hidden from view, but Smithy had not the slightest doubt that it was Wingate, and he chuckled inaudibly over his own astuteness. He was quite invisible from below, and the Greyfriars captain might have rooted about in the wood for the remainder of the day without finding a trace of him. With a grinning face the Bounder watched.

A head with a Homburg hat on it came into his range of vision at last. The Bounder started a little.

Wingate of the Sixth did not wear a Homburg hat. It dawned on the Bounder that the newcomer was not Wingate at all. Wingate had not, as he had suspected, waited and watched for him.

The man in the Homburg hat had stopped under the wide-spreading branches of the oak.

Smithy knew now that it was not Wingate, but there was something so furtive, so stealthy, in the manner of the man below him, that his keenest interest was awakened. The man moved slowly, stealthily, and was evidently watching and listening as he came out into the clear space beneath the oak from the clinging under-woods. His whole manner was that of a fugitive who dreaded pursuit. From above, the Bounder could hear his panting breath. The Bounder did not need to be told, as he watched the man with a cynical eye, that he was a fugitive, that he had barely escaped some pursuit by vigorous exertions, and that he was fatigued and had crept into the heart of the wood as a hiding-place.

Under the big oak the man stood still, turning his glance round him. He was watching and listening like a hunted animal in the wood. But it did not occur to him to glance upward into the leafy branches overhead, though he would not have seen the Bounder had he done so. The Removite of Greyfriars was completely hidden by thick foliage, only a narrow slit in the greenery giving him a view of the glade below.

He could see the man’s face—a face almost hidden by greyish beard and moustaches, and large horn-rimmed spectacles. The man stood still, and after a few minutes of deep silence he stirred and leaned against the trunk of the oak, resting. Still his panting, laboured breath came up to the ears of the silent junior above.

Vernon-Smith's eyes grew wider with surprise as he threw off the Homburg hat, and then removed the horn-rimmed glasses, the beard and the moustache. The face that was revealed was that of a man a little over thirty; a rather handsome, clear-cut face, a little hard in outline, but by no means unpleasing. Vernon-Smith drew a deep breath as he looked down at him. The man had been in disguise—an impenetrable disguise. He had looked nearly sixty when the Bounder first saw him; now he looked hardly over thirty. Certainly no one who had seen him in his disguise would be likely to recognise him now. Indeed, the Bounder, who had watched the transformation, could hardly believe that it was the same man, so total was the change in his aspect.

But the strange man was not finished yet.

He proceeded to strip off the black suit of clothes he wore, which had looked bulky on him. The bulkiness was explained when they were off, for under them he wore a light tweed suit. The man who had looked fat and bulky was in reality slim and graceful and active!

'My hat!' murmured the Bounder inaudibly.

His interest in the stranger was intensely keen now; but keener still was his desire to remain undiscovered in his eyrie. For he knew that this was a desperate man—by no means some ordinary thief who had fled after picking a pocket or snatching from a shop. In changing his clothes the man had changed an automatic pistol from the outer suit's pocket to a pocket of the light tweeds. The automatic and the deep disguise proved clearly enough that the man was a desperate character. Vernon-Smith wondered whether, if he was discovered, a bullet might bring him tumbling down from his perch. He was not scared; the Bounder was almost incapable of fear. But he was very careful to make no movement or sound.

The man proceeded to kick off his boots and to take off his collar and tie. He replaced the latter with a soft white collar, and a tie which the Bounder noticed had the Greyfriars colours. That, however, did not imply any necessary connection with Greyfriars; the Bounder was aware that in recent years Public-school ties could be bought at any hosier's; indeed, plenty of members of the public sported Greyfriars or Harrow or Eton colours without even being aware of the fact. From two pockets the man drew a couple of tan shoes, which he placed on his feet in lieu of the boots he had kicked off. From another pocket came a tweed cap.

He was finished now, apparently. But he was not going. He proceeded to roll the discarded clothes and boots into a bundle tightly, and with the bundle in his hands he came closer to the trunk of the big oak. In doing so he passed out of the Bounder's range of vision, and Smithy wondered for a moment or two what he was doing. But a rubbing, scraping sound apprised him of the fact that the man was thrusting the bundle into a hollow of the tree trunk.

'By gum!' whispered the Bounder to himself.

He grinned into the foliage.

It was not by chance that the fugitive had reached that solitary spot in the wood. He knew the place; he knew that there was a hollow in the trunk of the big oak. He had come there to dispose of his disguise now that he had finished with it. Whatever it was that he had done, he had taken all his measures beforehand for escape.

The man in tweeds seemed to be hesitating. Once more he looked about him, listening intently and watching. As if still in fear of being recognised, he slipped on a black mask. Then the Bounder saw him open a little bag and glance into it. Then he set it on the ground beneath the tree and ran his fingers through bundle after bundle of crisp paper, and laughed softly. Smithy's heart gave a jump. That little bag was stacked with notes—currency notes and banknotes. It was from a robbery—an extensive

robbery—that this strange man had fled. And the plunder was in his hands now, under the eyes of the Bounder of Greyfriars.

The man, after several minutes of hesitation, seemed to make up his mind. The notes were packed in again, and the little bag was thrust into the hollow of the trunk, after the bundle of clothes. The mask accompanied it. Then suddenly, swiftly, the man strode away. In a few seconds the woods swallowed him up, and Herbert Vernon-Smith, in the thick branches, was left wondering whether it was not all a dream.

CHAPTER IX The Head's Guest!

'LATE!' said Bob Cherry.

'The latefulness is terrific.'

Harry Wharton & Co. came out of the police station at Lantham. The juniors had volunteered information to the police, and had accompanied the constable to the station to have their statements taken down. They were able to give the inspector in charge a full description of the man who had 'held up' the Lantham and County Bank. As it happened, it was the Greyfriars party that had seen most of him; others had had only a hurried glimpse of a man in black, fleeing recklessly on a madly-driven bicycle.

It was a thrilling occurrence for a sleepy little market town like Lantham, which was extremely slumberous on all days but market days, and on market days only half-awake. That one topic of the hold-up at the local bank thrilled Lantham end to end, and was likely to last as a topic for months, if not years. Whatever had become of the bank robber, there was no doubt that he had vanished, and the pursuit was dropped by all but the police, who were still keeping it up, though with little hope of success. The very daring and audacity of the bank robber's deed had made it successful; before the happening, anybody in Lantham would have expected an air-raid as soon as a 'hold-up.'

It was a thrilling experience for the chums of the Remove—no end of a story to relate in the Rag at Greyfriars.

Unfortunately, so much time had been taken up that it was now impossible to ride back to Greyfriars in time for call-over.

'It's all serene,' said Harry as they turned their steps in the direction of the railway station, where the bicycles had been left. 'Quelchy won't rag us for being late when we explain about the giddy hold-up.'

'The ragfulness will not be terrific,' remarked Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh. 'The hopefulness is great that the esteemed Quelchy will give us time to explain before he starts in canefully.'

'No good,' said Lord Mauleverer. 'You fellows may not mind bein' late for call-over, but I'm awf'ly particular about it.'

'What?' ejaculated the Famous Five in chorus. This was the first time they had heard of Manly being particular on such points.

His lordship nodded seriously.

'Disrespectful, and all that, for a man to be late for roll if he can possibly help it,' he said solemnly.

'But we can't help it,' said Nugent. 'We've got ten miles to go, and a good bit of uphill.'

'What's the matter with the railway?'

'Oh!'

The juniors stared at Mauly for a moment, and then they burst into a laugh. Lord Mauleverer's particular desire not to be late for call-over—for once—was explained now. He preferred a cushioned seat in a first-class carriage to a ten-mile push on the bicycle.

'You old fraud!' exclaimed Bob Cherry, laughing. 'A lot you care about calling-over. You want to slack.'

'All the same, it's not a bad idea,' remarked Nugent. 'We've put in a rather strenuous afternoon, and I'm not yearning to push a bike for ten miles after it. There's an express to Courtfield—'

'Yaas,' assented Lord Mauleverer, 'I shall insist on standin' the tickets as it's my wheeze. And we can get a taxi at Courtfield, see? Horrid to be late for call-over if we can possibly help it.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

It was but seldom that the noble Mauly exerted himself, but he was full of energy now. It was necessary to catch that train; the alternative being a ten miles' push on the bikes. It was a time for action, not for words, and Mauly could be a man of action in such circumstances. He almost trotted towards the railway station, looking at his handsome gold ticker as he went.

'There's a train at five-thirty; gets to Courtfield at six,' he said. 'I came by it once after seein' my guardian here. We can catch that all right. Get a move on, you slackers. Don't slack about, for goodness' sake, when we're in a hurry!'

So the six juniors walked into the railway station, retrieved the bicycles from the left luggage department, and Lord Mauleverer took a batch of tickets and the bikes were duly consigned to a porter to be placed in the guard's van. The express was signalled as the juniors came on the platform.

'Thank goodness, we're in time,' said Lord Mauleverer, with a deep breath of relief.

'Saved!' exclaimed Bob Cherry dramatically, and the Juniors chortled.

A young man in light tweeds strolled on the platform after the juniors, and glanced at them as he passed them. His glance rather lingered on them, as if he had seen them before; but the Greyfriars' fellows did not observe it; they did not even look at him.

The young man in tweeds lighted a cigarette as he stood waiting for the train, evidently the same train that the schoolboys were to take. He stood at a little distance from them, and a slight smile came over his face as he listened to their talk. They were speaking, as was natural, of their exciting experiences of the afternoon. Had they observed that young man in tweeds, they might have noticed that he was interested in the affair of the Lantham and County Bank.

'Here's the giddy train!' said Bob.

The express buzzed away from Lantham, and all the way to Courtfield the Famous Five found interest in the discussion of the hold-up—while Lord Mauleverer dozed placidly in a corner seat.

'Courtfield Junction!'

The express stopped.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! There's Prouty!' said Bob.

Mr. Prout, the portly master of the Greyfriars Fifth, was adorning the Courtfield platform with his ample and important person.

He stood near the barrier, scanning the passengers that alighted from the train, evidently in the expectation of seeing someone in particular.

Harry Wharton & Co. went along to the guard's van for their bicycles. They got out their machines and wheeled them along to the barrier. By that time Mr. Prout had selected the passenger whom he had come to meet. The young man in tweeds

sauntered along the platform on his way out, looking about him as if he expected to be met. Mr. Prout's eyes fixed on him, and he noticed that the young man limped slightly with his left leg. Mr. Prout made a step towards the young man, and raised his silk hat with elaborate politeness.

'Captain Spencer, I presume?' he asked in his deep, fruity voice.

The young man stopped.

'That is my name,' he assented. 'And you—?'

'Dr. Locke requested me to meet you here this afternoon, Captain Spencer. Pray allow me to introduce myself—'

Harry Wharton & Co. wheeled their bicycles out, and the rest was lost to them. They capped Mr. Prout respectfully as they passed; the Fifth Form-master, however, being too busy with his elaborate courtesy to the young man in tweeds to acknowledge the salute.

'That's the chap who got in at Lantham,' remarked Nugent, as the juniors came out of the station. 'Looks like a visitor for Greyfriars, from Prouty being here to meet him. Jump on, and we shall get in for call-over all right.'

'I say, we're taxi-in' from here!' protested Lord Mauleverer.

'Six fellows and six bikes in a taxi!' grinned Bob.

'Yaas! Let's take two taxis—'

'Make it three!' chuckled Bob.

'Yaas, all right!'

'Fathead. We're biking from Courtfield. It's only a couple of miles, if we go across the common.'

'Only !' groaned Lord Mauleverer.

'Jump on, you slacker!'

'I'll tell you what,' said Mauly. 'You fellows bike it, if you're keen on it, and I'll take a taxi. My bike will go on top.'

'Bump him!' said Bob.

'Look here—'

'And your baggage, Captain Spencer?' It was Mr. Prout's fruity voice again, as he came out of the station with the Head's guest.

'A suitcase,' said the young man in tweeds. 'It was in the guard's van; it was rather too large for the carriage. Dear me! I had allowed it to slip my mind; pray excuse me for a few minutes.'

Captain Spencer went back into the station, leaving Mr. Prout to adorn the landscape with his portly person. He went so quickly that the portly Form-master had no chance of going with him, as he would certainly have done in his desire to show every possible attention to the Head's guest.

Harry Wharton glanced after him as he went.

At Lantham, the juniors had paid no special heed to the stranger, but they had seen him there, and he had had no suitcase or baggage of any kind with him.

Certainly he had not had a suitcase placed in the guard's van at Lantham, and certainly a suitcase had not been turned out of the train along with the bicycles. There had not been a suitcase in the luggage van on the express at all.

The circumstance struck Wharton as odd, but he gave it no thought, not being interested at all in Captain Spencer's affairs.

The six juniors arrived at Greyfriars long before the taxi bore Mr. Prout and the Head's guest, and were in good time to join the rest of the school going in to call-over in Hall. Mr. Quelch took the roll, and there was one member of the Remove who failed to answer to his name—Herbert Vernon-Smith. And the expression on Mr.

Quelch's face, as he marked Vernon-Smith absent, was an indication of what the rebel of the Remove had to expect when he should turn up late at Greyfriars.

CHAPTER X Looting the Loot!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH dropped from the tree at last.

The man was gone, probably very far away by that time. No sign remained in sight to show that he had ever been there. Indeed, so strange and mysterious was the occurrence that Vernon-Smith was almost inclined to believe that it was a waking dream. The Bounder stood under the oak, where the strange man had stood, thinking deeply. For the time, Smithy had quite forgotten his own escapade, and that calling-over at Greyfriars would soon be due.

The man he had seen was obviously a robber. He had committed some robbery in deep disguise, and had hidden both his disguise and his plunder in the hollow of the oak. In his present aspect he was safe from any possibility of suspicion. Even in case of suspicion, there was nothing on him to connect him with the robbery. But for what the Bounder had seen, the robber and his loot would have been absolutely secure. The Bounder grinned at the thought.

The man's manner had shown that he was hunted by those who were looking for a bearded,

horn-spectacled man in black, a bulky-looking man of sixty. Even if the police guessed that the beard and the spectacles were a disguise, they were not likely to have the remotest idea of what the man looked like in his own proper person. But the Bounder held the clue.

Smithy had noted the man's face carefully, and he was quite, certain that he would know it again if he saw it, that he could give an accurate description of it.

Obviously, it was his duty to inform the police of what he had seen. It was scarcely imaginable that the man's proceedings had been innocent. It was clear that he was a law-breaker who had escaped with his plunder. But as a schoolboy, it was more judicious for Smithy to speak to his Form-master or headmaster before taking any other step. The Bounder was already realising how this might be turned to his advantage. He was booked for severe punishment when he returned to the school, after breaking detention, and leading the head prefect of Greyfriars on an unavailing chase. Certainly that meant a Head's flogging.

But if he turned up at Greyfriars with the thief's loot in his Possession, to be handed back to the owner, the headmaster could scarcely reward him with a flogging. Smithy chuckled at the thought. It would be no end of a triumph to defy Mr. Quelch, to lead Wingate a dance, and then to escape all punishment for his rebellious audacity.

He laughed aloud as he thought of it. It would be a great score over Mr. Quelch.

He turned to the tree-trunk and examined the hollow into which the man had thrust his disguise and his plunder. It was a narrow opening, but evidently larger below, inside the old trunk, or it would not have contained the bundle the man had thrust in. That was another point the police would be glad to hear of. It proved that the robber was no stranger in the locality. Either he knew the country well, or else he had spent time in the locality, learning his way about, before he had ventured on the robbery.

Smithy thrust his arm into the opening and groped.

His hand came out with the little leather bag in it. He opened the bag, as the robber had done, and looked at the contents. The stack of money there almost made him gasp, though the Bounder was used to money. There were rolls and rolls of pound

notes and a wad of banknotes. At the very least there was the sum of eight hundred pounds in the Bounder's hands.

'My hat!' murmured the Bounder. 'What a haul!'

The bag was too large for any of the Bounder's pockets. Certainly he would not have cared to leave the wood carrying it in his hand. The strange man's pursuers might know it by sight. Certainly the robber would have known it had Smithy chanced on him. Vernon-Smith proceeded to remove the wads of notes from the bag and stuff them separately into his pockets. Most of his pockets were bulging by the time he had finished. Then he dropped the empty bag back into the hollow of the oak.

Vernon-Smith walked away from the tree at last towards the footpath, scanning the locality carefully as he went, to make sure of being able to find the oak again.

He reached the footpath and walked away towards Lantham.

The Bounder walked cheerily into Lantham, and went into the railway station, in good time for the next train.

He took his ticket and went on the platform, and he did not fail to observe that there was an air of excitement about the usually sleepy place. A dozen people were on the platform for the train, and they were all talking, and they had only one topic—the daring hold-up at the Lantham and County Bank.

In a very few minutes the Bounder knew where the money belonged that he had stuffed into his pockets.

The hold-up at the bank that afternoon and the hiding of the notes in the hollow tree in Lantham Chase could not be simply a singular coincidence. It was the bank robber whom Vernon-Smith had watched hiding his loot.

The express came in at last, and the Bounder took his seat. There were other passengers in the carriage, and they talked of the hold-up all the way to Courtfield. By the time Vernon-Smith arrived at Courtfield he knew all the details of the affair that were known to the public, even to the detail that some schoolboys belonging to Greyfriars had been on the scene when the hold-up took place. He could guess who those schoolboys were. He knew that Harry Wharton & Co. had been going to Lantham that afternoon.

The Bounder got out at Courtfield, and took a taxi to the school.

'I say, you fellows! Here's Smithy!'

It was an excited squeak from Billy Bunter, as the Bounder walked coolly into the House.

A dozen fellows stared round. The Bounder was the cynosure of all eyes at once. His escapade of the afternoon was the talk of the Lower School. Vernon-Smith glanced round, with a smiling face.

'Anything up?' he drawled.

'He, he, he!' chortled Billy Bunter. 'Wait till you see Quelch.'

'Has Quelch come in?'

'Long ago,' grinned Bunter. 'He's waiting for you, Smithy. You're for it. He, he, he!'

'You've asked for it this time, Smithy,' said Peter Todd, with a curious look at the Bounder. 'Wingate came back boiling. Did he follow you far?'

'Nearly to Lantham,' said the Bounder. 'I dodged him at the finish. I hope the exercise did him good.'

Some of the juniors laughed. But the laugh died away as Mr. Quelch came out of his study with a grim brow.

'Vernon-Smith! You have returned?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Very well. I shall take you to your headmaster to be dealt with,' said Mr. Quelch.

‘Thank you, sir, said the Bounder imperturbably. ‘I want to see the Head.’

‘What! No more insolence, Vernon-Smith! Follow me at once!’

‘Certainly, sir!’

The Remove master stalked away, and the Bounder lounged after him, bestowing a wink on the Remove fellows as he went.

‘Well, Smithy’s got a nerve!’ remarked Bob Cherry.

‘The beak will give him something to cure all that!’ chuckled Bunter.

The door of the Head’s study closed behind Mr. Quelch and the Bounder.

CHAPTER XI

The Bounder’s Trump Card!

DR. LOCKE laid down his pen, and fixed his eyes upon Herbert Vernon-Smith, with a glance that made the Bounder feel a little uneasy in spite of his nerve. The Head had received Wingate’s report during the afternoon, and later he had learned from Mr. Quelch that the Bounder had not been present at call-over. Now he had returned long after the school gates had been locked, and the air of assurance with which he entered the headmaster’s study added to his offence. There was thunder in the usually benevolent countenance of the Head. Smithy noticed that the birch lay on the table ready for use. His punishment had been already decided upon.

‘So this rebellious boy has returned, Mr. Quelch?’ said Dr. Locke.

‘Yes, sir, and without, I fear, feeling any regret whatever for his disrespect and disobedience,’ said the Remove master.

‘Vernon-Smith, you were detained this afternoon by your Form-master. You went out in spite of your detention, and refused to return to the school when ordered by your head prefect.’

‘Yes, sir,’ said the Bounder.

‘You are now nearly an hour late for calling-over.’

‘I am sorry, sir.’

‘I trust so!’ said the Head grimly. ‘You understand, of course, that you will be severely flogged?’

‘It was not really my fault that I came back late for call-over, sir,’ said the Bounder smoothly. ‘I was delayed by—’

‘By what?’ snapped the Head. ‘It matters little, in any case, as you had no right to be out of the school at all, in view of the fact that you were detained.’

‘There was a hold-up in Lantham this afternoon, sir—a bank was robbed.’

The Head raised his eyebrows.

‘That does not concern the matter in hand, Vernon-Smith.’

‘It does, sir,’ said the Bounder.

Dr. Locke glanced at the Remove master.

‘You have told me, Mr. Quelch, of a statement made by some boys of your Form that they were present in Lantham when the bank was robbed by some desperate character. Was Vernon-Smith with them?’

‘Certainly not!’ said Mr. Quelch. ‘Wharton and his friends came in for calling-over, and afterwards acquainted me with what had happened at Lantham. Vernon-Smith was not with them!’

‘I was not there at the time of the hold-up, sir,’ said the Bounder. ‘I came on the bank robber later.’

The Head started, and Mr. Quelch gave a little exclamation. Smithy had expected that statement to startle the two masters, and undoubtedly it did so.

‘What did you say, Vernon-Smith?’ exclaimed the Head. ‘You came on the person who robbed the bank at Lantham?’

‘Yes, sir. That is why I was late for call-over,’ said the Bounder calmly. ‘I thought I had better keep out of sight while he was around, sir, as he had an automatic pistol.’

‘Bless my soul!’
Dr. Locke blinked at the Bounder, and Mr. Quelch stared at him with grim, unbelieving eyes.

‘That is a very strange statement, Vernon-Smith,’ said Dr. Locke at last. ‘Kindly tell me at once what happened during your absence from the school.’

‘Certainly, sir. I intended to report to you as soon as I got back, as I want you to advise me whether to go to the police.’

‘Proceed!’ said the Head curtly.

The Bounder proceeded to describe his adventure in the old oak in Lantham Chase. Dr. Locke and Mr. Quelch listened attentively, in silence, while Smithy gave a minute account of the whole affair, leaving out only one detail. He did not mention that he had taken the stolen banknotes from the tree-trunk.

The Head’s expression was one of amazement; Mr. Quelch’s of strong disbelief. It was easy to see that the Remove master, at least, believed that Smithy, having heard of the hold-up, was telling a fanciful story, in the hope of thereby dodging punishment. For that reason, the Bounder kept back that one little circumstance, and made no allusion whatever to the fact that he had the bank’s money in his own pockets at that moment.

‘Bless my soul!’ said the Head at last. ‘This is a very strange story, Vernon-Smith. What do you think, Mr. Quelch?’

The Remove master set his lips.

‘I think that every word Vernon-Smith has uttered is a fabrication, sir,’ he answered deliberately. ‘He is not a truthful boy by any means. I believe he has invented this story in the hope of eluding a just punishment.’

Vernon-Smith smiled inwardly. He had in his pockets the proof with which to overwhelm his Form-master as soon as he chose. But he was in no hurry to produce it. He was, in fact, playing with Mr. Quelch like a cat with a mouse.

Dr. Locke gazed doubtingly at the Bounder.

‘You assure me you have spoken the truth?’ he asked.

‘Every word, sir!’

‘You would be able to find again this oak-tree of which you speak?’

‘Well, oak-trees are very much alike, sir, and Lantham Chase is very extensive,’ said the Bounder, with well-acted hesitation. ‘Of course, I hope I should be able to find it, sir I would try.’

‘And if you fail to find it, Vernon-Smith,’ said Mr. Quelch in a grinding voice, ‘do you expect this incredible story to be believed?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘You will be disappointed, in that case. I do not believe a single word you have uttered.’

‘I am sorry for that, sir,’ said the Bounder meekly. ‘I can only repeat that I have stated the exact facts.’

‘Nonsense!’

‘I fear, Vernon-Smith, that I must share your Form-master’s opinion,’ said the Head.

‘The story is, in fact, incredible.’

‘Vernon-Smith has evidently been to Lantham,’ said Mr. Quelch, with biting contempt. ‘He has heard there the story of the bank robbery, and upon it has founded

this romance.'

'It certainly would appear so,' said Dr. Locke.

'You do not believe me, sir?'

'I do not.'

'Not one word!' said the Remove master harshly. 'Not one syllable! I am surprised, even in you, Vernon-Smith, at this audacity. Such a tale is an insult to the intelligence of your headmaster.'

'Then you do not advise me to report to the police what I have seen?' said the Bounder, with great meekness.

'You have seen nothing of what you describe. I am sure that Dr. Locke will not allow you to attempt to delude the authorities with any such fanciful story.'

'Certainly not!' said the Head.

'Very well, sir,' said the Bounder, his calm face betraying no sign of his secret enjoyment. 'But at least, sir, you will advise me what to do with the money?'

'The—the what?' ejaculated the Head.



The two masters watched him, as if in a trance

'The money!' repeated Mr. Quelch blankly.

'Yes, sir,' said the Bounder demurely. 'Knowing, sir, that the money had been stolen, and thinking that the thief might return for it, I thought it best, sir, to take it from the hollow tree.'

'Bless my soul! Do you mean to say, Vernon-Smith, that the money taken from the bank at Lantham is now in your actual possession?' stuttered the Head.

'Yes, sir!'

Mr. Quelch's face was a study.

'That alters the case—if true!' said Dr. Locke.

'If true!' said Mr. Quelch between his set lips. 'If it is not one more impudent falsehood, sir.'

'Where is this money, Vernon-Smith, which you state you took from the hiding-place in the oak?' demanded the Head.

'I put it in a safe place at once, sir,' said Vernon-Smith, still bent on 'drawing' the unfortunate Remove master.

He succeeded perfectly.

'No doubt!' snapped Mr. Quelch. 'And this safe place, like the hollow oak, you will fail to find if called upon to do so. A still more audacious falsehood, in my opinion.'

The Bounder had difficulty in suppressing a grin. Certainly he had his Form-master 'on toast' now, as he described it afterwards to Skinner.

'Oh, sir!' he said deprecatingly.

'We are wasting time, Dr. Locke, in listening to this audacious boy's impertinent fabrications,' said the Remove master.

'I agree with you, Mr. Quelch. Now Vernon-Smith'—the Head paused a moment—'unless you can furnish immediate and complete proof of what you have stated—'

'Well, sir,' said the Bounder, affecting to hesitate, 'there's the money, sir—'

'You state that you put this money in a safe place?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And the place?' asked the Head patiently, while Mr. Quelch fairly glared his disbelief.

'My pockets, sir,' said the Bounder calmly.

'Your—your pockets?'

'Yes, sir!'

'Vernon-Smith! Is it your meaning that you have this money on your person at the present moment?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Dear me!' said the Head.

'Produce it, then!' almost shouted Mr. Quelch. For the first time in his long career at Greyfriars, the Remove master lost his temper in the presence of his chief. 'Impudent boy, if you are not, as I believe, lying with the most impudent effrontery, produce this money at once!'

'Certainly, sir!'

And the Bounder, to the amazement of the Head, and the complete stupefaction of Mr. Quelch, proceeded to turn out bundles of currency notes and banknotes from his pockets.

The two masters watched him, as if in a trance, while he stacked the notes on the Head's writing-table.

Quietly, methodically, with the utmost coolness, Smithy emptied his pockets of the notes, stacking them up in order. Hundreds of pounds were represented by those little stacks of paper.

The Head found his voice at last.

'Upon my word! This is—is—is very extraordinary! Mr. Quelch, it—it would appear that Vernon-Smith has—has spoken the truth, after all!'

Mr. Quelch did not speak. He was gazing at the growing heaps of notes, as if unable to believe his eyes. Certainly he did not wish to believe them. He was exasperated almost to the limit of endurance. Only too well he knew that the Bounder had deliberately kept back this proof of his statement to the last possible moment in order to overwhelm him with confusion.

'That is the lot, sir,' said Vernon-Smith at last. 'I haven't counted them, sir, but I think there is more than eight hundred pounds. I hope, sir, that you will take charge of them; they would not be safe in my pockets.'

'Certainly I shall take charge of them!' gasped the Head. 'The notes shall be locked in my safe till I can communicate with the bank and they can be returned. This is—is—is very extraordinary! Vernon-Smith, you have acted very badly and disrespectfully to-day, but it must be admitted that you have performed a public service in saving this large sum of money from the hands of a thief.'

'Thank you, sir!' said the Bounder.

'I shall telephone to the police-station at Lantham, and ask them to send an official to

take down your statement,' said the Head. 'Your description of the man will be most valuable; it may enable them to lay their hands on this scoundrel, who has only been seen in disguise by all other eyes. In the circumstances, I—I——' Dr. Locke hesitated. 'Vernon-Smith, it would be painful to me to punish you, in view of these circumstances. Yet it is impossible for me to overlook your disrespect and disobedience to your Form-master, whose authority you know it to be my duty to uphold. You have placed me in a very painful position, Vernon-Smith.'

The Bounder smiled inwardly. Outwardly his face was serious and concerned.

'I am sorry, sir,' he said. 'I had no idea of getting out of my punishment. I felt it my duty to save this money from the thief, sir, and to help the authorities, if you approve, in finding the bank robber, sir. I apologise to Mr. Quelch, sir, for the trouble I have given him, and should like him to believe that I am very sorry indeed for having acted in a disrespectful manner.'

The Head glanced at the Remove master expressively.

Mr. Quelch gulped.

'What do you say, Mr. Quelch?' asked the Head, his tone indicating very clearly what he expected the Remove master to say.

'I can only agree with your views, sir,' said Mr. Quelch painfully. 'I—I accept Vernon-Smith's apology, and the matter closes so far as I am concerned.'

'Thank you, Mr. Quelch. Vernon-Smith, I trust that you will attempt to show by your future conduct that you appreciate Mr. Quelch's kindness in thus pardoning your offence.'

'I will try very hard, sir, to show Mr. Quelch exactly how I appreciate his kindness,' said the Bounder.

'Very good,' said the Head, blind to the double meaning of the Bounder's words, though it was not lost on Mr. Quelch. 'You may go, Vernon-Smith. You will be called when the authorities desire to see you and take down your statement.'

'Yes, sir.'

And the Bounder walked out of the Head's study, and grinned mockingly as he went down the passage and strolled into the Rag.

CHAPTER XII An Amazing Discovery!

'HALLO, hallo, hallo!'

'Licked?'

'Sacked?'

'How's it gone, Smithy?'

'I say, you fellows, he doesn't look licked!'

The Bounder laughed.

Obviously, as he sauntered into the Rag with his hands in his pockets and a cool smile on his face, he had not been flogged, or sentenced to a flogging.

The Remove fellows simply could not understand it; but undoubtedly it enhanced the Bounder's prestige very considerably.

'I say, Smithy, how did you get off?' squeaked Billy Bunter in great excitement.

'Have you pulled the Head's leg somehow?'

'Blessed if it doesn't seem like a giddy miracle!' said Bob Cherry. 'You're not licked, Smithy?'

'Licked? No!'

'You're not going to be bunked?' asked Johnny Bull.

‘Do I look like it?’ asked the Bounder, with a careless laugh.

‘Well, no; but it beats me.’

‘The beatfulness is terrific,’ remarked Hurree Jamset Rain Singh. ‘The gladfulness is great to see the esteemed Bounder escape Scotchfully free. But how do you work these ridiculous miracles, Smithy?’

‘Spun the Head some yarn?’ said Nugent.

The Bounder nodded, ‘Just that!’ he agreed.

Harry Wharton was looking very curiously at the Bounder. He was as astonished as the rest of the fellows. He was glad that Smithy had escaped punishment; although the differences between them were very wide now, the captain of the Remove was not without some regard for the fellow whose faults were redeemed by indomitable courage. But he could not understand. He had fully expected the Bounder to be flogged; he would not have been surprised had Smithy been expelled from Greyfriars. Neither had happened, and it was amazing.

‘You’ve told the tale to the Head, somehow,’ said Squiff.

‘You’ve got it,’ assented the Bounder.

‘But what on earth did you tell him?’ asked Peter Todd. ‘The Head’s a downy bird.’

‘Oh, I don’t mind telling you,’ said the Bounder negligently. ‘I dare say you fellows have heard that there was a hold-up at Lantham this afternoon—at the bank?’

‘Yes, rather! We were on the spot,’ said Bob Cherry.

‘Well, I told the Head a yarn about that,’ said the Bounder. ‘A really interestin’ tale about meetin’ the bank robber and getting the stolen money off him.’

‘Great pip!’

‘You had the nerve to tell the Head a yarn like that?’ roared Bolsover major in amazement.

‘Oh, I’ve got lots of nerve.’

‘But the Head-didn’t swallow it, surely?’ exclaimed Skinner.

‘Swallowed it whole.’

‘Gammon!’ said Hazeldene.

Vernon-Smith laughed.

‘Well, I look as if he swallowed it, don’t I?’ he asked. ‘The birch was all ready on the Beak’s table. But I didn’t sample it.’

‘Well, my hat!’ said Hazel. ‘It beats me! The Head must be getting into his second childhood. I’ll bet you Quelchy didn’t swallow a tale like that.’

‘Well, no; not quite.’

‘Ha, ha, ha! Not Quelchy!’

‘But I convinced him at last,’ said the Bounder calmly. ‘He didn’t like it, but he took it down.’

‘You mean it, Smithy?’ asked Wharton.

‘Quite.’

‘But—but,’ exclaimed Bob Cherry, ‘if you spun the Head a yarn like that, Smithy, he’s bound to report it to the police.’

‘He’s going to,’ assented the Bounder.

‘Then the bobbies will want to see you about it.’

‘Quite.’

‘And what on earth are you going to tell them?’

‘Oh, the same yarn,’ said the Bounder carelessly. ‘Why not? Bunter isn’t the only fellow in the Remove who can tell the tale.’

‘Oh, really, Smithy—’

‘Well, I don’t think you’ll get away with it,’ said Nugent.

‘We shall see,’ said the Bounder.

The door of the Rag opened from without and a deep, rich, fruity voice was heard; the voice of Mr. Prout, the master of the Fifth.

‘Probably you remember this room, Captain Spencer? I believe it was called by the same name in your time at Greyfriars.’

‘The Rag—yes,’ answered the pleasant voice.

‘That’s the Head’s giddy guest,’ murmured Bob Cherry. ‘Prouty’s showing him round the school. Seen him, Smithy?’

‘Not yet,’ said the Bounder. ‘I remember hearing the Head speak to Prouty about him when I went to his study this morning.’

‘We came on the same train with him from Lantham,’ said Bob. ‘We didn’t know then that he was the Head’s giddy guest, though. He’s got a limp left over from the war. Decent sort of chap. Bit of a conjurer, too, I think.’

‘Eh, what?’

Bob grinned.

‘Well, he got in at Lantham without any baggage, but at Courtfield he produced a big suitcase, like a conjurer producing a rabbit from a hat,’ he said. ‘I don’t know how he did it.’

‘Might have come by an earlier train if he broke his journey at Lantham. He wouldn’t trouble to take his baggage out.’

‘Oh, yes; very likely,’ assented Bob, who had not thought of that simple explanation—indeed, had hardly thought of the matter at all. ‘Only he spoke to Prouty as if his suitcase was on the same train. I wonder if he saw anything of the hold-up at Lantham?’

‘Will you step in, Captain Spencer?’ Mr. Prout’s fruity voice was heard again. ‘The juniors use this room, as in your time at Greyfriars. Doubtless you remember it well.’

‘Oh, quite!’ said Captain Spencer.

He stepped into the Rag with the Fifth-form master.

The juniors stood respectfully to attention. Captain Spencer bestowed a smile and a nod upon the assembly generally.

Vernon-Smith felt his heart give a wild throb as he looked at the handsome, clear-cut face.

For a full minute the Bounder stood stock still, wondering whether he was dreaming. He almost rubbed his eyes.

Vernon-Smith had glanced carelessly at the young man in the first place, expecting to see a complete stranger in the Head’s guest. But his glance became fixed, frozen.

He had told the Head that he would recognise again, anywhere, the man he had seen change his clothes under the old oak in Lantham Chase—the man who had hidden the disguise and the stolen notes in the hollow tree.

Now he recognised him. In blank, dumb amazement, the Bounder stared at Captain Spencer.

He had changed his clothes since coming to Greyfriars; he was no longer in tweeds.

But the Bounder knew the slim, graceful yet athletic figure, the clear-cut, handsome, rather hard face. There was no mistake—there was no possibility of a mistake. The Head’s guest, the old Greyfriars man, was the bank robber at Lantham, the man who had held up the bank that afternoon, the man who had fled from a shouting crowd, the man who had crept into the depths of the wood to conceal his disguise and plunder.

It was so amazing, so utterly unnerving a discovery, that the Bounder, usually so cool and self-possessed, was utterly dumbfounded. He could only stand rooted to the floor, gazing at the man who had held up the bank and fired on the cashier, and who was

now the guest of the headmaster of Greyfriars School. The Bounder's brain fairly swam.

Captain Spencer did not observe the Bounder's fixed stare; he did not notice him at all among so many juniors. He strolled round the Rag with Mr. Prout and exchanged a few words with Wharton, and with Temple of the Fourth, evidently interested in the old place, as any old boy of Greyfriars might naturally be expected to be. Unaware of the amazed stare, unaware of the amazed thoughts thronging in Vernon-Smith's dizzy brain, the Head's guest walked to the door again with Mr. Prout and proceeded on his way.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Gone to sleep, Smithy?' exclaimed Bob Cherry, clapping the Bounder on the shoulder.

Vernon-Smith came out of his maze of astonished thoughts with a start.

'Oh! That—that was Captain Spencer?' he gasped.

'Yes.'

'The Head's guest?'

'Yes,' repeated Bob. 'What's up, Smithy? You look as if you'd seen a ghost.'

The Bounder did not answer, or heed Bob's curious look. He went out of the Rag, his brain still in a whirl. Captain Spencer was in the corridor with Mr. Prout, and the Bounder gave him another long, searching look as he passed him on his way to the stairs. There was no mistake—he knew that there was no mistake; yet he knew that if he stated what he knew to be true no one in Greyfriars—the Head least of all—would believe a word of it. Herbert Vernon-Smith went to his study, dazed by his amazing discovery, and for once at an utter loss to know what to do.

Eventually he decided to ask Harry Wharton's advice, and that very astonished member of the Remove declared that the Bounder could do nothing less than tell Dr. Locke—although, like the Bounder, Harry Wharton hardly expected that the Head of Greyfriars would believe the story.

CHAPTER XIII The Vials of Wrath!

MR. QUELCH, the master of the Remove, sat in his study with a deep frown on his brow.

Seldom had the Remove master of Greyfriars been in so bitter a temper as he was that evening.

He was thinking of Herbert Vernon-Smith, who had defied his authority that day—and defied it successfully.

There had been rebellious spirits in the Remove before, but it was the first time Mr. Quelch had been defeated in a contest with a member of his Form.

The defeat rankled deeply.

There was a tap at the door and Trotter, the page, looked in.

'The Head wishes to see you, sir.'

'Very well.'

Trotter retired.

Mr. Quelch rose slowly from his table. He did not desire to see the Head, but the wish of his chief was a command. He supposed that Dr. Locke desired to speak on the subject of Vernon-Smith and the hold-up, and he was tired of the subject—more than tired. Owing to that affair Vernon-Smith would be more and more in the limelight. He would be wanted to make a statement to the police; he would be an interesting figure to all the Remove, and Mr. Quelch would have been very glad to crush him back into

his proper position of a junior schoolboy of no particular importance.

The Remove master made his way slowly to Dr. Locke's study. He was there. But, rather to his surprise, he found the Head frowning, and the Bounder looking dark and bitter. Apparently the hero of the hour was already in disgrace with the headmaster, and Mr. Quelch's gloomy brow lightened a little as he noticed it. Praise and impunity, in Mr. Quelch's opinion, were only likely to make the reckless scapegrace more reckless and insolent than ever; what he needed was punishment—or at least, stern repression.

'Mr. Quelch,' said the Head, in a rather agitated voice, 'you must hear what Vernon-Smith has just stated to me. Is it your opinion, Mr. Quelch, that this boy is capable of making an utterly unfounded statement for the sole purpose of causing trouble and discomfort, and making himself of importance?'

'Undoubtedly,' said Mr. Quelch.

'I can hardly bring myself to repeat the absurd and senseless statement that Vernon-Smith has made reflecting upon an honourable gentleman, once a Greyfriars boy,' said the Head. 'It will appear to you to be incredible, Mr. Quelch, that this boy has accused Captain Spencer of being the unknown ruffian who robbed the bank at Lantham.'

Mr. Quelch almost staggered.

'Impossible, sir!'

'He has said so, Mr. Quelch.'

Wrath and indignation gathered in the Remove master's face. 'Then, sir, I recommend a severe flogging, to teach this insolent boy to refrain from such reckless slanders!' he exclaimed.

The Bounder smiled cynically.

He had not expected to be believed; he had known that the Head could not believe such an accusation against the man he had admitted to Greyfriars as a guest, at least without the strongest proofs. And the Bounder had no proof but his own statement that he recognised the man.

'I hardly know how to deal with the boy,' said the Head, after a long pause. 'Inspector Craven is even now on his way to Greyfriars to see Vernon-Smith and take down his statement. Undoubtedly the boy saw the bank robber at close quarters, as he has told us. He can give a description of the man. I must allow him to see Inspector Craven.'

Mr. Quelch nodded.

'That can scarcely be prevented, sir. But surely even this reckless and bad-hearted boy will not dream of making such an accusation against your guest to the official police.'

'I trust not!' said the Head, glancing at the Bounder.

'If you forbid me to do so, sir, I shall not do so,' said Vernon-Smith coolly. 'I am bound to obey my headmaster. But the responsibility will be yours, sir.'

'What—what?'

'I believe that I am bound by law to tell the police all I know, in such a matter, sir.'

'All you know, undoubtedly,' said Mr. Quelch. 'But not all you may surmise in a wicked and unchecked imagination.'

'Precisely,' said the Head.

'If I describe the man I saw, sir, his description will be that of Captain Spencer.'

'I hardly think that the boy is actually lying merely to create mischief,' said the Head.

'No doubt the man he saw may bear some resemblance to Captain Spencer. He is not an uncommon type.'

'He is the same man, sir.'

'Nonsense! You saw some young man of about Captain Spencer's age and general

appearance—there are hundreds such in every town.’

‘I saw Captain Spencer.’

‘Silence!’

The Bounder stood silent.

‘The whole thing is inexpressibly painful, Mr. Quelch,’ said the Head. ‘Captain Spencer is to remain my guest here for some weeks. Imagine his feelings if a hint of this should reach his ears.’

‘I am amazed at the boy’s reckless audacity, sir. You will, of course, command him not to repeat this wicked story to anyone.’

Dr. Locke paused.

‘I’m bound to tell Inspector Craven, sir,’ said Vernon-Smith. ‘I shall, of course, obey Dr. Locke if he forbids me to mention Captain Spencer’s name. But I am bound to tell the police that I have seen the man since he hid the money in Lantham Chase, and that I know where he is to be found. If Inspector Craven disbelieves me, sir, the matter ends. But he has a right to know what I know.’

Mr. Quelch’s eyes glittered.

‘Do you set yourself up against your headmaster’s authority, Vernon-Smith, as well as against your Form-master’s?’

‘I have my duty to do, sir.’

‘Duty! You, the most undutiful and insolent boy at Greyfriars, dare to speak here of duty!’ exclaimed the Remove master angrily. ‘Be silent.’

‘The position is very difficult, Mr. Quelch,’ said the Head slowly. ‘I cannot forbid the boy to make a statement to the police, if he believes it himself. If he believes it, I fear that it shows that he has a bad and suspicious mind. Nevertheless—’

‘After all, sir, Inspector Craven is an experienced man,’ said the Remove master. ‘He will know how much importance to attach to a wild and foolish statement made by a schoolboy who desires to attract attention and cause a sensation.’

‘That is true,’ assented Dr. Locke. ‘I shall, then, allow you to make this statement to the police inspector, Vernon-Smith, in my presence, if you persist.’

‘Thank you, sir!’

‘At the same time, I shall warn the inspector that you are known to be untruthful and unscrupulous,’ added the Head sternly. ‘Mr. Craven may be here any minute now.

Remain here until he arrives.’

‘Very well, sir.’

At the same moment, the sound of a car was heard without. ‘I have given instructions for the inspector to be shown in the moment he arrives, Mr. Quelch,’ said the Head.

‘Doubtless that is he. Please remain. Vernon-Smith, for the last time, I warn you to think carefully before you make a statement that cannot be recalled.’

‘Certainly, sir.’

A few moments later, Inspector Craven, of Lantham, was shown into the study.

CHAPTER XIV Great News for Bunter!

HARRY WHARTON left the Rag and the House. After what he had heard from Vernon-Smith, the captain of the Remove was in no mood for the cheery gossip of the Rag. He did not, and could not, believe what the Bounder had told him; but it was borne in upon his mind that Smithy himself believed it, and he wondered what would come of it.

A number of circumstances, trifling in themselves, seemed to bear out the Bounder’s

belief; certain it was, at least, a singular coincidence if the captain had hurried out of Greyfriars immediately after the Bounder's story.

A man with a 'game' leg would not naturally be expected to go on a bicycle spin, and it would be rather out of the common for a guest of the headmaster to borrow a machine from the bike-shed. But Wharton was not at all sure that it really had occurred, and that the Bounder's imagination had not been at work to help him with his remarkable theory. It was easy enough to ascertain; and Wharton walked down to the bike-shed with that intention.

The bike-shed was unlocked, long after the hour at which it was usually locked up for the night. Wharton entered and struck a match. He knew Wingate's machine well enough—a handsome Sunbeam.

The glimmer of the match showed that the stand was vacant — Wingate's machine was gone! The captain of the Remove knew that Wingate himself was in the House; he had seen him talking to Gwynne at the corner of the Sixth Form passage.

Evidently, therefore, Wingate himself had not taken the machine out.

With a very thoughtful brow, Wharton went down to Gosling's lodge. The Greyfriars porter had the key of the bike-shed.

Gosling looked out of his window as Wharton knocked. He did not look amiable. At that hour of the evening, William Gosling naturally expected to have done with the 'dratted' boys.

'Ho!' said Gosling. 'You! Well?'

'The bike-shed's unlocked, Gosling,' said Harry.

'You've come 'ere to tell me that?' inquired Gosling sarcastically. 'Well, I unlocked it meself, Master Wharton.'

'Wingate's machine has gone!'

'Is it really?' said Gosling, still sarcastic. 'Any law agin Captain Spencer borrherrin' it if he so wishes?'

'Not at all!' said Harry, laughing.

'So you've come along and disturbed a man arter a 'ard day's work to tell him that, 'ave you?' said Gosling. 'Did you think a blinking burglar 'ad got in and pinched the machine? Did you think I'd leave the bike-shed unlocked for burglars? Do you think it's up to you to manage this 'ere school, Master Wharton?'

'I'll tell you what I think, Gosling,' said the captain of the Remove cheerily. 'I think you're a rusty, crusty old codger, and that you talk too much—much too much! I think—'

Slam!

The window slammed before William Gosling could hear any more of the Removite's thoughts.

Harry Wharton walked away smiling, but his face grew grave as he went back to the House. He knew now, beyond doubt, that Captain Spencer had borrowed Wingate's machine and gone out on it. Possibly the fine evening had tempted him to go for a spin; as an old Greyfriars man, he might be keen to look around ancient haunts of his boyhood. Still, it was unusual, and it gave some colour to the Bounder's theory.

And it was odd, too, that a man with a 'game' leg should be given to cycling. A man who still limped from a wound received in the War, would not have been expected to use a push-bike. Was that limp, as the Bounder declared, only a pretence? Anyone wondering who the disguised bank robber might possibly be certainly would not have thought of a man with a limp.

But, if it was so, the captain was a man leading a double life— a life of pretence and false appearance. In that case, the Lantham affair could hardly be his first exploit. He

was a thief by profession, in secret, while outwardly leading the life of an old Public school man. The thing was possible—such things had happened. But—
But it was much more likely that the Bounder had been deceived by some chance resemblance, aided by his desire to get into the limelight by making a sensational statement.

Wharton went back into the House, but not to the Rag. A little later a car came up the drive, and he saw Inspector Craven, of Lantham, conducted to Dr. Locke's study. Would the Bounder have the nerve to make his statement to the Lantham inspector? What would be the outcome, if he did? Wharton was deeply interested, as well as uneasy and troubled. He remained near the doorway, and a quarter of an hour later, Inspector Craven came back to his car. He did not come alone. Herbert Vernon-Smith was with him.

The inspector's cool, keen face expressed nothing. But there was a smile on the Bounder's face.

He gave Wharton a nod.

'You've told him?' asked Harry, in a low voice, as the inspector went out to the car.

'Yes.'

'He doesn't swallow it?'

'I don't know.' Vernon-Smith grinned. 'The Head's no end upset, and Quelchy's almost raving.'

'No wonder.'

'The inspector wanted to speak to Captain Spencer,' grinned the Bounder. 'Even the Head was surprised when he learned that the giddy captain had gone out, and couldn't be seen.'

'And you—?'

'I'm going with Mr. Craven to point out the hollow oak—no time like the present.

Quelchy is awfully ratty at having to let me go, but, of course, he can't say so,'

Vernon-Smith chuckled. 'Quelchy is comin' out at the little end of the horn, all along the line. I expect he will make me sit up in class tomorrow.'

'Very likely. You've made him pretty wild to-day!'

'I'll make him wilder,' said the Bounder coolly. 'They're both down on me now—down on me like a ton of bricks—and why? Because I'm helpin' the police to nobble a bank robber. I'm goin' to make both of them look utter fools. It's up to me, now. If Spencer pulls the wool over the inspector's eyes, I'm goin' to show him up myself somehow. You'll see. I shall have the deuce of a time now from Quelchy and the Head. But they'll have to sing small when Captain Spencer is run in for the bank robbery.'

'When!' said Harry, with a slight smile.

'You don't believe it yet?'

'I can't!'

'Well, wait and see. I'm promised a flogging if I say a word about it in the school.'

'Better say nothing, anyhow.'

'Think so?' said the Bounder grimly. 'Perhaps I might have kept mum if they'd treated me decently. But they won't allow even that it might be a mistake—not even that. It's a lie—a slander. Just a mischievous trick to cause a sensation. That's what they call it. They've put it up to me now. I'll make Greyfriars ring with it!'

The Bounder's eyes glittered.

'Unscrupulous—untruthful—reckless slanderer!' he said between his teeth. 'I'll show them!'

'Smithy, old man,' said Wharton earnestly. 'For goodness' sake don't play the goat! If

you're right it will come out—the police will find it out. Don't say a word to the fellows!

'That's your advice, is it?' sneered the Bounder. 'I've been called a liar and a slanderer, and I'm to take it lying down.'



Breathless with excitement, Bunter rolled into the Rag to spill out his news

'Yes, yes; but—'

'Bunter!' called out Smithy.

'Yes, Smithy?'

'For goodness' sake, Smithy,' exclaimed Wharton, in alarm, 'not a word to Bunter! It will be all over Greyfriars—'

'That's what I want!'

'Have a little sense! The Head will—'

'You shut up, Wharton!' exclaimed Bunter. 'You let Smithy tell a pal. What is it, Smithy, old chap?'

Bunter was agog with excitement now. It was plain to him that Wharton was trying to keep some secret from his podgy ears, and that was enough for Bunter. Bunter always wanted to know.

'The bank robber,' said Vernon-Smith, in a clear and distinct voice that was heard by others as well as Wharton and Bunter. 'He's at Greyfriars now, Bunter!'

The fat junior jumped.

'What?' he yelled.

'It's Captain Spencer—'

'Captain Spencer is the bank robber.'

Bunter's round eyes grew almost like saucers behind his big spectacles, Wingate of the Sixth strode across the hall towards the Bounder, with a black brow.

'Vernon-Smith, you young rascal, how dare you say such a thing!' he shouted.

The Bounder looked coolly at the captain of Greyfriars.

'Because it's true!' he answered.

'You dare to say—'

'I dare to say that Captain Spencer is the man who held up the bank at Lantham, and I'm going to prove it!' retorted the Bounder, in a loud, clear voice, heard far and wide.

With that, Herbert Vernon-Smith turned and ran down the steps after the Lantham inspector. The car drove away with both of them. There was a buzz of astonished

voices in the hall. Billy Bunter rolled off to the Rag at once, his fat face ablaze with excitement. The Owl of the Remove had an item of news to impart now that was calculated to set the Rag in a roar, and banish all lesser topics. Almost breathless with excitement Billy Bunter rolled into the Rag and spluttered out his amazing news.

CHAPTER XV Struck Down!

THE Bounder, sitting beside Inspector Craven in the car that ate up the miles on the Lantham road, glanced several times curiously at the keen, composed face of the official. Inspector Craven had heard his amazing story—with shocked interjections from the Head, bitter comments from Mr. Quelch. What he thought of it, whether he believed a word of it or not, the Bounder did not know and could not guess. He was keen enough to realise, however, that a police-inspector's point of view would be very different from that of a schoolmaster.

The Bounder spoke at last.

'Will you tell me whether you believe me or not, Mr. Craven?'

'I believe that you have spoken to the best of your knowledge,' said the inspector.

'That's something,' grinned the Bounder. 'But you think I've very likely been taken in by a chance resemblance in looks?'

'I keep an open mind on that point.'

'You haven't seen Captain Spencer?'

'No.'

'But you will see him?'

'Certainly!'

'And look into his past record?'

Mr. Craven made no answer to that. The Bounder smiled sarcastically. He did not really expect a police official to discuss his intentions with him. But he was irritated. And Mr. Craven's composed face told him nothing, keen as his eyes were.

'You don't want any further help from me, Mr. Craven?'

'I want you to guide me to the hollow oak you have described, where the bank robber's disguise is to be found.'

'And nothing more?'

Mr. Craven gave the Bounder a keen, quick look. He could see that the schoolboy was keeping something back.

'Have you anything more to tell me?' he asked.

'If I choose,' said the Bounder coolly. 'My belief is that I can help you put your hand on the man in circumstances which will make the whole thing clear. What about that?'

'Go on.'

'One good turn deserves another,' said Vernon-Smith. 'I'll tell you this. I know where Captain Spencer is at this minute, and I know his game. Do you want me to tell you?'

'Yes,' said Mr. Craven curtly.

'Then answer my question first. Do you take enough stock in my story to look into Spencer's past record?'

Inspector Craven frowned. He was silent for a minute or two, and he compressed his lips. But he was keen, very keen indeed, in getting on the trail of the desperate man who had held up the bank at Lantham in broad daylight, and he understood that this cool-headed junior might be useful in that task. He did not like the Bounder's tone,

and he did not like the Bounder; but business came first.

‘Yes,’ he answered at last, ‘I shall take steps immediately to look into Captain Spencer’s record.’

‘That does it, then,’ said the Bounder. ‘If you’re taking the thing up seriously, I’m as keen as mustard in helping. And I can help. We’re going to Lantham Chase now to see the hollow oak. If we lose no time, we shall find Captain Spencer there.’

The inspector started.

‘What do you mean?’

Vernon-Smith succinctly explained the theory he had formed—that the captain had taken Wingate’s bike to get to the hollow oak before the police could get there.

The inspector sat silent, watching from the window. The car raced along under the summer stars, It halted at last, where a footpath left the road, and the inspector jumped out.

‘Come!’ he said curtly.

The Bounder followed him. He noticed that there was something in the inspector’s hand as they plunged into the shadows of the footpath. Mr. Craven was armed; which looked as if he did attach importance to Smithy’s story. As for the Bounder, he did not feel anything like fear, though he knew that it was quite probable that a desperate man would be cornered at the hollow oak—a man armed with deadly weapons that he had proved himself ready to use.

‘Look!’ breathed the Bounder.

In the darkness of the wood a light glimmered afar among the trees and underwoods.

‘Is that the place?’

‘That’s about it,’ said Smithy. ‘I couldn’t find the oak again without turning on a light—’

‘Don’t do that!’ rapped out the inspector.

Smithy chuckled.

‘I don’t mean to. My belief is that that light will guide us to the hollow oak. He just did it on the bike.’

‘Silence, please!’ said the inspector curtly. ‘Remain on the footpath. I am not authorised to take you into danger.’

Mr. Craven plunged into the wood, heading in the direction of the glimmering light under the trees.

Vernon-Smith laughed softly. He had not the slightest intention of being left out.

Softly, cautiously, he trod in the track of the Lantham inspector, deeper and deeper into the wood.

The light was stationary. It came from an electric torch fixed on a shrub or low tree. Several times a moving shadow dimmed the light. The Bounder was quite assured that the light was shining on the trunk of the hollow oak, and that the bank robber was groping in the hollow.

All of a sudden the light vanished.

Smithy heard a muttered word from the Lantham inspector. He knew that the man at the hollow oak had heard the rustling in the underwoods, and taken the alarm, and extinguished the light. Throwing caution to the winds Mr. Craven rushed on, crashing through the thickets, with the Bounder almost on his heels. There was a sound of a collision, a struggle of an instant’s duration; then a sharp cry and a heavy fall.

Vernon-Smith, running on with throbbing heart, stumbled over something on the ground, and almost fell. From somewhere in the dark came the sound of rustling, brushing bushes, as someone, unseen, fled into the night.

Smithy regained his balance, and groped in his pocket for his electric torch.

He knew what had happened—what must have happened. The Lantham inspector's grasp had been actually upon the bank robber when he had been struck down. The man who was fleeing through the wood was the bank robber—that was obvious. It must be the inspector who was lying at Smithy's feet.

The Bounder flashed on his light.

He gave a stare round him first, and saw the hollow oak, in the branches of which he had been hidden that eventful afternoon. At the foot of the oak lay a black coat; half inside the hollow of the trunk hung another black garment. The man who had been dragging the discarded disguise from the tree had been interrupted, and had not ventured to make any attempt to finish his task. He had struck down the inspector and fled, leaving everything as it was, very probably in the belief that the constables were at hand, for he must have heard the Bounder's footsteps. Vernon-Smith turned the light on the man at his feet.

Inspector Craven lay on his back with a streak of crimson running down his face. The fierce, sudden blow had stunned him for the moment, but he was already recovering consciousness.

Vernon-Smith helped him to his feet, and Mr. Craven leaned heavily against a tree, breathing hard.

The footsteps of the fleeing man had died away. Pursuit was of little use now; the deep, dark woods of Lantham Chase had swallowed him up.

'He's gone,' said the Bounder.

'You did not see him?'

'No. But he was here—as I told you he would be.'

The inspector did not answer. His face was pale, and he was dabbing the blood from his face with a handkerchief. Vernon-Smith waited for him to speak. His story had been proved to a certain extent; the man who had been at the hollow oak, who had struck down the inspector and fled, could only be the bank robber. But he had not been seen, and the theory connecting him with Captain Spencer remained an unproved theory.

The inspector smiled grimly.

'You had better go back in the car now, Master Vernon-Smith,' he said. 'It is already past your bed-time, I think. I am very much obliged for the assistance you have given me, and probably you will see me again.'

'Very well,' said Vernon-Smith. 'But you're hurt, sir.'

'That is nothing.'

The Bounder went back to the footpath, leaving Inspector Craven busy with the disguise that the bank robber had not been given time to remove. A few minutes more, and the car was whizzing back to the school with the Bounder. The Remove were all asleep in bed when Vernon-Smith arrived, and Mr. Quelch, with a hard, cold face, conducted him to his dormitory without a word. The Bounder turned in cheerfully.

'Good-night, sir!'

The Remove master did not reply. He left the dormitory, and the Bounder grinned as he laid his head upon the pillow.

CHAPTER XVI In the Limelight!

CLANG! Clang!

Harry Wharton turned his eyes on the Bounder's bed as he rose at the clang of the

rising bell in the early summer morning.

Vernon-Smith was there. He was awake, and he met Wharton's eyes with a grin. Bob Cherry was the second fellow to turn out, and he also glanced at the Bounder's bed.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! You're there, Smithy! I began to think you were making a night of it!'

'Anything happen at Lantham?' asked Peter Todd, sitting up in bed.

'Lot's!' answered Smithy.

'Did the catchfulness of the esteemed and ludicrous bank robber come off?' inquired Hurree Janset Ram Singh.

'Not quite!'

'Is Captain Spencer in a cell yet?' asked Bolsover major sarcastically.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

There was a general chortle in the Remove dormitory.

The Bounder's amazing statement had made a sensation in the Form. It had been the one topic until the juniors fell asleep the night before. But not a fellow believed a word of it. It was too utterly improbable, and the fellows only wondered at the Bounder's nerve in daring to utter, or even hint, such an accusation against the headmaster's guest.

'I say, you fellows, Smithy will be sacked to-day!' chuckled Billy Burner. 'The Head is sure to come down heavy when he hears!'

'No need to jaw about it, Bunter,' said Squiff. 'No need for the Head to hear! Least said, soonest mended!'

'He's bound to hear,' said Toddy.

'Of course I shan't talk about it,' said Bunter. 'I'm not the fellow to tattle, I hope!'

'Oh, my hat!'

'I mentioned it to you fellows in the Rag, and some of the Fourth were there,' said Bunter. 'I told Hobson of the Shell in confidence. I mentioned it to Price of the Fifth. But—'

'Fathead!'

'Oh, really, Toddy—'

'What does it matter?' asked the Bounder coolly. 'Wingate of the Sixth heard me tell Bunter, and a dozen other fellows, too. I dare say it's reported to the Head by this time. Besides, I told the Head and Quelch.'

'Well, you've got a nerve!' said Skinner.

'The nervefulness is terrific! The flogfulness will be the next item on the esteemed programme!'

'If not the bunkfulness!' grinned Bob Cherry.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The Remove fellows were rather excited when they went down that morning. They did not suppose for a moment that Captain Spencer was concerned in the hold-up at Lantham. But they wondered what would happen to the Bounder when Dr. Locke heard that he had made his guest the talk of the Lower School. At breakfast Mr. Quelch favoured the Bounder with a cold, steely glance of disapproval. But it was clear that he had not yet heard of the thrilling topic among his Form. Vernon-Smith had been forbidden by the Head to speak on the subject in the school. That he had directly disobeyed that order the Remove master was not likely to guess—until the talk about Captain Spencer reached his ears, as it was bound to do sooner or later. When Vernon-Smith strolled into the Form-room for class all eyes were turned on him at once.

‘Here he is!’ chortled Billy Bunter. ‘Not bunked yet, Smithy. He, he, he!’

‘Not yet,’ assented the Bounder.

‘I guess you’ve got it coming!’ chuckled Fisher T. Fish.

‘Who knows?’

‘I can’t see what else the Head can do when he hears of this,’ said Bob Cherry. ‘It’s altogether too thick, Smithy.’

‘It may come to that,’ said the Bounder coolly. ‘But what’s the odds? It will all be set right again when Captain Spencer is arrested for the hold-up at Lantham.’

‘When!’ said Bob.

‘The whenfulness is terrific.’

‘For goodness’ sake, Smithy, chuck it!’ exclaimed Harry Wharton. ‘You don’t seem to understand what you’re heading for.’

‘I understand quite well, and I’m not goin’ to chuck it. I’m goin’ to tell everybody who will listen that Captain Spencer is the bank robber of Lantham,’ said the Bounder deliberately.

‘Hush!’ breathed Bob as he sighted Mr. Quelch in the doorway of the Form-room. There was a sudden breathless hush. The petrified expression on Mr. Quelch’s face showed that he had heard the Bounder’s words.

For a moment a pin might have been heard to drop in the Remove-room. The Remove master found his voice at last.

‘Vernon-Smith!’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘You—you have dared—you have dared to repeat this ridiculous and wicked slander in the school, in spite of your headmaster’s commands to say nothing on the subject. The Bounder set his lips.

‘The Head told me it was a lie and a slander,’ he answered. ‘That put it up to me. Even the Head has no right to forbid me to speak as I like of a dangerous criminal!’

Mr. Quelch gasped.

‘You dare to apply such a name to the Head’s guest?’

‘That is his description, sir.’

‘Insolent boy! This is beyond all toleration,’ exclaimed the Remove master. ‘You are presuming, with utter recklessness, upon the service you rendered yesterday. But that will not save you, Vernon-Smith. I shall take you to Dr. Locke.’

‘I’m ready, sir.’

‘Follow me!’ thundered Mr. Quelch.

‘Certainly, sir.’

Herbert Vernon-Smith followed his Form-master from the Remove-room.

‘That’s torn it,’ said Skinner. ‘It’s the sack for Smithy this time. What else did he expect, I wonder?’

And Skinner’s opinion was generally shared in the Remove.

CHAPTER XVII

Where is Smithy!

‘Poor old Smithy!’

‘Well, he asked for it.’

Nothing was known officially. All the Remove knew was Mr. Quelch had come back to the Form-room alone, and that classes had been taken without the Bounder. In the morning break there had been an eager rush to look for him, but no one had seen anything of him.

In third lesson he was absent as before.

Mr. Quelch's face was far too grim and forbidding for the fellows to think of asking him a question.

They wondered what had happened; but few doubted that Herbert Vernon-Smith had been expelled.

If that was so there was nothing surprising in it. The kindest and most patient headmaster could scarcely have tolerated the Bounder's conduct. Right or wrong, Smithy had made an accusation against a guest of Dr. Locke, which to all but Smithy seemed absurd and ridiculous, yet which, absurd as it was, was certain to cause the police to interview the young man.

Absurd it might be, but that did not make it any the less unpleasant. As Skinner remarked, if you throw enough mud, some of it is bound to stick. Nothing could alter the fact that Eric Spencer's name had been coupled with crime—that one fellow, howsoever reckless and unreflecting, had declared that he recognised him as the Lantham bank robber. The position was simply intolerable with the headmaster. After third lesson the Remove fellows looked for Smithy again, and again they did not find him.

The general conclusion was that he was gone.

'Short and sharp,' remarked Skinner. 'Of course they wanted to shut him up as quick as possible.'

'Locking the stable door after the giddy geegee's stolen!' said Hazeldene. 'All Greyfriars knows about it now!'

It was after tea that the Remove received sudden startling news, and learned that Herbert Vernon-Smith was not, after all, gone from Greyfriars.

Billy Bunter burst into Study No. 1 with his fat face full of excitement and his eyes almost bulging through his big spectacles.

'I say, you fellows!' he gasped.

'Well, what's the latest?' yawned Nugent.

'Smithy!' gasped Bunter. 'He's not gone.'

'Not gone?'

'No. He's still at Greyfriars!'

'Where?' demanded Wharton.

'In the punishment-room—locked up!'

'Oh, my hat!'

'Skinner had gone round the old chapel for a smoke,' explained Bunter. 'You can see the window of the punishment-room from there. He saw Smithy at the window.'

'Sure?' asked Wharton doubtfully.

'You fellows come and see,' said Bunter. 'Lots of chaps are going round. I can't make out his face at the window, but Skinner says it's quite plain.'

The Famous Five, keenly interested, left the study. Outside the House they found that the news was spreading, and that quite a crowd of fellows were going round the buildings to stare up at the window of the punishment-room. There were twenty or thirty fellows on the spot when Harry Wharton & Co. arrived there with Bunter.

'There's Smithy!'

High above was a barred window, and at the glass a face could be seen. It was difficult to recognise at the distance, but there was no doubt that it was Vernon-Smith's, for no other Greyfriars man was missing from his usual place.

'So he's not gone,' said Bob Cherry with a deep breath.

'I'm glad,' said Harry.

'Same here!'

‘The samefulness is terrific!’ remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh. ‘The esteemed Bounder is a prisoner.’

Skinner was waving his hand to the prisoner in the punishment-room. The little window high above opened, and a hand came through the bars to wave back.

‘What are you fags doing here?’

It was Wingate’s voice. Evidently the crowding of the juniors to that secluded spot had been observed. Wingate of the Sixth came up with a frowning brow.

‘Clear off!’ he snapped. ‘This is out of bounds for the Lower School. Any fag found this side of the old chapel will be licked. Get out!’

And the crowd dispersed, eagerly discussing the latest development of the peculiar case of the Bounder.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Prisoner!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH was still at Greyfriars.

While the Remove fellows were discussing his fate, the Bounder had spent a weary day in the punishment-room.

Shut up in that lonely apartment, far from the rest of the school, out of the sound of voices and footsteps, left entirely to himself for the greater part of the time, Smithy found the hours drag heavily.

But his spirit was unbroken.

The Head’s decision was that until he withdrew his accusation against Captain Spencer, apologised for having made it, and promised never again to allude to the matter, he was to remain secluded from the rest of the school.

It was a little difficult to see how otherwise the headmaster could have acted, and the Bounder was quite able to realise that. But he was quite determined not to give in. He believed what he had said. Indeed, unless his eyes had deceived him that afternoon in Lantham Chase, he knew that it was true. He could not and would not give in.

But as one weary hour dragged after another through the long summer day the Bounder began to doubt whether he had done wisely.

He was up against forces that were much too strong for him, and he realised at long last that, in his headstrong recklessness of consequences, he had made a mistake. In spreading the story through the school he had made it unavoidable for his headmaster to take drastic action. His first impression had been that he would stand it, and prove himself game. But solitude and silence had their natural effect on him. An audience was essential to the Bounder.

By the time Trotter brought in his tea Herbert Vernon-Smith was utterly and completely fed-up.

Once more he was left in dismal solitude until Trotter came back for the tray.

‘The ’ead’s sent a message, sir,’ said Trotter.

‘Cough it up!’

‘He’s coming to see you.’

‘Tell him he’s welcome, and ask him to bring me some smokes.’

‘Oh, Master Vernon-Smith!’

And the grinning Trotter took away the tray and locked the door.

It was half an hour later that the Bounder heard footsteps outside, and the key grated in the lock.

He rose respectfully as the Head entered.

Dr. Locke’s face was cold and severe.

'I trust, Vernon-Smith, that I find you in a better frame of mind,' he said icily.

The Bounder did not speak.

'Had you obeyed my command and said nothing of your wild and absurd suspicion in the school, this need not have happened,' said the Head. 'But even you, headstrong and obstinate as you are, must realise that I cannot allow any Greyfriars boy to traduce a guest under my roof.'

'I know that, sir,' said Vernon-Smith. 'Only what I said is true, and I'm certain that Inspector Craven thinks so.'

'Nonsense! I may tell you that Captain Spencer, in consequence of your assertion, has had a long interview with Mr. Craven this afternoon, and that the inspector is perfectly satisfied.'

The Bounder grinned involuntarily.

'He would not be likely to tell Captain Spencer if he wasn't, sir,' he answered.

'Naturally, he will say nothing until he's got the case clear.'

The Head compressed his lips.

'It is futile to speak to you, Vernon-Smith,' he said. 'This state of affairs cannot continue. Only my impression that you really believe what you say has prevented me from sending you away from Greyfriars. But if you persist, you must go.'

He paused a moment.

'Captain Spencer was naturally much surprised and shocked when he had to be told of your accusation, Vernon-Smith. But he has very kindly made allowances for you. He thinks that you saw someone resembling him, and made a mistake. He has begged me not to expel you, great as your offence has been.'

The Bounder made no answer. He was quite sure in his own mind that Captain Spencer did not want to see him expelled. Certainly, Mr. Vernon-Smith, the millionaire, would have taken the matter up vigorously had his son been expelled from school. The man who had a dangerous secret to keep could not possibly want that. The captain undoubtedly would have been glad to see the last of the Bounder, but not by a method which would have led to rigorous investigation.

But the Bounder could not tell the Head what he thought, and he remained silent.

'I had hoped to find you in a better frame of mind,' the Head went on. 'So long as you dare to traduce a man whom I honour and esteem you cannot be allowed to associate with other Grey-friars boys. But the present position cannot last indefinitely. You cannot remain in the punishment-room for more than a few days. If you remain obstinate, therefore, I must send you away from Greyfriars. I require you to withdraw your accusation against my guest.'

'I can't, sir.'

'Very well! I warn you that my patience is very nearly exhausted, Vernon-Smith!' said the Head sternly. 'So long as you persist in this unscrupulous story, you remain here!'

The Head left the punishment-room and locked the door.

Vernon-Smith went to the window, and stood looking out into the red sunset. His face was dark and gloomy.

CHAPTER XIX

Billy Bunter Makes a Discovery!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. saw nothing of the Bounder on the following day.

They knew that he was still in the punishment-room, that his meals were taken there, and he was allowed out on the leads for exercise when the other fellows were in class.

Meanwhile, Captain Spencer was still the Head's guest at Greyfriars. It was known that he had come to stay several weeks; but some of the fellows had expected that, in the curious circumstances, he would cut his visit short.

He showed no sign of intending to do so, however.

On Saturday afternoon the captain sauntered down to Little Side, where the Remove were at games practice.

'I say, you fellows, here he comes!' called out Bunter.

Harry Wharton glanced round and lifted his cap politely to the captain.

Eric Spencer nodded and smiled.

'It's like old times to see you lads at games practice,' he said genially—'like my old days at Greyfriars. I used to be a bowler, of sorts. Like me to send you down a few?'

'Yes, rather!' said Harry at once.

'I'd like to see whether I've lost my old skill,' said the captain, with a smile.

'The honourfulness to our esteemed selves is terrific,' said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, handing the captain the ball.

'Put your best batsman in,' smiled the captain.

'Go it, Wharton!'

Harry Wharton took his bat, and the captain went on to bowl. The Remove fellows looked on with keen interest.

Captain Spencer could hardly have made a more popular move, if he wanted to be liked in the school, than this. Every cricketer there was gratified by the Old Boy taking a keen interest in their games.

Eric Spencer soon showed that his old skill with the ball was not gone. Wharton's wicket was a wreck in a few moments.

'Good man!' said Bob Cherry.

'Well bowled, sir!'

'Try that again,' said Harry.

'Pleasure,' said the captain.

Squiff tossed the ball back, and the captain caught it easily with his left. His limp was very pronounced as he took a little run to bowl again. But he bowled remarkably well. For a junior, Wharton was a first-class bat; but he had great difficulty in keeping his sticks intact; and a few minutes later his bails were down again.

All the cricketers were keen on watching the Old Boy bowl; but Billy Bunter was not a cricketer. Billy Bunter took advantage of the general attention being concentrated on Captain Spencer to sidle off the field. It was compulsory practice that afternoon—the only reason why William George Bunter was there at all.

As Form captain, it was Wharton's duty to see that the fellows turned up for games practice, and to see that they did not clear off too early. Wharton's attention being occupied now, William George Bunter did not lose his opportunity.

The Owl of the Remove rolled away, and at a little distance he broke into a trot. There was a fat grin on his face as he rolled out into the road, safe from games practice for that occasion, at least. Bunter had a supply of toffee in his pocket, and he looked for a shady spot to sit down in comfort and devour it. Sucking toffee under a tree appealed to Bunter much more strongly than cricket practice.

'Oh, lor'!' ejaculated Bunter suddenly.

Wingate and Gwynne of the Sixth came strolling along the road, and Bunter halted in dismay.

If the prefects spotted him, he would be ordered back to the Little Side at once, probably with a cuff to reward him for slacking. That was not what Bunter wanted—

not at all.

He backed out of the road among the trees by the wayside, and turned a deaf ear when he heard his name called.

'Beast!' he murmured.

The fat junior plunged on among the trees, and stopped at last, panting, in a deep thicket. There, screened from view on all sides, he sat down to rest his weary, fat limbs. It was extremely unlikely that the Sixth-Form prefects would take the trouble to look for him; but Bunter was leaving nothing to chance.

In the deep, shady thicket he sat and leaned against the trunk of a tree, and proceeded to devour toffee.

He was soon quite happy and sticky.

Then Billy Bunter's round eyes closed behind his big spectacles, and he dozed. He grinned sleepily as he thought of the other Remove fellows slogging at games practice on Little Side in the sun. Dozing in the shade was an immense improvement, from William George Bunter's point of view.

He did not fall asleep, but probably he would soon have been in the embrace of Morpheus had not a rustle in the wood aroused him. He opened his sleepy eyes and blinked round him.

Someone was coming through the trees directly towards the spot where Bunter lay hidden among the thickets. The fat junior sat very quiet. It would be like that beast Wharton, and especially like that beast Cherry, to hunt for him and march him back to Little Side by the scruff of his neck. The fat junior scarcely breathed.

But the rustling stopped; the newcomer, whoever he was, did not seek to enter the thicket where Bunter lay. The scent of a cigarette came to the Owl of the Remove. He grinned.

Obviously, it was not Wharton or Bob Cherry. More likely Skinner or Snoop, retired to that secluded spot for a smoke.

A minute or two later a voice came to his ears. To his amazement, it was the voice of Eric Spencer. He knew the quiet, cultivated tones of Captain Spencer at once.

'You're on time, Ransome.'

'To the minute, captain,' came a rather husky voice, very unlike the cultivated tones of the captain. 'I read about it in the papers—you were in luck.'

'Not as it turned out.'

'No. I see a report that the money has been taken back to the bank. What 'appened, then?'

Billy Bunter sat as if frozen.

He almost wondered whether he had, after all, fallen asleep, and was dreaming this.

For one of the voices he heard was that of Captain Spencer, the Head's guest at Greyfriars; and he was discussing the Lantham hold-up with the man he addressed as Ransome—and he was discussing it as the man who had robbed the bank.

Bunter sat motionless, staring blankly at the thick screen of foliage that hid the speakers, not four or five feet away. Not for worlds would Billy Bunter have made a sound or movement then. For he knew that he was in the presence of desperate men—he knew what only the Bouncer had known before, that Captain Spencer was the Lantham bank robber.

Billy Bunter did not stir. Even when a gnat settled on his fat little nose he did not venture to brush it off. He sat frozen with amazement and terror combined.

Captain Spencer was speaking in a low, hurried voice—but the dazed Owl of the Remove did not follow his words. He was not thinking of listening, he was thinking only of the astonishing discovery he had made, and of his own danger if the two law-

breakers should find him there. He could not see either of the men, so thick was the screen of foliage. Only their voices came to him. He started, and gave a little attention, as the man Ransome spoke again.

‘You’ll ’ave to cut, then, captain?’

‘Impossible! If I left Greyfriars now, it would fix suspicion upon me at once. I’ve got to see it through.’

‘The old schoolmaster don’t suspect?’

‘Not in the slightest. I am quite safe where I am—only one young scoundrel, a lad named Vernon-Smith, knows anything, and he is generally discredited as a reckless slanderer.’

There was a husky chuckle.

‘But it’s different with the police,’ went on Eric Spencer. ‘The Head thinks I quite satisfied Inspector Craven at my interview with him—but I could see that the man was not wholly satisfied. He attaches some importance to what the schoolboy told him—how much, I cannot find out. Certainly he does not feel that he can act on the information given to him by Vernon-Smith; and I have not been able to discover whether he is keeping me under any observation. But—’

‘But it makes the game risky, captain. The school ain’t the safe place to operate from that you reckoned it would be.’

‘No. But—I must have money. I made a big haul at the Lantham and County Bank last Wednesday—over eight hundred. That would have seen us through. But every shilling was lost, owing to the meddling of a schoolboy. It has left me worse off than before, as I have had to spend money, of course, on the enterprise. The luck has been rotten all through. I shall have to fix up an absolutely perfect alibi on the next occasion. But I can’t take the risk yet in any case. The school may be watched—it’s difficult for me to find out, of course. My comings and goings may be observed. It is useless to leave; if I am watched here, I shall be watched elsewhere. And going before the normal end of my visit would look suspicious.’

‘That’s so, governor. But what do you want me to do?’ asked the other. ‘I came here when I got your line, but I don’t see—’

‘You’re not known in this neighbourhood. You can put up at some inn, and hang round the place—as a pedlar. Your old game.’

‘Yes; but—’

‘I want you to find out whether I am being watched. If Inspector Craven suspects me, from what the schoolboy said, it’s pretty certain that he has a man observing the school. If that is the case, you will soon spot it, from outside.’

‘That’s so.’

‘If you come upon me, of course, we are strangers. But I shall take a walk on the Friardale road every day after lunch, and a pedlar can stop me to offer something for sale, without exciting remark.’

Ransome chuckled again.

‘Leave it to me,’ he said. ‘In less than two days, governor, I’ll be able to tell you whether they’re keeping an eye on the school. You leave it to me.’

‘That’s all then. I must get back now—I’m due for tea in a Form-master’s study.’

There were a few more muttered words, and then the sound of receding footsteps. Silence followed.

Billy Bunter still sat motionless.

It was a quarter of an hour before the Owl of the Remove ventured to make a movement.

Then he scrambled to his feet, his fat limbs trembling.

'Oh, ice'! breathed Bunter. 'Oh, lor'! The awful villain! He's the bank robber—Smithy was right all the time. Oh, lor'! The fat junior rolled away to Greyfriars. He was safe now; and being relieved of his terrors for his own fat self, he was beginning to realise the importance of the discovery he had made. It was in Bunter's power now to show the man up, and the fat junior swelled with importance at the thought.

CHAPTER XX

Chuck it, Bunter!

'PETER—'

'Enough!' said Peter Todd.

Peter Todd was having his tea with the Famous Five in Study No. 1.

In No. 7, Billy Bunter was his study-mate, and possibly Peter had enough of Bunter's company in No. 7. He did not seem to want any of it now.

'But I say, Peter—' urged Bunter, blinking in at the doorway.

He did not venture inside. Bob Cherry had picked up a loaf and was taking aim. When William George Bunter dropped into a fellow's study at tea-time, he had to be prepared to dodge.

'Enough!' repeated Peter Todd distinctly. 'When I say enough, Bunter, I mean exactly what I say, and that's enough. Catch on?'

'The enoughfulness is terrific, my esteemed fat Bunter,' said the Nabob of Shanipur.

'The clearfulness would oblige.'

'Peter, old chap—'

'Assez!' said Peter.

'What?'

'Assez!' Toddy apparently hoped to make his meaning clearer in French.

'Look here, you fathead—' roared Bunter.

'Genug!' said Peter genially.

'What the thump do you mean by genook?' hooted Bunter.

'Genug means assez, and assez means enough,' explained Peter Todd. 'Would you like it in Italian?'

'Oh, really, Peter—'

'Abbastanza!' said Peter.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'You silly chump!' roared Bunter, 'I've got something to tell you, you blithering idiot, and it's important!'



‘Can anyone lend me a cricket stump?’ said Todd wrathfully as he got up

‘Now look here, Bunter,’ said Peter Todd. ‘I’ve told you in four languages, and it’s time you caught on. If you want me to put it in Latin, you’ll have to fetch me the dick.’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘Peter—’

‘My hat! He’s still going it!’ exclaimed Peter Todd. ‘Will one of you fellows lend me a cricket stump? A cricket stump speaks a language that even Bunter can understand.’ The Famous Five chuckled, and Wharton obligingly passed over a cricket stump. Toddy took a business-like grip on it.

‘If you’re still there, Bunter—’

‘Oh, really, Peter—’

‘Where will you have it?’

‘I—I say, it’s really important!’ gasped Bunter. ‘I’ve found it all out about Captain Spencer!’

‘Wha-a-a-t?’

Bunter grinned. He had succeeded in making an impression at last. Six pairs of eyes turned on him inquiringly.

‘He’s a spoofer,’ said Bunter. ‘He’s an imposter. He’s just what Smithy said, and I’ve found it all out.’

Peter Todd rose to his feet, looking quite grim. His grip was hard on the cricket stump.

‘So you’re beginning, are you?’ he asked. ‘Smithy’s got shut up in the punishment-room for spinning that idiotic yarn about the Head’s guest, and now you’ve taken it up.’

‘It’s true!’ roared Bunter.

‘How can it be true, when it’s you that’s saying it?’ inquired Peter. ‘The two things don’t fit together.’

‘You silly chump—’

‘Is the fat idiot potty?’ asked Frank Nugent. ‘You know what the Bounder’s got, Bunter. That ought to be a warning to you.’

‘Let a fellow speak!’ hooted Bunter. ‘I tell you I know all about it now! I’ve found it

all out! I'm going to show him up! I'm going to report it to Mr. Quelch! I'm telling you fellows first!

And Bunter told.

There was a roar of laughter in Study No. 1 when he had finished.

'Oh, my hat!' sobbed Bob Cherry.

'But it's true!' shrieked Bunter. 'I'm going to tell Mr. Quelch. I'm bound to.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

The Owl of the Remove blinked at the juniors in great exasperation. He had intended to thrill the study through and through with his dramatic announcement. Instead of which, he had set the study in a roar.

On most occasions Bunter did not expect to be believed very easily. On the rare occasions when he told the truth, however, he found it very exasperating to be disbelieved. But his reputation was always against him. Even an ordinary statement from Bunter required confirmation from other sources before it could be credited. And such a startling statement as this would have required confirmation strong as proof of holy writ. Billy Bunter had only his word to give. And the roar of merriment in Study No. 1 showed how much value was placed upon his word.

'Why, you—you—you beasts!' gasped Bunter. 'I tell you I heard them. I'm going to show that villain up! I'm going to save the Head from an imposter. I'm going—'

'You're going to get a flogging if you play the goat like this!' said the captain of the Remove. 'Chuck it, Bunter!'

'Oh, really, Wharton—'

'Look here, Bunter,' said Harry Wharton seriously. 'You're the biggest and fatheadedest fibber at Greyfriars, or anywhere else. You never know when to stop. You want to borrow some of Smithy's limelight by telling the same silly story, and you don't understand that it won't do. I advise you to chuck it. The Head's pretty fed up with Smithy, but his hands are rather tied because Smithy's made an honest mistake, and really believes what he has said. You'll get flogged if you make up fatheaded yarns like this. If you must fib, stick to Bunter Court and your titled relations and your postal-order.'

'Why, you beast—' gasped Bunter.

'But don't spin yarns about the Head's guest, like Smithy. You'll get into real trouble if you do,' said the captain of the Remove.

'I heard them—'

'Chuck it!'

'I swear—' gasped Bunter.

'You won't swear here,' said Nugent. 'Keep that for your own study, if Toddy allows bad language in No. 7.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I swear I heard them plotting—'

'How long are you going to keep that stump idle, Toddy?' asked Johnny Bull. 'If you're too slack to use it, hand it to me.'

'I—I say, you fellows, I swear—I mean, I give you my word— honest Injun!' gasped Bunter.

'Are you going to bend over, Bunter?'

'No!' yelled Bunter. 'I'm going to Mr. Quelch to tell him. I'm bound to tell him what I know.'

'That means telling him nothing,' grinned Peter. 'If you try to pull Quelchy's leg, you'll hear something drop.'

Billy Bunter glared at the grinning juniors with a glare that almost cracked his

spectacles. Peter Todd swung up the stump, and Bunter dodged out of the study. He closed the door after him with a terrific slam.

‘Well, this takes the cake, even for Bunter,’ said Bob Cherry. ‘If he must tell fancy tales, he might think of something new and not give us Smithy’s yarns at second-hand. Blessed if he didn’t look almost as if he believed it himself!’

‘He may have gone to sleep and dreamed it, with Smithy’s yarn running in his silly head,’ remarked Nugent.

‘Yes, that may be it. Now, about St. Jim’s match—’ And the talk in Study No. 1 ran on the even tenor of its way, and Billy Bunter and his remarkable story were dismissed together.

After tea, the Famous Five came down from the study, and then they were reminded of the unimportant existence of William George Bunter. Deep groans reached their ears as they sauntered out of the House, and, looking up, they discerned a fat figure leaning against a buttress, wriggling painfully.

‘Hallo, hallo, hallo! Cramp or jim-jams?’ asked Bob Cherry cheerfully.

‘Ow! Wow! Wow!’

‘What on earth’s the matter with you, Bunter?’ asked Harry Wharton.

‘Yow-ow-ow!’

‘The yow-yowfulness is terrific,’ remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. ‘Is it a case of the lickfulness?’

Billy Bunter groaned dismally.

‘That beast Quelch! Ow!’

‘How many?’ asked Bob.

‘Ow! Six! Yow!’

‘Well, I dare say you asked for them,’ said Bob consolingly. ‘You ask for more than you get, you know.’

‘Beast! Ow! Wow!’

‘But what— Oh, my hat!’ exclaimed Bob. ‘You don’t mean to say that you’ve really spun that yarn to Mr. Quelch?’

‘Yow-ow-ow! Of course I did! It’s true! I was bound to tell him, wasn’t I?’ groaned Bunter. ‘And instead of thanking me—’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘He didn’t even wait for me to finish. As soon as I told him I’d found out that Captain Spencer was the bank robber, he told me to bend over.’

‘What did you expect?’

He said it was a result of Vernon-Smith spreading a wicked story in the school,’ groaned Bunter. ‘He said he would make an example of me, in case any other Remove fellow thought of doing the same. He gave me—ow ! —six. Hard! Yow-ow!’

‘Stick to the truth, old fat bean,’ said Bob.

‘Yow-ow! It’s the—ow-ow-ow ! —truth.’

‘Chuck it!’

‘Yow-ow-ow!’

Harry Wharton & Co. walked on, leaving Billy Bunter still owing and yowing and yowing, in a state of mingled anguish and indignation.

The Famous Five gave no more thought to the Owl of the Remove till they came up to the studies for prep. Then they found him in the Remove passage, surrounded by a crowd of juniors, who were roaring with laughter. Bunter, evidently, was telling his tale again, and receiving the amount of credence to which his reputation as a prevaricator entitled him.

It was useless for Bunter to insist that this time, at all events, he was telling the truth.

If the fellows had not believed Vernon-Smith on that topic, they were not likely to believe Billy Bunter. Not a fellow doubted that the Owl of the Remove wanted to share some of the notoriety lately earned by the Bounder, and was setting about it in the most fatuous way.

'I say, you fellows,' called out Bunter, as the Famous Five came up, 'just listen to a chap! I tell you it's true—'

'Chuck it, Bunter!'

'You fellows know how truthful I am,' said the Owl of the Remove, with almost tearful earnestness.

'We do!' chortled Bob Cherry. 'We does! Just!'

And the juniors went into their studies, laughing. Billy Bunter rolled dismally into Study No. 7. For once, if never before, the Owl of the Remove was telling the truth, and never before had he been so thoroughly disbelieved. Like the youth in the fable who cried 'Wolf!' so often when there was no wolf, that he was unheeded when the wolf really came.

In the Remove dormitory that night, Bunter tried it on once more. But by that time the Removites considered that, as a joke, the thing was exhausted and they were fed up. There was a general chorus of: 'Chuck it, Bunter!'

And as the injunction was backed up by two or three whizzing boots and a couple of pillows, the indignant Owl of the Remove did chuck it at last.

CHAPTER XXI

'Doggo!'

'THE Head!'

'Cover!' grinned Bob Cherry.

Five Remove fellows were sauntering cheerily along Friardale Lane towards the school when the majestic figure of Dr. Locke came in sight.

It was morning break at Greyfriars.

In morning break fellows were supposed not to go outside the school gates.

But at Greyfriars, as elsewhere, fellows did not always do precisely what they were supposed to do.

Harry Wharton & Co., on this especial morning, had allowed themselves the privilege of relaxing the rule in their own favour.

Having let themselves surreptitiously out of the school precincts by way of the cloister wall, they had enjoyed a little ramble, and now they were returning in good time for third lesson.

Dr. Locke was certain to stop them and inquire what they were doing out of school bounds in break. They were able to explain that they were doing no harm. There was no imaginable harm in a little ramble along the leafy lanes. Nevertheless, rules were rules, from a headmaster's point of view. They would be reported to their Form-master, and whether they received lines or a licking depended largely upon Mr. Quelch's humour.

Neither lines nor a licking appealed to the Famous Five. Obviously it was ever so much better to dodge the meeting.

Fortunately that was not difficult.

The Head was still at a distance, and he was progressing along the road at a slow and stately pace suitable to a headmaster, somewhat resembling the rate of travel favoured by a tortoise.

Moreover, the Head had a wrinkle of thought in his brow, and his eyes were on the

ground. Probably he was thinking out one of those obscure passages in Euripides or Sophocles, which have perplexed the scholars of many generations, and doubtless never will be satisfactory elucidated, even if they are worth elucidating.

By the time Bob Cherry had uttered the word 'Cover!' the chums of the Remove were in cover. They fairly flew through a gap in the high hawthorn hedge, and vanished from the sight of their headmaster if he had raised his eyes—which he did not.

'Saved!' ejaculated Bob Cherry dramatically.

'The savefulness is terrific!' murmured Hurree Jamset Ram Singh.

And the juniors chuckled.

'All serene,' murmured Harry Wharton. 'We've only got to lie doggo for a few minutes, and he will be past.'

The captain of the Remove peered cautiously through the gap in the hedge into the sunny road.

Dr. Locke was still a dozen yards away, coming majestically onward. He looked neither to the right nor to the left, and obviously had not the slightest suspicion that five Lower Fourth fellows were lying doggo so near at hand.

Harry Wharton gave a sudden start.

From a gap in the hedge on the opposite side of the road, only a few feet ahead of Dr. Locke, a face was looking.

It was turned away from Wharton's direction, the eyes being fixed on the advancing headmaster.

Wharton had a full view of the man, who was crouching in the hedge, and could not help noticing that he gripped a heavy cudgel in his hand.

Wharton stared at him blankly.

It seemed incredible that a footpad could be lying in wait for the headmaster of Greyfriars in broad daylight on a road where pedestrians or cars might have passed at any moment.

Yet the crouching man, cudgel in hand, was waiting the approach of Dr. Locke, and waiting for him to come up.

'Look here, you fellows!' breathed Wharton.

'What is it?' asked Nugent.

'Look!'

The five Removites stared from the hawthorns at the man farther up the lane on the opposite side. The Head, slowly as he came on, was very near the ambushed man now.

'Well, my hat!' murmured Bob Cherry: 'Looks like a giddy footpad. But if he is, he must have a nerve.'

'That's what he is,' said Johnny Bull. 'Can't be anything else. We shall see in a minute, and then—'

'Then we shall jolly well chip in,' said the captain of the Remove. 'There are enough of us to handle that fellow, cudgel and all.'

'Yes, rather!'

The chums of the Remove watched breathlessly. They were extremely unwilling to show up in the presence of their headmaster, who was very punctilious on such little matters as school bounds. But that consideration mattered little if their headmaster was actually in danger. Still, they sagely waited to see what was going to happen. The man's appearance was more than suspicious; but they did not want to make a mistake and give themselves away for nothing.

The crouching man never once glanced in their direction. His eyes were fixed on the approaching schoolmaster. The juniors had a full view of his profile, and it was not

prepossessing. He had a large, red, bulbous nose, a dark and stubbly face, and an ugly scar on his chin. His clothes, however, were quite respectable. It seemed scarcely credible that so decently dressed a man was planning highway robbery; yet his attitude told of that and nothing else.

A few moments later there was no further doubt. As the Head came abreast of him, the man leaped out into the road brandishing the cudgel.

‘Stop!’ he shouted.

The Head stopped in sheer amazement.

‘What? What?’ he ejaculated.

‘Money or your life!’

‘What? What?’

‘This is where we chip in,’ murmured Bob Cherry.

‘Hold on!’

Wharton pulled Bob Cherry back into the hedge as he caught sight of a running figure on the road behind the Head.

It was the figure of a young man of slim but athletic build. Wharton knew him at once. It was Captain Spencer.

‘What—’ began Bob.

‘Captain Spencer’s there—’

‘Let’s chip in, all the same. He’s got a cudgel.’

‘Oh, all right!’

Captain Spencer, however, had reached the spot before the Famous Five emerged from the hedge. He came panting up, passed the amazed Head, who was standing like a man in a dream, and hurled himself upon the footpad, heedless of a swing of the cudgel.

The next moment the man was sprawling in the road.

‘Just in time!’ gasped Eric Spencer.

‘Bless my soul!’ stuttered the Head. ‘What—what—what— I am quite bewildered!’

Thank you, Captain Spencer! Bless my soul!’

The footpad scrambled to his feet.

He backed away as Captain Spencer made a stride at him, and took to his heels.

The captain rushed in pursuit; but his left leg suddenly crumpled up under him, and he dropped on one knee. All Greyfriars knew that Eric Spencer had a limp in his left leg, the result of an old wound received in the War. Apparently he had forgotten it himself in the excitement of the moment. He gave a sharp cry as he collapsed, and Dr. Locke hurried to his assistance at once.

The footpad, racing away down the lane, would have been clear in a minute more; but he was running in the direction of Harry Wharton & Co., whom he had not yet seen.

He saw them now!

The Famous Five, pouring from the gap in the hedge, fairly jumped on him, and the footpad, taken utterly by surprise, went with a crash into the road, with the Removites sprawling over him.

CHAPTER XXII The Famous Five’s Capture!

‘GOT him!’

‘Sit on him!’

‘Hurrah!’

‘The gotfulness is terrific.’

The footpad was down on his back, with Bob Cherry kneeling on his chest, Wharton and Nugent grasping his arms, and Johnny Bull and Hurree Singh trampling recklessly on his legs.

Under the five juniors he was helpless; never was a man more thoroughly and effectually captured.

The chums of the Remove were feeling in high feather. They had made the neatest possible capture, and they felt that that would be a considerable set-off against the fact that they were out of bounds. The Beak could not fail to be pleased by that handsome capture of a dangerous footpad.

‘Got him, sir!’ shouted Bob Cherry. ‘Got him safe!’

‘Bless my soul!’

Dr. Locke had helped Captain Spencer to his feet. He stared blankly at the bunch of juniors pinning down the footpad. The whole thing had happened so quickly that the good old Head was still in a state of bewilderment. From the intricacies of Euripides he had been brought back to common earth with a startling jerk, and he was quite dazed.

‘Bless my soul!’ he repeated. ‘These—these are Remove boys! What are you boys doing out of gates in break?’

‘Catching a footpad, sir!’ said Bob Cherry.

‘Dear me! Upon my word!’

Captain Spencer’s handsome face had an extraordinary expression as he stared at the schoolboys and their captive. He seemed utterly taken aback.

Leaving the Head, he hurried on and reached the spot where the footpad wriggled painfully and breathlessly in the grasp of the Famous Five. Dr. Locke followed him more slowly.

‘We’ve got him, sir,’ grinned Johnny Bull.

The captain breathed quickly.

‘Yes, I see you’ve got him,’ he said. ‘You—you acted very promptly. But—but what were you doing here at all?’

‘You boys should not be Out of gates,’ said the Head, coming up.

‘Sorry, sir,’ said Wharton meekly. ‘We—we took a little stroll in break, sir—ahem!’

‘You should not have done so,’ said the Head, frowning. ‘However, I shall pass over the matter as you have been the means of securing this dangerous scoundrel. I should have been seriously harmed had not Captain Spencer come up in time. Hold him fast!’

‘The fastfulness is terrific, honoured sir,’ said Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. ‘He will not get away from our esteemed selves.’

‘No fear!’

‘Shall we walk him to the police-station, sir?’ asked Bob Cherry. ‘There are enough of us to hold him safe till we get him there.’

The Famous Five looked hopefully at their headmaster. Taking the captured footpad to the police-station meant not only a service in the cause of law and order, but also missing third lesson in the Remove-room at Greyfriars. And that morning there were ‘maths.’

Captain Spencer spoke before the Head could reply.

‘Leave him to me,’ he said.

‘He might get away from you, sir,’ said Bob. ‘You wouldn’t be able to run after him, sir.’

The captain smiled.

‘He will not get away when I get a grip on him,’ he said. ‘I think your Form-master will be missing you by this time.’

‘Hem!’

The Famous Five were quite willing to be missed by their Form-master, and the longer Mr. Quelch missed them, the better they would have liked it when mathematics were the order of the day. And really it was no concern of an Old Boy at Greyfriars. But the Head evidently shared Captain Spencer’s opinion. He had been about to assent when the captain spoke. Now he shook his head.

‘You boys had better return to the school at once,’ he said. ‘I will excuse you for breaking bounds in the circumstances; but you must not miss your class.’

‘We-we shouldn’t mind, sir, for—for once!’ murmured Bob.

‘Come, come!’ said the captain.

He stooped and grasped the footpad by the arm.

‘Let him get up,’ he said.

Rather reluctantly the juniors released their prisoner. The man, covered with dust from the road, staggered to his feet, the captain gripping his arm. He gave the schoolboys a black, savage look.

‘Now, no nonsense, my man!’ said Captain Spencer. ‘I’ve got you safe, and you’re going to the station. If you try to get loose you’ll get hurt. Get a move on!’

‘Let a man off, sir—’

‘That’s enough. Will you come, too, sir, and charge the man at the station?’ asked Captain Spencer.

‘Certainly,’ said the Head.

‘I—I suppose we shall be wanted as witnesses, sir?’ suggested Bob.

‘You will not be wanted as witnesses,’ said the Head dryly. ‘You will return to the school immediately.’

‘Hem!’

Evidently there was nothing doing.

Harry Wharton & Co. started for the school.

They glanced back at a little distance and saw the dusty footpad, with Captain Spencer’s grip on his arm, tramping away towards Friardale, the Head following.

‘Well, I suppose he’s safe,’ said Bob, with a laugh. ‘We’re not really wanted; but I’d have liked to cut maths.’

‘Same here.’

‘The samefulness is terrific.’

‘Rather mean of Captain Spencer to let us down,’ grunted Johnny Bull. ‘He might have remembered what it was like when he was a Greyfriars chap. I dare say he liked to cut a class now and then.’

‘Might have let us walk along,’ said Nugent. ‘But as we’ve got to get in, we’d better hurry. We’re late for third lesson already.’

The Famous Five hurried on to the school. When they arrived the rest of the Remove were already in their Form-room. They found Mr. Lascelles, the maths master, in charge of the Remove for third lesson, and to him they explained why they were late, and that the Head had excused them. The Remove fellows heard their explanation and stared; and Billy Bunter gave a fat snigger.

‘I say, you fellows,’ whispered Bunter, as the Famous Five went to their places.

‘Lucky for you it was Lascelles! That yarn wouldn’t have done for Quelchy. He, he, he!’

‘It’s true, fathead!’ growled Bob Cherry.

‘He, he, he! Yow-ow-ow!’ added Bunter involuntarily, as Bob pinched his fat ear in passing. ‘Yarooooop!’

Mr. Lascelles looked round.

‘Bunter, how dare you howl out in class in that ridiculous manner! Take fifty lines!’

‘Ow, wow! I—’

‘Silence!’

‘But I—’

‘Take a hundred lines!’

‘Oh, lor’!’

And William George Bunter, feeling sorry that he had spoken, subsided into indignant silence, and Harry Wharton & Co. sat down, smiling, in their places.

CHAPTER XXIII

The Bounder Climbs Down!

‘I’M fed-up with this!’

Herbert Vernon-Smith growled out the words savagely.

Vernon-Smith was tramping restively about the punishment-room.

It was no wonder that the Bounder was fed-up.

The bright sunshine glimmered in at the little, barred window. He knew, by his watch, that it was morning break—that the Remove fellows would be out in the fresh air and the sunshine. If they thought of him at all, it was only as a reckless ass who had asked for trouble and got it.

He heard a footstep in the corridor outside, and scowled. No doubt it was his Form-master, with a new task for him for the day. He stood facing the door, with a black brow, as the key turned and it opened.

Mr. Quelch, with a severe, unsmiling countenance, entered the punishment-room. But he did not bring a paper or a book in his hand. It was not a new task this time.

Mr. Quelch closed the door, and turned to the sullen Bounder and fixed his eyes upon him.

‘This will be your last day here, Vernon-Smith,’ he said coldly. Smithy’s face brightened.

‘I’m glad of that, sir,’ he said.

‘The Head has decided—rightly, in my opinion—that you cannot be kept longer under detention here,’ said the Remove master. ‘It is for you to decide whether you rejoin your Form, or whether you leave Greyfriars.’

‘Oh!’ said the Bounder.

‘Your absurd and unworthy suspicion regarding Captain Spencer, the guest of your headmaster—’

‘It is not a suspicion, sir,’ said Vernon-Smith steadily. ‘Captain Spencer has deceived the Head. He is the man who held up the Lantham and County Bank last week, and whom I saw removing his disguise in Lantham Chase. He is the man who struck down Inspector Craven when I was showing him the hollow oak in Lantham Chase where the loot was hidden. He—’ Mr. Quelch held up his hand.

‘I have heard enough—more than enough—of your wild accusation,’ he said harshly.

‘It is only because you appear to believe this yourself that the Head has dealt leniently with you. But for that you would have been expelled from the school for insulting his guest. Dr. Locke has made allowances; but you have tired out his patience. This cannot be permitted to continue. If this foolish belief is fixed in your mind—’

‘I can believe my own eyes, sir.’

‘It is probable that the man you saw bore some kind of resemblance to Captain Spencer,’ said Mr. Quelch. ‘I cannot think that even so reckless and unscrupulous a boy as you are, Vernon-Smith, would wholly invent such a story. But this

resemblance, if it exists, does not justify you in bringing a wild accusation against the Head's guest, still less in disseminating such a story through the school as you have done.'

'I admit that much, sir,' said the Bounder. 'I'm sorry now that I told all the fellows. But I was wild at the Head treating what I told him as a falsehood.'

'There is no excuse for you,' said the Remove master coldly. 'If you really believe this absurdity, it cannot be helped; but your headmaster forbade you to speak of it outside his study, and you disobeyed him. So long as you persist in this attitude you cannot be allowed to associate with other Greyfriars boys. But, as I have said, you cannot remain longer in confinement in the punishment-room. I require you to promise to say nothing more in the school on this subject, to refrain from repeating, in a single instance, your accusation against an honourable man. Give me this promise, and keep it, and you go back to your Form. Refuse—'

He paused.

'Well, sir?'

'Refuse, and you will be sent away from Greyfriars to-day,' said the Remove master curtly. 'The Head is quite decided upon that point; and I am to take you home by the afternoon train.'

'Oh!'

'Think, and decide!' snapped Mr. Quelch.

The Bounder's face set hard.

It was hard for him to yield even to his Form-master and his headmaster. The Bounder was a rebel by nature. But he did not intend to gratify Mr. Quelch by going, and he did not intend to leave Captain Spencer without a single eye to observe him in the school. Already the Bounder had realised that the time had come to climb down.

'I must do as you say, sir,' he answered. 'I can't change my belief. But I promise to say nothing further about Captain Spencer in the school. So far as I am able I will not say a word again on the subject unless—'

'Unless what?' rapped out Mr. Quelch.

'Unless it should be proved that I was right, and that Captain Spencer is the man who held up the bank at Lantham.'

'That proviso is of no moment, as nothing of the kind can ever be proved or believed by any person with a less—distorted mind than yours, Vernon-Smith. I shall accept your promise, and release you from detention here. I must warn you, however, that if you break your pledge you will be sent away from Greyfriars the same day.'

'Very well, sir!'

'The matter, then, closes on the understanding that you keep your word!' said the Remove master coldly. 'You may leave the punishment-room, Vernon-Smith, and take your books back to your study.'

'Thank you, sir!'

Mr. Quelch quitted the room, leaving the door open.

The Bounder sauntered out into the sunny quad, breathing deep of the fresh air, rejoicing in his freedom. He whistled cheerily as he strolled about the green quad with his hands in his pockets. It was good to be free again; although it was only a few days since he had been taken to the punishment-room, it seemed like weeks to him, if not months. The Bounder detested solitude, and seldom enjoyed his own company. He was quite-eager for the fellows to come out of the Form-rooms, eager to mingle once more in a crowd.

Suddenly he stopped, and a glint came into his eyes.

He was strolling near the gates when the Head came in with Captain Spencer.

They were speaking as they came up the path, and the Bounder caught Eric Spencer's words:

'My fault—entirely! I blame myself—'

'Not at all, my dear fellow,' said the Head. 'You could not help it. It is of little consequence, too. The police have the man's description.'

'But for my wretched limp, he would not have got clear.'

'Do not distress yourself. It really is of no moment,' said the Head.

And the captain walked on with Dr. Locke, leaving the Bounder.

Five minutes later the fellows were out of the Form-room, and the Bounder was surrounded by a crowd of the Remove.

CHAPTER XXIV The Same Old Smithy!

'HALLO, hallo, hallo!'

'Smithy!'

'The esteemed Bounder!'

'You're out again, Smithy!'

'Out of quod!' grinned Skinner.

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Jolly glad to see you loose again, Smithy!'

'The gladfulness is terrific!'

Harry Wharton & Co. greeted the Bounder cordially enough. Most of the Remove fellows were glad to see him free again. The Bounder nodded and smiled at the Famous Five.

'Yes, here I am again,' he said. 'Jolly glad to be out. I can tell you, I was gettin' fed-up with chokey.'

'You asked for it,' remarked Bolsover major.

'Oh, quite!'

'And what price Captain Spencer now?' asked Skinner, with a grin. 'Are you keeping up your yarn about him?'

The Bounder shook his head.

'No!'

'Well, I'm glad of that,' said Harry Wharton. 'It really was a little too thick, Smithy.'

'But what's changed your opinion, Smithy?' asked Bob Cherry.

'I haven't changed it.'

'But you said—'

'I'm let loose again on condition that I say nothing about Captain Spencer. As it's a promise, I shall keep it. It makes no difference to my belief, of course.'

'Oh!' said Harry Wharton slowly.

'Well, so long as you chuck it, all right,' said Bob. 'Since you've been in chokey, Smithy, another silly ass has started a yarn of the same kind. You see, it was catching.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Oh, really, Cherry!' squeaked Billy Bunter. 'I've told you a hundred times at least that I described just what happened—'

'You could tell me a thousand times, old fat man, and it wouldn't make any difference!' said Bob.

'I can jolly well tell you—'

'Chuck it, Bunter!' said Harry Wharton. 'It was bad enough from Smithy, but nobody

wants Smithy's yarns at second-hand from you.'

'Oh, really, Wharton—'

'Dry up!'

'Look here—' roared Bunter.

'Kick him, somebody!'

'Yaroooh!'

Herbert Vernon-Smith glanced curiously at the Owl of the Remove as Bunter rolled away. It was news to him that another Remove fellow had 'taken up' the strange story he had told about Captain Spencer. Bunter with his fertile imagination and utter disregard for the truth, was just the fellow to spin an unfounded yarn, and, in other circumstances, Smithy would have taken no heed. At the present time, however, he was eager to hear anything that was said on the subject of the Head's guest, whom he had accused of being the 'hold-up' man of Lantham, and he resolved to question Bunter later.

'So the subject's going to be dropped for good, Smithy?' asked the captain of the Remove.

'Yes; I'm bound to say nothing more.'

'That's good! Least said, soonest mended,' said Harry. 'The police are after that hold-up merchant, anyhow, and they don't want any help from Greyfriars men. Let it drop.'

'I'm bound to, after my promise to Mr. Quelch,' said Vernon-Smith. 'I shall not mention the matter again, so far as I can help it.'

'You see, we've seen a good deal of Captain Spencer the last few days,' said Frank Nugent. 'He seems a decent fellow all round. He's come down to Little Side for the cricket more than once.'

'Has he?' said the Bounder, with a sardonic grin.

He was not surprised to hear that Eric Spencer was seeking to make himself popular in the school. Friends were less likely to be suspicious and observant than enemies.

'And if you'd seen him this morning—' said Johnny Bull.

'I have seen him,' said Vernon-Smith. 'I saw him come in with the Head ten minutes ago.'

'I mean before that. He tackled a footpad in Friardale Lane who was going to rob Dr. Locke—'

'Eh! Pulling my leg?' asked Smithy.

'Not at all!' And the Famous Five proceeded to explain together what had happened in morning break.

The Bounder listened with a deep attention that was quite flattering to the narrators.

'The footpad was a hefty chap, and had a cudgel,' said Bob Cherry. 'It was plucky of the captain to tackle him. Of course, he couldn't do anything else as the man was attacking the Head. Still, it was plucky.'

'I've no doubt he's plucky,' said the Bounder. 'Whatever he's short of it's not courage. He's got pluck enough. The man who held up the bank at Lantham in broad daylight was no funk, at least.'

'There you go again!' grinned Nugent.

'My mistake—I shouldn't have said that! But I say, this is a queer yarn you've spun me,' said Vernon-Smith. 'I wish I'd been there. I can see now that I made a mistake in getting shut up in punny. You say he knocked the man down and the fellow bunked—'

'Captain Spencer would have collared him, only his leg gave way,' explained Bob.

'His limp, you know.'

'I know! And then you fellows—'

‘We got him!’ grinned Bob.

‘The gotfulness was terrific.’

‘And you didn’t see him safe to the station? That was rather a mistake.’

‘The Head wouldn’t let us!’ chuckled Bob. ‘We were quite keen to cut maths, but the Head was too wide.’

‘Was captain Spencer willing for you to go to the station with the footpad, if the Head had been willing?’

The chums of the Remove exchanged uncomfortable glances. They could not help remembering that it was owing to Eric Spencer that they had had to return to the school, leaving the captured footpad in Spencer’s charge.

‘Look here! What are you getting at, Smithy?’ asked Wharton.

‘I fancy you’ve been taken in, that’s all, and the Head, too,’ said the Bounder coolly.

‘It’s a bit too much like a film story for me. A footpad waylays the Head in broad daylight—Captain Spencer happens on the spot in the nick of time—and the man gets away—or would have got away if you fellows hadn’t been there by sheer chance. Looks to me like a put-up job.’

‘Oh, what utter rot!’

‘You say the footpad was crouching in the hedge when you spotted him, waiting for the Head to come up?’

‘Yes.’

‘How did he know the Head was going for a walk in morning break?’ asked the Bounder sarcastically. ‘Dr. Locke does so perhaps once in a week. Somebody who knew him “tipped him the wink.”’

‘Rubbish! He was waiting for any prosperous-looking johnny to come along, of course, and it happened to be the Head.’

‘And Captain Spencer happened to be taking a walk in the same direction, at the same time? And his game leg came in handy to let the man escape.’

‘Oh, chuck it!’ said Bob, in some disgust. ‘Blest if you wouldn’t turn any dashed thing the wrong way out, Smithy. You’ve got a jolly suspicious mind, that’s your trouble.’

‘Anyhow, Captain Spencer has taken him to the police-station,’ said Wharton gruffly.

‘Would he do that if it was a put-up job, as you call it?’

‘He would not.’

‘Well, then, doesn’t that make it all clear?’ snapped the captain of the Remove.

‘Yes, if the footpad got to the station,’ said Smithy.

‘We watched them go.’

‘You didn’t watch them as far as the police-station. I rather think you’ll find that the man got away somehow.’

‘Rubbish!’

‘Rot!’

‘How could he get away, with Captain Spencer holding his arm all the way?’ demanded Bob Cherry.

The Bounder laughed.

‘I mustn’t say anything about Captain Spencer—it’s a promise. So I’ll put it like this. Owing to something or other, the footpad unfortunately got away before they reached the police-station.’

‘Bosh!’

‘The boshfulness is terrific.’

The Bounder shrugged his shoulders.

‘You seem to be taking your promise to Mr. Quelch rather easily, Smithy,’ said the

captain of the Remove, with a frowning brow. 'But just to prove to you that you're talking out of the back of your neck, I'll go and ask Captain Spencer this minute whether the man was safely juggled at the station.

'Do!' said the Bounder. 'I'm interested to know.'

Harry Wharton went into the House at once.

The other fellows waited for him to return, and they improved the shining hour, while they waited, by telling the Bounder what they thought of him and his endless suspicions. Vernon-Smith listened in silence, with a sardonic grin. He remembered the snatch of conversation he had caught between the Head and Captain Spencer when they came in, and he was quite sure that his surmise was well founded.

Harry Wharton came back in five minutes or so. There was quite a peculiar expression on his face.

'Well?' demanded the Co., in chorus.

'It—it's rather odd,' said Wharton haltingly. 'As it happens, Smithy has guessed right.'

'Oh!'

'Not that I believe a single word of Smithy's rot, of course,' said the captain of the Remove emphatically. 'But it certainly is the case that the footpad got away before they got him into Friardale. He struck Captain Spencer a sudden blow and got loose, and the captain's game leg prevented him from collaring the man again, once he jumped out of reach. The fellow scudded off across the fields and got clear.

There was an uncomfortable silence. It was broken by the Bounder's sneering laugh.

'That couldn't have happened if you fellows had gone to the station with them!' grinned the Bounder.

Harry Wharton & Co. looked at the Bounder, and turned away from him without another word.

CHAPTER XXV

Tea in Smithy's Study

VERNON-SMITH went to his study after class, and Skinner followed him there. During the Bounder's detention in the punishment-room Study No. 4 had not been the land flowing with milk and honey such as Skinner had been accustomed to since Smithy had taken him in as study-mate. Skinner was rather anxious for the horn of plenty to begin flowing once more.

'What about a bit of a celebration, Smithy?' asked Skinner.

'Good egg!' assented the Bounder.

'Let's ask a couple of fellows and make it rather a spread, what?' said Skinner.

'Yes, rather! Ask whom you like.'

'Snoop and Stott, then,' said Skinner.

'And Bunter,' said Smithy.

Skinner stared.

'Bunter?' he repeated.

'Yes, Bunter!'

'What on earth do you want Bunter for?'

'Oh, he's an entertaining chap at tea—in his own way, you know,' said the Bounder carelessly.

'This is the first I've heard of it. Anyhow, it won't be necessary to ask him; he will butt in as soon as he finds out there's a spread.'

The Bounder laughed.

‘Ask him, all the same; I want to make sure of him.’

‘Is it a rag?’ asked the mystified Skinner.

Harold Skinner had never heard before of anybody wanting Bunter’s company especially.

‘Not at all! Just tell him I’d like him to come. And if you don’t mind dropping into the tuckshop for me—’

‘Pleased, old chap!’

‘Order something really decent, and tell Mrs. Mible to put it down to me,’ said Smithy.

‘Right-ho! Leave it to me, old bean!’

Skinner walked off very cheerfully. He did not particularly object to Billy Bunter’s company, so long as there was plenty to go round. And as Skinner was to give the order he was able to make sure on that point.

Skinner, and Snoop, and Stott came in together, very early for tea, all with parcels from the tuckshop. Needless to say, William George Bunter followed them in. Bunter was surprised at being asked to the spread. He would certainly have asked himself, and nothing but a boot would have excluded him. Still, it was much more agreeable to roll in as an honoured guest. Bunter, of course, could not let it go at that. Next to a spread, Bunter enjoyed swank; and he preferred the two together, if possible.

‘Trot in, Bunter!’ said the Bounder hospitably.

‘Here I am, old chap!’ said Bunter. ‘Pleased to come to tea with you, Smithy. I’ve turned those chaps in Study No. 1 down on your account. I felt that I was bound to play up, you know, after you’ve been in chokey so long. So I turned them down.’

‘Turn them up again,’ suggested the Bounder. ‘Don’t mind me!’

‘Hem! The fact is—’

‘The fact is you talk too much,’ said Skinner. ‘Sit down and shut up, Bunter!’

‘Oh, really, Skinner—’

‘Shut up!’

‘Yah!’

Billy Bunter sat down after that elegant rejoinder. Good things were unpacked on the table, and Bunter’s fat face was irradiated by an expansive smile. This was something like!

Skinner & Co. enjoyed the spread, but they found Bunter’s company rather irksome. They could not discuss their own affairs in the presence of the Owl of the Remove; their own affairs were not of the kind that would bear being tattled in the passages and the Rag.

Why Smithy had bothered himself with the Owl of the Remove was a mystery to them at first. But they discovered his reason later on. Bunter, having disposed of enough provisions for three or four follows, found the keen edge taken off his appetite, and began to talk. Skinner, and Snoop, and Stott had no desire whatever to listen to him: but, to their surprise and annoyance, they found that the Bounder had.

‘Shut up, Bunter!’ said Skinner politely.

‘Oh, let Bunter talk,’ said Vernon-Smith.

‘I was going to tell you about Ponsonby,’ said Skinner sulkily.

‘You can tell me that another time. Go on Bunter!’

Bunter grinned triumphantly at Skinner.

‘I hear that Bunter has had quite an adventure while I’ve been locked up in the punishment-room,’ said the Bounder casually. ‘I’m jolly curious to hear all about it.’

‘I’ll tell you with pleasure, old fellow,’ said Bunter.

‘What utter rot!’ said Snoop. ‘It’s all spoof from beginning to end—just a fatheaded

yarn!’

‘It isn’t!’ roared Bunter.

‘Rats!’ said Stott. ‘It’s Smithy’s own story over again in a more idiotic form.’

‘I tell you it really happened!’

‘Bosh!’

‘Well, I want to hear Bunter tell the story,’ said Vernon-Smith. ‘You fellows ring off and give Bunter a chance to speak.’

Skinner & Co. rang off. They understood now why Smithy had asked Bunter to tea; he wanted to hear his story about Captain Spencer. Nobody in the Remove believed that story, and nobody but Bunter wanted to hear a word about it. But the Bounder’s word was law in Study No. 4, and they gave Bunter his head, so to speak. Skinner & Co. devoted their attention to the comestibles, and left the talking to Bunter.

‘It was last Saturday afternoon,’ Bunter explained, with his mouth full. ‘Captain Spencer came down to Little Side when games practice was on, and I got away—I was fed up. You see, I don’t need a lot of cricket practice, like some fellows; besides, I never really get a chance to show what I can do. Wharton doesn’t like being put into the shade by a better man.’

‘And what happened?’

‘That beast Wingate of the Sixth spotted me in Friardale Lane,’ said Bunter. ‘He was going to order me back to games practice, but I cut into the wood and pretended not to hear him. He, he, he!’

Bunter paused to help himself to another tart.

‘I got out of sight in a thicket,’ he went on. ‘I had some toffee, you know. Well, I’d finished the toffee when somebody came along under the trees and stopped near me. Then I heard Captain Spencer’s voice. He had come from another direction. He said— These are jolly good tarts, Smithy!’

‘He said what?’ exclaimed Skinner.

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

‘That isn’t what you told us last time,’ chuckled Snoop. ‘Oh, really, Snoop! I said that about the tarts, not Captain Spencer. He said to the other man a lot of things about the holdup at Lantham, and about being suspected by Smithy, and about having to lie low for a time, and so on. I can’t remember the words.’

‘There’s a proverb which says that Bunters ought to have good memories,’ remarked Skinner.

‘Oh, really, Skinner—’

‘Go on, Bunter,’ said the Bounder quietly. ‘You’re awfully interesting, old chap!’

‘Smithy knows I’m telling the truth,’ said Bunter loftily. ‘He knows that Captain Spencer is the bank robber, though he was locked in the punishment-room for saying so.’

‘Did you see the other man?’ asked Smithy.

‘No; neither of them. I heard them both, though, quite distinctly. They’re confederates.’

‘Did you hear Spencer mention the other man’s name?’

‘Yes; he called him Ransome.’

‘Ransome!’ repeated the Bounder. ‘Good! If you fellows had any sense you’d see that Bunter isn’t inventing this. His yarns never hang together like this.’

‘He’s made it all up, of course,’ said Skinner, with a stare. ‘You don’t mean to say you believe a word of it, Smithy?’

‘Every word!’

‘Well, you’re glad to hear anything to bolster up your own yarn against Captain

Spencer. I suppose that's it?'

'That's it,' said Snoop, with a nod.

'Think so, if you like,' said the Bounder carelessly. 'But shut up a bit. Just now I'm interested in Bunter. Go on, old bean.'

'Well, I didn't hear all they said. And I don't remember all I heard,' said Bunter. 'But Spencer told the other man to hang about the neighbourhood, get up as a pedlar, to find out whether Inspector Craven was keeping the school watched on his account.' The Bounder's eyes gleamed.

Knowing what he did already, he was able to see that this was not, as the Remove fellows supposed, one of Bunter's fanciful inventions. The story tallied too well with what he knew already.

'And Spencer mentioned that he was awfully short of money, owing to his loot being taken back to the bank after Smithy found it in the hollow oak in Lantham Chase,' said Bunter. 'He said he would have to prove a jolly strong alibi next time. I suppose he meant next time he held up a bank. Pass the cake, Skinner.'

Skinner rose to his feet. He had finished his tea, and he was not disposed to waste his time listening to Bunter.

'See you later, Smithy,' he said, and he left the study, followed by his friends.

The Bounder hardly observed them go. For once, Bunter was the desired guest, and he cared nothing whether the others stayed or went.

Bunter had slowed down now, but he was still eating while he talked. Vernon-Smith lighted a cigarette and leaned back in his chair. He listened while Bunter ran inexhaustibly on. The Owl of the Remove was delighted to find such a listener. For once, Bunter had been telling the truth, startling as his story was; but in the Remove it had been received with general derision. For the first time Bunter felt that he was being treated with the seriousness that was his due.

Finding his listener so attentive, and having got to the end of the facts, Bunter began to embroider his narrative in his usual style, drawing upon his fertile imagination. He was very keen to keep Smithy in that attitude of rapt attention.

But the fat junior was disappointed. As soon as his fertile fancy began to wander the Bounder was quite aware of it, and he very soon cut Bunter short. He realised that he had learned all that the Owl of the Remove could tell him.

'I say, Smithy, I haven't finished yet,' said Bunter, as Vernon-Smith rose from the table.

'Stay as long as you like,' said the Bounder.

'I mean, I haven't finished telling you about what happened last Saturday.'

'You have,' said the Bounder coolly, and he walked out of the study.

Bunter frowned after him. He was beginning to develop in his fat mind quite a thrilling romance, founded upon the latest American film he had seen at the pictures.

It was rather hard to be cut short before he had been able to get it off.

'Beast!' murmured Bunter.

But there was consolation in the stack of good things all remaining on the table.

Bunter devoted his attention to them—more and more slowly, as all the available space within his extensive circumference was filled, but steadily and industriously.

The Bounder strolled out into the quad, with a thoughtful frown on his brow and a glint in his eyes.

Bunter's story had let fresh light into his mind on the subject of that 'Old Boy' of Greyfriars, who was outwardly an honourable man, a guest of his old headmaster, and secretly a desperate bank robber. The affair of the footpad had appraised Vernon-Smith that Eric Spencer had a confederate at hand; from Bunter he had learned the

confederate's name. The bank robber had lost the loot he had gained by the hold-up at Lantham. It was very probable that he was in desperate need of money; as indeed, according to Bunter, he had said to his confederate.

The Bounder knew with what intentions the man had come to Greyfriars. Was he likely to leave, in a few weeks' time, with those intentions unfulfilled? It was not likely. Yet, as the Owl of the Remove had heard him say, he had to prove a very strong alibi 'next time'; in the circumstances, another bank robbery in the neighbourhood could scarcely fail to point the finger of suspicion at Eric Spencer, unless it was quite plain to all eyes that he had nothing to do with it. Was the spoof attack and rescue that had happened that morning a part of the scheme?

It seemed to the Bounder that he had a glimmering of the scheme, as in a glass darkly. But he had to know more, if he was to show the rascal up in his true colours.

And upon that the Bounder of Greyfriars was determined. All the school, which had looked on him as a reckless traducer, or at best a reckless fool, should know Captain Spencer as he really was; it would be a tremendous triumph for the Bounder. To that end the Bounder was prepared to devote his whole energy; for that reason he had given up his rebellious recklessness; he could not afford to be placed under detention, or watched by a Form-master's suspicious eye, now. He had made one serious mistake—he did not mean to make another.

CHAPTER XXVI The Footpad Escapes

'THAT's the man!'

'What?'

'Look!' shouted Bob Cherry.

It was Wednesday afternoon, a half-holiday at Greyfriars, and Harry Wharton & Co. had cycled down to Friardale. They had stopped at Uncle Clegg's little shop for refreshment in the shape of ginger-beer, and were partaking of the same at the little table under the oak-tree in front of the village tuckshop when a two-seater came at a leisurely pace down the winding old High Street.

Bob Cherry's glance had rested on it carelessly as it came by, but as he noted the driver he jumped up in great excitement, his ginger-beer swamping out of his glass. There was only one man in the car, and he was a man with a dark complexion, a large, bulbous nose, and a prominent scar on his chin. Bob knew him at once. It was the well-dressed footpad who had attacked the headmaster of Greyfriars a few days before.

'Look! That's the johnny!'

'Who—what?'

'The footpad!'

'Oh, my hat!'

The Famous Five stared at the man in the little two-seater. He was tooling his car along the old High Street at quite a leisurely pace. They had a full view of him, and there was no doubt at all of his identity.

The juniors stared in astonishment.

The man's description was posted up outside the little police-station in Friardale; he was wanted by the police for the attack on Dr. Locke, yet here he was, driving a car through the village, as if courting public attention. The nerve of it astounded the schoolboys.

'It's the same man,' said Wharton.

‘The samefulness is terrific.’

‘I’d know that beak anywhere,’ said Frank Nugent, ‘and that scar on the chin, too.’

‘What a chance for P.C. Tozer, if he were here!’ said Johnny Bull.

‘The man must be an utter fool to show up here like this,’ said Harry Wharton, in wonder. ‘He must know that his description is known.’

The man in the car did not seem to have perceived the group of schoolboys staring at him from under Uncle Clegg’s oak. His manner was quite casual and unconcerned, as he drove slowly up the High Street. Wharton looked round quickly, in the hope of seeing Police Constable Tozer’s portly form. He uttered an exclamation.

‘There’s Tozer—and Captain Spencer!’

‘Spencer’s seen him!’ exclaimed Bob.

Captain Spencer, at a little distance, was pointing out the car to Mr. Tozer. Obviously he had seen the man in the two-seater, and was pointing him out to the village constable. Mr. Tozer seemed a little slow to comprehend.

But he caught on at last, as it were, and strode into the road towards the car, holding up his hand.

The scarred man glanced at him, and seemed to wake to sudden alarm.

In a twinkling the car accelerated, and shot away like a bullet from a rifle.

It shot ahead, raced past the tuckshop, where the Greyfriars juniors stood, and sped away towards the open lane, leaving Mr. Tozer staring blankly after it.

Bob Cherry rushed to his bicycle.

‘Come on!’ he shouted.

The Famous Five’s machines were stacked under the oak. In a few seconds they rushed them out into the street.

‘After him!’ panted Wharton.

‘Follow him, lads!’ shouted Captain Spencer, catching sight of the chums of the Remove. ‘Keep him in sight if you can!’

‘Yes, rather, sir!’

The Famous Five mounted in hot haste, and fairly flew on the track of the two-seater. In less than a minute they were outside the village and tearing away along the road that led past the gates of Greyfriars.

The two-seater was still easily in sight, though it was going at a speed that cyclists could not hope to equal.

Why the scarred man had shown himself in the village at all was a mystery; but it was evident that he had taken the alarm now, and was doing his best to escape.

Three Greyfriars fellows on bicycles were coming down the road—Vernon-Smith plunged out of the way as the car whizzed towards them. Skinner and Snoop, in their alarm, plunged into the hedges on their machines. The Bounder jumped down by the roadside, and stared after the car with an angry face, and shouted.

‘You confounded road-hog!’

‘Join up, Smithy!’ roared Bob Cherry, as he passed. ‘It’s the footpad!’

‘What?’ gasped the Bounder.

Bob was already past. But Harry Wharton called to the Bounder as he came by after Bob.

‘It’s the footpad who tried to rob the Head the other day, Smithy! Come on! We’re after him!’

‘Great pip!’

Vernon-Smith stood staring blankly.

The Famous Five were gone in a moment more in a cloud of dust.

Vernon-Smith’s first impression was that the chums of the Remove were pulling his

leg. But he could see that they were in hot pursuit of the car. He whirled round his machine, mounted, and raced after them. 'Smithy!' shouted Skinner.

But the Bounder did not heed him.

He was riding like the wind, and in a minute or less he overtook and passed Nugent and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh, who were dropping behind in the race.

'Keep it up, Smithy!' called out Nugent, as he passed.

The Bounder pedalled on hard. He passed Johnny Bull, and by a desperate spurt, drew level with Wharton.

They rode on side by side; Bob Cherry, still ahead, keeping the lead. But the tearing car was disappearing now.

It turned into a lane that led towards Redclyffe, and vanished. At the corner of the lane Bob Cherry jumped down, and waited for his comrades to come up.

His face was crimson, and streaming with perspiration, and he was breathing in great gasps.

'Nothing doing!' he panted, as Wharton and Smithy reached him. 'He's gone! Of course, we had no chance!'

Nugent and Johnny Bull and Hurree Jamset Ram Singh came up. They were all breathless from their exertions.

'Well, he's got away,' said Harry. 'We did all we could?'

'Here comes old Tozer!' grinned Bob, breathlessly.

A car—evidently commandeered by P.C. Tozer for the chase—came rushing up from Friardale. Captain Spencer was driving, and the village constable sat beside him, with his truncheon across his fat knees, The juniors waved to the car, and Captain Spencer halted. He had been about to drive straight on past Greyfriars, towards Courtfield.

'This way!' shouted Bob.

'He's taken the road to Redclyffe!' yelled Wharton. 'Right!'

Captain Spencer drove round the corner, and the car flew on towards Redclyffe, and disappeared in the distance.

'They won't get him!' said Nugent. 'The man may have taken any of a dozen turnings.'

'They won't get him,' agreed the Bounder. 'Captain Spencer will take jolly good care of that!'

'What the thump do you mean, Smithy?' exclaimed Harry Wharton angrily. 'Captain Spencer pointed him out to the constable in the High Street of Friardale. We saw him. He put Tozer after the man.'

'Oh, he did?' exclaimed Vernon-Smith, rather taken aback. 'Yes, he did! And now he's driving Tozer after him. Tozer can't drive a car, and he couldn't have gone after him otherwise.'

'Well, he won't catch him,' said Vernon-Smith. 'You're sure that that's the man who went for the Head!'

'Quite sure!'

'I saw him as he passed me,' said Smithy. 'I'd know that chivvy again anywhere. Some nose.'

'A regular corker!' said Bob. 'Can't understand the man showing up in this neighbourhood at all. Must have a nerve!'

'What was he doing in Friardale?'

'Just driving through.'

'Jolly queer proceeding for a man who's wanted by the police, and whose description is posted up outside the police-station,' said the Bounder.

‘The queerfulness is terrific!’ said Hurree Jamsset Ram Singh.

‘He had some reason for showing up there,’ said the Bounder, wrinkling his brows in thought. ‘I’m blessed if I can get on to the game. But if he is a confederate of Spencer’s, as I think—’

‘You utter idiot!’ said Bob Cherry, in measured tones. ‘You’re potty on that subject, Smithy. Think Spencer would point him out to the bobby if he was in league with the man?’

‘He might have a reason. Anyhow, they won’t catch him—that was clear from the start. The man was in a fast car, and could get away when he liked.’

‘It doesn’t occur to you that we’ve noted the number of the car, and that a car can be traced by the number,’ said Bob.’

The Bounder laughed.

‘It occurs to me that the man had a false number-plate on the car,’ he answered.

‘Oh’

‘Well, if they get the man I’ll take back all I’ve said about Captain Spencer,’ said the Bounder, and he remounted his machine, and rode away to look for Skinner and Snoop.

‘Rats!’

‘Bosh!’

‘Fathead!’

The Bounder laughed as he pedalled away. His opinion was not likely to be changed by the comments of the Famous Five.

CHAPTER XXVII

Drastic Measures!

THE Bounder was sitting at the little table under the oak-tree outside the village tuckshop.

He remained where he was, staring along the street towards Mr. Tozer’s headquarters. It was only a few minutes later that a car stopped outside the police-station, and Mr. Tozer and Captain Spencer alighted. The Bounder watched them with a sarcastic eye. Obviously the pursuit of the two-seater had been a fiasco. The man with the bulbous nose and the scarred chin had got clear. The Bounder was too far away to hear what was said between the captain and the police constable, but he could guess that Mr. Tozer was thanking Captain Spencer for the assistance he had rendered.

A few minutes later, Captain Spencer walked away, limping slightly as he went. The Bounder’s keen eyes followed him.

Vernon-Smith was not thinking of Skinner and Snoop, or the intended run out of bounds planned for that afternoon. The bank robber occupied his mind, to the exclusion of all other matters.

Something was ‘on’—there was a new development, and the Bounder was cudgelling his brains trying to think it out. That the scarred man was Spencer’s confederate—probably the confederate with whom Bunter had heard the captain talking—was certain to Vernon-Smith’s mind. What had happened in Friardale High Street that afternoon was part of some scheme—the second act, as it were, of the comedy, of which the ‘spooof’ attack on Dr. Locke had been the first act. The Bounder was sure of it.

Captain Spencer walked away in the direction of Greyfriars, as if it was his intention to return to the school.

At the end of the village street he stopped and looked round in a casual way which

would have excited no suspicion in any mind not already on the alert.

Then he walked on again, and disappeared into the leafy lane that led towards the school.

Herbert Vernon-Smith rose to his feet.

Leaving his bicycle where it stood against the oak, he walked in the direction in which Captain Spencer had gone.

His heart was beating fast.

He had been waiting and watching for Mr. Tozer's unsuccessful return from the chase of the scarred man. Mr. Tozer had returned unsuccessful, as the Bounder had been sure he would. But that little comedy had not been played for nothing, the Bounder knew that. The pretended footpad had deliberately shown himself in public, and Captain Spencer had been on the spot to draw Mr. Tozer's attention to him.

What it all meant, the Bounder could not guess; but he knew that it meant something—there was more to follow. And he was determined to keep Captain Spencer in sight that afternoon. He did not believe that the captain intended to return to the school, though he had walked away in the direction of Greyfriars.

The Bounder strolled into the lane with a careless air, his hands in his pockets. But his eyes were very keenly about him. He grinned sardonically as he noted that the road ahead of him was empty. Captain Spencer had evidently turned off into the footpath that led through the wood. He was not, therefore, going back to Greyfriars.

Vernon-Smith reached the stile that gave access to the footpath, and vaulted over it. He hurried along the path under the thick trees.

Captain Spencer was not to be seen; and the Bounder hurried on, fearing that he had lost him.

'Stop!'

Vernon-Smith halted in surprise.

Captain Spencer was leaning against a tree near the path, smoking a cigar.

A somewhat ironical smile was on his handsome face, as he looked at the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith faced him, his heart beating hard.

'You called me?' said the Bounder, speaking as calmly as he could, and watching Spencer like a cat watches a mouse.

The captain nodded.

'Yes. What are you doing here?'

'This wood isn't out of bounds,' said Smithy calmly. 'I suppose I can walk here if I like.'

'You were following me.'

'Why should you think so?' said the Bounder.

'I think it is fairly plain,' said Captain Spencer. 'You are the Remove boy who told a cock-and-bull story about me. For some reason you have associated me in your mind with the bank robber whom you say you saw in Lantham Chase a week ago. You have been punished for telling so preposterous a story about your headmaster's guest. But your punishment does not seem to have cured you of your ridiculous suspicions.'

'No!' said the Bounder grimly.

'I shall not condescend to discuss with a schoolboy a matter affecting my personal honour,' said the captain. 'But I shall not allow you to spy on me, Master Vernon-Smith, though there is nothing to be discovered, as you imagine, by your spying.'

The Bounder flushed hotly.

'I am no spy!' he said savagely.

'What do you call your present conduct, then?'

Watching a scoundrel who is deceiving his old headmaster, who trusts him,' said

Vernon-Smith, between his teeth.

‘And if I report your words, and your conduct, to your headmaster, what do you think will be the result?’

‘I shall be flogged. Report to him as soon as you like; I’m asking no favours from you.’

‘I shall mention the matter to Dr. Locke,’ said Captain Spencer, ‘but I do not think that my old friend and headmaster will blame me if I take the matter into my own hands as well. I shall not allow you to spy on me, Master Vernon-Smith; and it is my intention to thrash you for doing so.’

Captain Spencer threw away his cigarette and grasped his walking-cane. He made a stride towards the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith eyed him savagely.

There was no escape for the Bounder. He had walked fairly into the trap, and now he was at his enemy’s mercy. He made a backward spring, but the captain was on him in a moment.

His grasp closed like steel on the Bounder’s collar.

‘Touch me with that cane and I shall hit out!’ hissed the Bounder between his teeth.

‘All the worse for you if you do, you impudent young rascal!’

And the cane rose and fell.

The Bounder was as good as his word. He struck out fiercely. But the next moment he was twisted over in the captain’s powerful grasp and flung into the grass. Then the cane lashed hard, and lashed again and again.

It was a severe thrashing. The Bounder was helpless in the grasp of the powerful man, and he could only set his teeth and endure it. Not a sound of pain escaped his shut lips as the blows fell savagely.

‘I think that will do,’ said the captain at last. ‘You had better think twice before you spy on me again.’

And he walked away back to the high road.

The Bounder lay on the grass, panting for breath, aching from the castigation he had received.

He staggered to his feet at last, and stood leaning against a tree, panting for breath.

His face was white.

His pursuit of the man he suspected was over now. Captain Spencer was gone; and it would have been futile to have shadowed him now that he was on his guard.

The Bounder’s thoughts and feelings were bitter as he stood leaning on the tree. He had been defeated; and he was more certain than ever that something was planned for that afternoon. The very fact that the man had been so watchful and had taken so effectual a method of stopping his shadower proved, to the Bounder’s mind, that Captain Spencer could not allow his movements to be observed. But the game was up now, and the Bounder, in a bitter mood, limped away at last, sore both in mind and in body.

CHAPTER XXVIII Bunter Comes in Useful!

BILLY BUNTER stopped at the stile in Friardale Lane, leaned his fat person upon it, and grunted discontentedly.

Bunter was not feeling pleased with things that sunny afternoon.

Lord Mauleverer had gone over to Lantham to cash a cheque at the bank there, and Bunter had fully intended to go with his lordship. For reasons of his own Mauly had slipped away without appraising Bunter, and when the Owl of the Remove sought for him he found him not.

William George Bunter's luck was out that afternoon, and at last he rolled out on the road to Friardale, intending to look for Harry Wharton & Co. in the village. But walking never was Bunter's strong point, and by the time he reached the stile in the lane he was breathless and tired. It was a warm afternoon, and Bunter had an unusual amount of weight to carry.

He rested his weary, fat limbs on the stile, and grunted. He was feeling an extremely ill-used youth.

'Shift, you fat fool!'

Bunter blinked round. It was the Bounder's voice.

Vernon-Smith, white-faced and furious, was tramping up the footpath from the wood. He reached the stile, upon which the Owl of the Remove was sitting with his feet on the step.

'Oh, really, Smithy—'



'Here's your half-crown, you frabjous duffer!' roared the Bounder

'Get out of the way!' snarled the Bounder.

Bunter decided to get out of the way. The Bounder looked in a humour to send him rolling into the road if he did not.

Vernon-Smith clambered savagely over the stile into the road. Billy Bunter eyed him curiously. He could see that something had happened to the Bounder.

'I say, Smithy, I've been looking for you!' he said amicably. The Bounder glared at him.

'I've nothing to lend you,' he snapped.

'Oh, really, Smithy—'

'Shut up!'

'You look as if you've been through it,' grinned Bunter. 'Who's been grabbing your collar? He, he, he!'

The Bounder clenched his hand, and Bunter prudently backed away. Herbert Vernon-Smith stood leaning on the stile. Bunter, eyeing him warily, climbed on the top bar, at the extreme end. His fat limbs required further rest. The Bounder gave him no heed.

'I say, Smithy, was it Captain Spencer?' ventured Bunter at last.

‘Was what Captain Spencer, you fat fool?’

‘Well, a cow with half an eye could see that you’ve been licked,’ grinned Bunter, ‘and the Spencer man passed me just before I got to the stile. He came out of the wood, just as you did, Has he walloped you?’

‘Yes,’ said the Bounder, between his teeth.

‘Cheeky cad, you know,’ said Bunter sympathetically. ‘We know what sort of a rotter he is, Smithy, if the other fellows don’t. I say, you’d feel better for some ginger-pop. Let’s get along to Uncle Clegg’s.’

‘Go and eat coke!’

Bunter relapsed into silence, The Bounder was evidently not in a mood to stand ginger-pop in the village tuckshop.

‘You saw Spencer, you say?’ asked the Bounder, after a few minutes’ silence.

‘Yes; he passed me.’

The Bounder eyed the fat junior.

‘You’ve been telling a yarn, Bunter, about Spencer meeting a man in the wood last Saturday. Could you find the place again?’

Bunter brightened up.

‘Easily,’ he answered. ‘I’ll show you the place, if you like, Smithy. It’s not far from here, on the other side of the road. Let’s go to Uncle Clegg’s first.’

‘Hang Uncle Clegg! I’ll tip you half a crown if you show me the place.’

‘Come on!’ Bunter rolled briskly off the stile. ‘I’ll show you the place with pleasure, Smithy. Anything to oblige a pal!’

‘Turn off here,’ said Bunter.

He led the way into the trees beside the road. At a distance from the road the trees thickened, and the underwoods were dense. Billy Bunter stopped and blinked about him uncertainly. The Bounder watched him with angry impatience. It was soon clear that Bunter was quite unable to find his way back to the thicket where he had lain concealed and listened to the talk of the two law-breakers the Saturday before.

‘It’s right on from here.’ said Bunter at last. ‘Not more than a few minutes’ walk, I know.’

‘You mean you don’t know where the place is,’ growled the Bounder.

‘There was a big oak-tree——’

‘Sure it was an oak?’

‘Well, it might have been a beech,’ said Bunter cautiously.

‘You silly owl!’

‘Oh, really, Smithy——’

‘Are you sure it was either an oak or a beech, you dummy?’

‘Yes, quite, unless it was an elm.’

‘You footing chump!’ hissed the Bounder. ‘You can’t find the place, anyhow. Get off, and bother you!’

‘I say, Smithy——’

‘Oh, clear off!’

The Bounder moved on angrily. Billy Bunter did not clear off. He blinked wrathfully after the Bounder, and then rolled in pursuit.

‘Smithy, old chap——’

Vernon-Smith turned his head to glare at the fat junior.

‘Have you remembered the place?’

‘Nunno. But——’

‘But what, you born idiot?’

‘You’ve forgotten something!’ gasped Bunter. ‘Something rather important, old

fellow.'

'What do you mean, you dummy? What have I forgotten?'

'The—the half-crown——'

'You fat chump!' howled the Bounder. 'Trust you to remember that, if you can't remember anything else. There, you frabjous duffer!'

'Yow-ow-ow!' spluttered Bunter, as Vernon-Smith tossed him the half-crown, which caught him on his fat little nose.

'Now clear out!'

'Beast!'

Bunter fielded the half-crown and rolled back towards the road, rubbing his fat nose with a podgy hand. He paused by the roadside to shake a fat fist after the Bounder, who had already vanished in the trees, and then rolled away towards Friardale to call on Uncle Clegg.

The Bounder, dismissing Bunter from his mind, plunged into the thick trees with a scowling brow. He was still feeling painfully the effects of Eric Spencer's walking-cane, and his temper was at its worst. It appeared very probable to his mind that the solitary spot where Bunter had overheard the two rascals in discussion was the accustomed meeting-place of Captain Spencer and his confederate.

Knowing nothing of the discovery Bunter had made, the bank robber would regard it as a safe rendezvous. Had Bunter been able to guide him there, the amateur detective of Greyfriars might have hoped to surprise the rascals in a meeting, perhaps to learn something of their plans. But Bunter, as he might have expected, had failed him.

But he knew that he could not be far from the spot, and he moved among the trees silently, with eyes and ears on the alert. He stopped suddenly, with a throb of excitement. The scent of a strong cigar came to his nostrils, and he knew that someone was close at hand in the silent wood, smoking. He was aware that Eric Spencer smoked strong Havana cigars; and he knew the scent of a Havana. He stood quite still, his heart beating, listening.

The Bounder was a Boy Scout of Greyfriars, and he had not forgotten his scoutcraft. He dropped on his hands and knees, and wormed his way silently and cautiously through the underwoods, the scent of the cigar guiding him.

Deep in a leafy thicket, he caught a glimpse of a man standing under a tree, leaning on the trunk, smoking a cigar. The man was Eric Spencer. He was evidently waiting, and smoking while he waited. The Bounder lay quite still, his eyes glittering. Through the foliage he caught only glimpses of Spencer, but he was sure of him. He was waiting for someone; and for whom could he be waiting in that lonely spot? There was a bitter satisfaction in the Bounder's face. He was on the track again, and this time the man he was shadowing should not discover him. Silent, still, the Bounder lay and watched, and at last he was rewarded by the sound of a rustling in the thickets, and a man came through the trees and joined Captain Spencer.

CHAPTER XXIX

Light at Last!

HERBERT VERNON-SMITH suppressed his breathing. His face was pale with excitement now.

He was hardly more than six or seven feet from the two men standing under the tree, and through the interstices of the foliage he had a view of both of them, completely hidden himself. The voice of Captain Spencer came clearly to his ears.

'I've waited half an hour for you, Ransome.'

'Couldn't be 'elped, captain,' answered a husky voice. The Bounder watched the man who had joined Captain Spencer, surprised and disappointed.

He had expected to see the man with the bulbous nose and scarred chin, who had driven the two-seater.

But the man was quite an ordinary-looking fellow, with a rather hard, coarse face, and shifty eyes set close together. He bore little, if any, resemblance to the man who had driven the car.

He was carrying a valise in his hand, which he laid on the grass and opened.

'You've got the stuff there?'

'You bet, captain!'

'Where did you leave the car?'

'Safe enough, t'other side of Courtfield. You'll want t'other car for the job—the closed car.'

The Bounder barely suppressed a start.

This was the man, after all, who had driven the two-seater. The disfigured nose and the scarred chin had been make-up; the man had been in disguise.

Smithy understood that now.

Ransome was kneeling beside the open bag, sorting out various articles. There was a gleam of reflected light as he fastened a mirror to a trunk. The Bounder watched intently.

Captain Spencer was slipping on a suit of clothes over his own. The suit had been taken from the bag.

Then he stood before the glass, and the Bounder, with beating heart, watched him making up his face, like an actor preparing for the stage.

The whole game was clear to Smithy now.

He was not surprised when he saw the captain adjusting the false nose, darkening his skin, and artistically delineating the scar on his chin.

The man worked quickly; it was plainly a kind of work to which he was well accustomed.

In a very short time Captain Spencer had vanished from all knowledge, and in his place stood an exact representation of the footpad who had attacked Dr. Locke, and who that afternoon had driven the two-seater through the High Street of Friardale.

The Bounder grinned.

He knew now why the pretended footpad had made his appearance near Greyfriars; why the man who was wanted had ventured to drive a car through Friardale, with Captain Spencer on the spot to point him out to P.C. Tozer.

It was a carefully prepared 'alibi' for the bank robber. Obviously, that afternoon was to see the bank raider at work again; but he was to appear in the guise of the man with the bulbous nose and the scarred chin, thus preventing even the bare possibility of suspicion attaching to Eric Spencer.

P.C. Tozer was an irrefragable witness that Captain Spencer was not the man! Mr. Tozer had seen both Spencer and the scarred man in the High Street of Friardale at the same moment. Obviously, therefore, they were not the same man!

It was a cunning scheme; an alibi that could not be disputed, or even suspected.

The Bounder's heart was beating fast.

What he had learned now could only mean that the desperate man had planned a raid for that afternoon; his make-up as the scarred man could mean nothing else.

The captain was finished at last.

'All right!' said Ransome, surveying him. He chuckled huskily as he spoke. 'Right as rain, captain.'

'You understand?' Captain Spencer spoke in low, tense tones. 'You'll be at the cross-roads on Courtfield Common at three-fifteen, in the closed car.'

'You bet.'

'I can get to Courtfield Common from here by following the footpaths, without coming out into the open at all. I know all this country like a book. I was a schoolboy here once.'

Ransome nodded.

'You pick me up at the cross-roads, and drive me to the bank. I shall probably not be three minutes in the bank.'

'You're the man for it, captain,' said Ransome admiringly. 'There ain't one man in a thousand got the nerve. But you've got it.'

'And you haven't,' said the captain, with a shrug of the shoulders.

Ransome grinned.

'No fear!' he said. 'I'm backing you holding up a bank in broad daylight—not me!'

The captain laughed contemptuously.

'Well, you've got an easy part to play, so you needn't worry.'

'I ain't worrying,' grinned Ransome. 'You're taking the risk, captain. And you're all safe at the school?'

'Quite.'

The Bounder, silent in the thicket, smiled.

There were a few more muttered words, and then the man Ransome tramped away through the trees and disappeared.

Captain Spencer remained where he was a few minutes longer. The Bounder, tensely silent, watched his disguised face through the interstices of the foliage.

But for the fact that he had watched the man assuming the disguise, he would never have believed that it was Eric Spencer standing there.

Harry Wharton & Co. and P.C. Tozer, had they seen him then, would not have had the slightest doubt that this was the man who had driven the two-seater through Friardale.

The Bounder watched him grimly.

The scheme had been so cunningly laid that success was certain, but for the Bounder's knowledge. After the raid on the Courtfield Bank, the raider would vanish in the closed car driven by Ransome; and in a hidden spot he would strip off his disguise, and walk back to Greyfriars as Eric Spencer.

The police would be seeking for the man with a bulbous nose and a scarred chin, who would be no longer in existence.

The captain strode away through the trees.

His footsteps died away in the distance.

For some time the Bounder did not move. But he rose from his covert at last.

He looked at his watch.

It was a quarter to three.

In half an hour the bank raider would be picked up in the closed car on Courtfield Common, to drive to the bank. After that it was a matter of minutes.

Only the Bounder of Greyfriars held the clue to what was intended, and he had little time to act.

His first thought was to communicate with Inspector Craven at Lantham; but he realised at once that there was no time.

He had no more than time to reach Courtfield before the raid on the bank took place.

He hurried back to the Friardale road, and ran into the village at top speed. His bicycle was still where he had left it, leaning against the oak outside Uncle Clegg's tuckshop.

'Hallo, hallo, hallo!'

Bob Cherry's cheery, ruddy face was looking out of the doorway of Uncle Clegg's little establishment.

He waved his hand to the Bounder.

'Come and have a ginger-pop, Smithy.'

The Bounder's hand was on his bike. He hesitated a moment, and then, leaving the machine where it was, hurried into the tuck-shop.

CHAPTER XXX

The Bank Raider at Courtfield!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. were sampling Uncle Clegg's ginger-beer in the little shop. Billy Bunter was perched on a high stool at the counter, with a jammy smear on his fat face. There were two or three other Greyfriars juniors there. All of them glanced curiously at the Bounder as he came in breathless, his face full of excitement.

'You fellows busy?' asked the Bounder.

'Frightfully!' said Frank Nugent, laughing. 'Don't we look it?'

'The busyfulness is terrific,' remarked Hurree Janset Ram Singh. 'The excellent ginger-pop of the esteemed Mr. Clegg is grateful and comfortable on a warm afternoon, and the thirstfulness of our esteemed selves is—'

'Terrific!' chuckled Bob Cherry.

'I want you fellows to come with me,' said the Bounder abruptly.

'What's on?' asked Harry Wharton.

'Where are we to come?' asked Nugent. 'Don't suggest the pictures on a hot afternoon!'

'Courtfield,' said the Bounder. 'You've got your bikes here.'

'Anything on at Courtfield?'

'Yes.'

'Well, if there's anything on, we'll come,' said the captain of the Remove. 'We were going for a spin, anyhow. But what's on?'

'A bank robbery.' 'What?'

'Which?'

'Draw it mild!'

'Smithy's got bank robberies on the brain' chuckled Bob Cherry. 'Trying to pull our leg, old bean?'

The Bounder smiled sarcastically.

Eric Spencer was even then on his way to Courtfield, with the intention of holding-up the bank as he had held up the bank at Lantham the week before. The Bounder knew it from his own words to his confederate.

But he knew also that if he told what he knew the chums of the Remove would not believe a word of it. They were fed-up with his suspicions of Captain Spencer.

'For goodness' sake, Smithy, get off that subject!' said Harry Wharton impatiently.

'You make a fellow tired!'

'There's no time to talk,' said Vernon-Smith quietly. 'I'd like you fellows to come along and help. You'll be sorry afterwards if you miss the show. But suit yourselves. I'm going.'

'But what—' began Johnny Bull.

'Will you come?' exclaimed the Bounder impatiently. 'I'm not pulling your leg. I give you my word. A ride to Courtfield won't hurt you if you're going for a spin, anyhow. Look here, I'll race you to Courtfield!'

'Too hot for racing,' yawned Nugent.

‘Slacker!’

‘Oh, let’s!’ exclaimed Bob Cherry at once. ‘This Co. never refuses a challenge. We’ll race Smithy to Courtfield, and beat him by a dozen lengths!’

‘Not in your lifetime!’ said Vernon-Smith.

‘I suppose you’re trying to pull our leg, Smithy,’ said Harry Wharton, with a perplexed look at the Bounder’s face, which was burning with suppressed excitement.

‘But we’ll race you to Courtfield, if you like.’

‘Done, then!’

Herbert Vernon-Smith hurried out to his bicycle. In spite of themselves, the Famous Five could not help being a little impressed by his evident earnestness.

‘What on earth has Smithy got in his noodle now?’ asked Bob, as they followed the Bounder out.

‘Goodness knows!’ said Harry. ‘He seems in earnest.’

‘Some more of his rot, I suppose,’ grunted Johnny Bull. ‘The rotfulness is probably terrific, but the racefulness will do us no harm,’ said Hurree Singh.

‘Here, start fair, Smithy!’ roared Bob Cherry, as the Bounder rushed his bike out into the street and mounted.

‘Come on, you slackers!’ called back Smithy.

‘Go it, you chaps!’

The Famous Five mounted at once and pedalled away in a bunch up the High Street and out into Friardale Lane.

The Bounder did not look back.

He was grinding at his pedals as if his life depended on his speed, and his machine fairly flew.

Even when they reached Courtfield High Street, and there was traffic to be considered, Vernon-Smith rode on with reckless haste. Bob Cherry slacked down a little then. He was not prepared to take the risk of knocking over foot passengers, like the Bounder.

The Courtfield Bank was a large corner building, and the Bounder, as he reached it, jammed on his brakes and jumped off. Almost reeling from his exertions, he dragged out his watch and looked at it.

It was a quarter-past three.

‘We’re on time!’ gasped the Bounder.

Bob Cherry jumped down.

‘You reckless idiot!’ he bawled. ‘You might have got killed about half a dozen times!’

The Bounder laughed breathlessly.

‘Never mind that. Come with me.’

He had stopped on the side of the street opposite the bank. The Courtfield bun shop stood there, with a row of little tables outside, under a striped awning.

There was time before the bank robber could arrive. The closed car, driven by Ransome, was to pick up the disguised captain at the cross-roads on Courtfield Common at three-fifteen. It was, therefore, picking him up at the very time that the Bounder dismounted outside the bun shop opposite the bank. It could not be on the scene for at least five minutes yet, and more likely ten.

The Bounder stood breathing in gasps, Bob Cherry eyeing him rather grimly. Harry Wharton and Johnny Bull rode up and dismounted at the pavement. Nugent and Hurree Singh were still far away.

‘Let’s sit down here, you men,’ said the Bounder. ‘Shove the bikes behind that corner. Sit down and have some ices.’

‘But—’ began Bob.

‘Oh, sit down!’

‘All serene! Might as well have had the ices at Uncle Clegg’s, in Friardale, so far as I can see,’ remarked Johnny Bull.

‘That isn’t very far,’ sneered the Bounder

‘Look here, Smithy—’

The Bounder did not heed.

He had picked a table a little hidden by the awnings, so that the juniors would be somewhat screened from the street, but still able to see the bank entrance on the opposite side of the road.

The chums of the Remove could see that Vernon-Smith was almost trembling with excitement, and to some extent they caught the infection of it. In spite of their doubt and disbelief, somehow they began to feel that there was ‘something in it.’

They sat down round the little table, and the Bounder ordered ices, but did not touch his own. His eyes were on the bank opposite.

Harry Wharton followed the direction of his gaze. He laughed impatiently.

‘Still thinking of the bank raid?’ he asked. ‘Yes!’

‘You’ll never see one,’ said Bob Cherry. ‘It happened last week, at Lantham. First time it’s ever been heard of in this part of the country. May not happen again in a hundred years.’

‘It will happen again within ten minutes.’

‘Pile it on!’ grinned Bob.

‘Keep an eye on the street while you eat your ices,’ said Smithy. ‘You will see a closed car come from the direction of the common and stop at the bank.’

‘How do you know?’

‘Never mind that now. Too long a story—and you wouldn’t believe it, anyhow, till you see the raid. The bank robber will be in the car.’

‘Go it! This is as good as films, and cheaper.’

‘Ha, ha, ha!’

The Bounder did not heed the merriment of the three juniors. His face was almost drawn with suppressed excitement. Feverishly he watched the busy street.

Suddenly his eyes blazed.

In his excitement he gripped Harry Wharton’s arm.

‘There’s the car!’ he breathed.

The juniors gazed at it. It was a common-looking car enough. The man who was driving was a commonplace looking man, with a rather hard face and foxy eyes.

‘You’ve seen that man before,’ said Smithy.

‘Not that I remember,’ said Harry.

‘He had a false nose on, and a scar painted on his chin when you saw him last.’

Wharton jumped.

‘Wha-a-at?’

‘Oh, this is getting too rich!’ said Bob Cherry laughing. ‘The man’s about the same build as that johnny in the two-seater, but he doesn’t look like him a little bit.’

‘He was in disguise then—’

‘Hem!’

‘And the same disguise is now worn by the man crouched inside that car, who will get Out When it stops at the bank.’

‘What a mix-up,’ said Bob. ‘I said this was as good as the films, but I was understating the case. It’s better.’

‘The betterfulness is terrific, as Inky would say,’ chuckled Wharton.

‘And who’s the johnny in the car who has borrowed the nosy man’s chivvy?’ asked Johnny Bull, grinning.

‘Captain Spencer.’

‘You silly owl! Are you beginning that yarn again?’

‘You’ll see in less than a minute.’

‘Rats!’

‘I don’t suppose the car will stop at the bank after all,’ chuckled Bob Cherry, ‘and what will you say then, Smithy?’

‘Look!’

The car slowed down as Bob was speaking; as the Bounder ejaculated, it stopped just opposite the bank entrance across the road.

Harry Wharton & Co. stared a little.

The Bounder had said that the closed car would stop at the bank. It had stopped!

Smithy’s statement was borne out so far.

‘Well, that’s a coincidence,’ remarked Bob.

‘We can’t see who gets out of the car,’ remarked Johnny Bull. ‘It’s between us and the bank.’

‘You’ll see him when he goes up the bank steps.’

‘Yes, that’s so.’

Still unbelieving, but decidedly suspicious, Harry Wharton & Co. stared across the road. They were keenly interested now, at least. A man had stepped out of the closed car and crossed the pavement to the bank entrance hurriedly. There were two large granite steps at the entrance, and as the man mounted them the juniors had a view of him. It was only a momentary view, as he pushed open a heavy swing door and disappeared into the building. But that glimpse, brief as it was, electrified them. For they spotted the red, bulbous nose, the dark complexion, and scarred chin of the man who had driven the two-seater in Friardale early that afternoon. The Bounder knew that it was not the same man, but to the chums of the Remove he was the same man beyond the shadow of a doubt.

‘My hat!’ ejaculated Bob in amazement.

‘That’s the man!’ rapped out Johnny Bull. ‘How Smithy knew it all beats me; but that’s the man. After him!’

The Bounder was already darting across the street. Harry Wharton & Co. did not need to be called on to follow; they rushed after him. Two panting cyclists jumped down at the same moment as they caught sight of the Greyfriars juniors.

‘Hallo, you fellows!’ called out Nugent. ‘What on earth’s up?’

‘The upfulness is terrific,’ remarked Hurree Jamset Ram Singh. ‘Let us follow onfully, my esteemed Franky.’

And, leaving their bikes on the kerb, Hurree Jamset Ram Singh and Frank Nugent rushed across the street after their comrades.

CHAPTER XXXI

Stop Thief!

HARRY WHARTON & Co. reached the pavement on the opposite side of Courtfield High Street.

They were about to rush across the pavement to the steps of the bank when the Bounder caught Wharton by the arm.

‘Hold on!’ he panted.

‘Come on, you mean!’ gasped Wharton. ‘He’s in there now. It’s a bank raid plain

enough!’

‘I know that. I know he’s got an automatic, too, and he’s got the bank people with their hands up!’

‘But—’

‘Don’t be a fool. The man would shoot you down like a rabbit. We’ve got to cut off his retreat, then he’ll be nailed!’ hissed the Bounder. ‘That car is waiting for him to escape in. Cut along to the corner—there’s a bobby there—sharp, while I collar that man in the car!’

Wharton hesitated a second.

But he realised at once that the Bounder was right. It was not much use for an unarmed schoolboy to rush into the building where an armed and desperate man was holding up the bank staff at the muzzle of an automatic pistol.

‘Right!’ breathed Wharton.

And he dashed along to the corner where a constable was on duty.

The Bounder turned to the car, and Johnny Bull and Bob Cherry turned with him. Ransome, sitting at the steering-wheel, stared at the schoolboys. He had heard the Bounder’s excited words to the captain of the Remove. From the bank had come no sound; the staff, and any customers who happened to be in the building, were evidently terrorised by the raider’s automatic. Who these schoolboys were, and how they knew what was going on, Ransome did not know; but he saw that the game was up. Waiting for his confederate meant arrest for himself. There is said to be honour among thieves, but that did not seem to apply to Captain Spencer’s confederate.

The car leaped into motion.

‘Stop him!’ yelled Bob Cherry.

‘Stop that car!’ roared Johnny Bull.

‘Let him go,’ said the Bounder coolly. ‘What does it matter, so long as the car is gone when the bank raider comes out?’

‘But—’

‘It’s the bank robber we want!’

The car, recklessly driven, dashed into the traffic. The Bounder did not even give it a glance as it went. For the man Ransome he cared nothing, or less than nothing.

Whether he escaped, or whether he was taken, mattered not a straw to the Bounder of Greyfriars. It was Captain Spencer, now in the bank building, that Herbert Vernon-Smith wanted; and now that his confederate had fled, the bank robber’s retreat was cut off.

Already the Courtfield constable with a startled and sceptical face was coning up to the bank entrance with Harry Wharton.

Bang!

It was the sudden report of a firearm within the bank.

The constable’s scepticism vanished as he heard that sharp, startling sound.

A cry followed the shot.

Instantly afterwards the policeman’s whistle rang out a shrill blast, and he grasped his truncheon.

The swing doors flew open, and a man with a red, bulbous nose and a scarred chin dashed down the steps. One of his pockets bulged with the loot hastily crammed into it; in his right hand he grasped an automatic pistol.

But for the intervention of the Bounder the raid would have been a complete success. Only one man in the bank had attempted to stop the raider, and he had been shot down, and lay wounded and groaning in the building as the robber dashed out. The desperate man required only a second to rush across the pavement to the waiting car

and dash away to safety. But the car was no longer there, and the pavement was blocked by a stalwart police constable, truncheon in hand, and six Greyfriars juniors. The bank raider was half-across the pavement before he realised how the position had changed.

‘Collar him!’ roared Bob Cherry.



The constable crumpled slowly to the ground

The bank raider halted, panting.

‘Collar him!’

‘Don’t let him get away!’

The automatic swung up.

‘Stand back!’ panted the desperate man.

Heedless of the levelled pistol, the constable rushed straight at him.

Bang!

To the startled eyes of the Greyfriars juniors it seemed like some terrible dream. They could scarcely believe their eyes as the desperate man fired, and the constable dropped on the pavement, his truncheon crashing to the ground. The bullet was in his leg, and he lay helpless; but his whistle was to his lips, and he was blowing it shrilly.

The bank raider turned and dashed up the street.

‘After him!’

The juniors had backed away from the automatic; but as the bank raider ran they rushed in pursuit.

There were wild shouts and cries from every direction now.

‘Stop him!’

‘Stop thief!’

‘After him!’

‘Stop him! Stop him!’

A shouting crowd joined in the pursuit. A man made a clutch at the fleeing robber, but jumped back from the threatening pistol, and the desperate fugitive ran on.

‘After him!’ hissed the Bounder.

Vernon-Smith was hot in pursuit. Besides the Greyfriars fellows, there were now at least forty or fifty people rushing after the desperate man. It was the first time that an armed bank raid had happened in Courtfield; but everyone had read of such things in the newspapers, and knew what it meant. The High Street was in a roar from end to end—every shop and house poured out its occupants. Right in the path of the fleeing man a police constable appeared, and the automatic barked again and again, but the hurried shots missed. There was a crash of breaking glass as the bullets shattered a shop-window.

The policeman's grasp was almost upon the hunted man, when he turned into a side street and escaped once more. But the hot pursuit swept round the corner after him, the constable now in the lead. Another and another constable appeared, apparently from nowhere, as if by magic. Missiles were flying, and the desperate fugitive was seen to stagger as a stone struck his head.

'We'll get him!' panted the Bounder.

A man leaped from a shop doorway and grasped the fugitive as he was running past, and brought him to the ground. There was a roar from the chasing mob behind. But the next moment the man who had seized the bank raider was rolling on the pavement, half-stunned by the crashing barrel of the automatic, and the fugitive was running again.

'Stop thief!'

'After him!'

The man-hunt was fairly up now. There were hundreds of people running and shouting.

The bank raider's case was hopeless. He had lost ground, and the pursuit was close behind. One stalwart constable, running hard, was only two yards behind the fleeing man, and behind him came a yelling mob. A quick-witted grocer's lad hurled his basket in front of the fugitive, and he stumbled over it before he could stop, and fell. But again he was up before he could be seized and furiously speeding on. The end of the street was an open lane, leading out into the country, and it seemed to be the desperate man's object to reach the open, perhaps with some delusive hope of escaping into the woods. But the chase was too hot and too close.

He turned suddenly and swung up his pistol. His eyes gleamed and glittered wildly over the weapon.

There was a gasp of alarm from the pursuing mob, and a wild scattering to avoid the coming shot.

Bang!

The policeman nearest the fugitive fell, with the bullet in his shoulder. The man was running again.

'Stop thief!'

The houses were left behind now, save for a few scattered buildings.

There were fences and hedges on either side of the raider as he ran, and behind him whooping hundreds. He stared round again, breathing in great gasps, desperate, hopeless, almost at the end of his tether. A heavy stone whizzed through the air and struck him, and he reeled. The next moment the grasp of the constable was on him, and he went to the ground with a crash, the pistol flying from his hand.

For a moment he struggled. But many hands were instantly upon him, and his resistance ceased. In the grasp of many hands, he was dragged to his feet. His despairing gaze swept the faces of the gathering crowd, thronging triumphantly round him. His eyes fell on the Bounder and blazed with rage. As if by intuition he knew to whom he owed his disaster.

'Got him!' gasped Bob Cherry.

'Got him!' repeated the Bounder, breathless, fatigued, but still cool. 'Got him! Your game's up, Captain Spencer.'

'You fool!' roared Bob. 'How dare you—'

'Look at him!'

In the brief struggle the false nose had been brushed from the man's face. A handsome nose was revealed, and its whiteness was in startling contrast to the dark complexion of the rest of the face. Obviously the man had been in disguise.

‘That man is Captain Spencer!’ said the Bounder in a loud, clear voice. ‘I watched him making up this afternoon; that complexion will wash off, and so will the scar on his chin. That man is Captain Eric Spencer, who robbed the bank at Lantham last week.’

‘Smithy—’

‘Look at him!’ jeered the Bounder.

A passing motor-car was signalled by one of the policemen, and stopped, and the captured bank robber placed in it, to be taken back to Courtfield. The excited mob followed in a stream. Harry Wharton & Co., scarcely knowing what to think, followed with the rest; it was borne in upon their minds at last that the Bounder was right.

At Courtfield, Herbert Vernon-Smith went into the police-station, where the captured man had been taken, to make his statement to Inspector Grimes. Harry Wharton & Co., with their minds in a whirl, waited for him to come out.

There was a smile on the Bounder’s face when he emerged. Inspector Grimes came to the door with him, with a very satisfied smile on his plump face. He was treating the Bounder with an air of very great consideration.

‘Well done—well done, indeed Master Vernon-Smith!’ said the inspector. ‘I shall report your services to your headmaster. This news will be a shock to him, but he will be glad to know that a Greyfriars boy was instrumental in exposing the scoundrel.’

‘I hope so!’ grinned the Bounder.

‘As a matter of fact, I had had an eye on the man,’ said Mr. Grimes. ‘Inspector Craven, of Lantham, consulted me about your report to him, Master Vernon-Smith.’

Harry Wharton came forward.

‘You’ve found out the name of the bank robber, Mr. Grimes?’ he asked.

Mr. Grimes glanced at him.

‘There’s no secret about that, Master Wharton,’ he said. ‘The man does not deny his identity.’

‘And his name—’

‘Captain Spencer.’

‘Oh!’ Harry Wharton & Co. turned away with heavy hearts. They were glad that a desperate law-breaker had been brought to justice; but the news was a terrible shock to them, and they could not share the triumph of the Bounder. They knew too that it would be a terrible shock to the Head of Greyfriars. But the Bounder was thinking only of his triumph and his face was bright, and he seemed to be walking on air as he left the police-station.

CHAPTER XXXII The Bounder’s Triumph

‘I SAY, you fellows!’

Billy Bunter met the chums of the Remove as they came into the School House very late for tea. Harry Wharton & Co. were not looking so merry and bright as usual; but the Bounder, who came in with them, was smiling. Bunter seemed to be full of news.

‘I say, you fellows, have you heard?’ exclaimed the Owl of the Remove. ‘There’s been another bank raid!’

‘Eh?’

‘Bank raid this afternoon at Courtfield, just like the one the other day at Lantham!’ said Bunter impressively.

The Famous Five could not help grinning. Evidently the fat junior was not aware that they had been on the scene when the Courtfield Bank had been raided.

'You don't say so, Bunter!' ejaculated Bob cherry.

'Fact!' said Bunter. 'You fellows never hear the news! Man held up the bank with a gun, or something, just the same as at Lantham!'

'Go hon!'

'I tell you it's so!' exclaimed Bunter. 'I had it from Hobson of the Shell. He was in Courtfield this afternoon, and saw a regular mob chasing the man. Where have you fellows been?'

'In Courtfield!' grinned Bob.

'Did you see anything?'

'The whole show.'

'Oh!' said Bunter. He realised that he was not first with the news this time. 'I say, you fellows, did they get the man?'

'They did.'

Bunter's eyes bulged with eager curiosity behind his spectacles.

'Who was it?' he gasped.

'My only hat!' ejaculated Bob Cherry. 'There must have been some truth, after all, in that yarn Bunter was spinning!'

'I told you it was true, didn't I?' roared Bunter.

'Yes. That made us think it wasn't, of course!'

'Oh, really, Cherry—'

'I knew it was true,' said the Bounder, with a grin, 'and it was partly owing to Bunter that I got on the man's track this afternoon.,'

'Well, a fellow couldn't be expected to guess that Bunter was telling the truth!' said Bob Cherry argumentatively. 'Naturally, that never occurred to anybody.'

'Beast! But they got the man—who was it?' gasped Bunter. 'Was it—you know whom, Smithy?'

'It was Captain Spencer,' said the Bounder. 'The other man got away—the man Ransome. Captain Spencer was the bank raider!'

'Vernon-Smith!'

It was a thunderous voice as Mr. Quelch came striding out of his study. The Remove master's brow was black with anger.

The Bounder faced him coolly.

'Yes, sir.'

'How dare you! I repeat, how dare you!' thundered Mr. Quelch. 'You were released from the punishment-room on your promise, your word of honour, to cease your slanderous stories concerning the Head's guest! You were warned in the plainest possible terms that if you broke your word you would be sent away from the school. Yet I hear you repeating your accusations! How dare you!'

He dropped his hand on the Bounder's shoulder.

'Come with me, Vernon-Smith! You have disregarded your promise, and you have repeated your slanderous accusation against Captain Spencer! You will be expelled from the school! I shall take you to the Head at once!'

With a thunderous brow, Mr. Quelch marched the Bounder away to the Head's study. His determination was fixed now. The rebel of the Remove had gone too far, and he should reap his reward. The cool confidence of the Bounder's manner perplexed Mr. Quelch, and enraged him further. He kept an angry grip on the Bounder's shoulder as he marched him away. He knocked at the Head's door, and marched the delinquent in. Dr. Locke had just laid down the receiver of the telephone, and he was sitting with a stricken, dazed look on his face. Mr. Quelch for the moment did not observe his expression. The Bounder did, and could guess that the Head had received information

from Inspector Grimes.

'Dr. Locke, I have brought this boy to you,' said Mr. Quelch. 'I regret to say that, in spite of all the warnings he has received, he has abused the leniency with which he has been treated. He has repeated in my hearing his wicked accusations against your guest. I trust, sir, that an example will be made at once of this rebellious and unscrupulous boy!'

'Mr. Quelch—'

The Head's voice faltered. It was obvious that he had had a heavy blow, and that it had deeply disturbed him.

'It is not too late, sir, for Vernon-Smith to leave Greyfriars today!' said the Remove master. 'Surely, sir, his presence in the school can no longer be tolerated! It is an insult to Captain Spencer!'

The Head sighed.

'There is no question of Vernon-Smith leaving Greyfriars, Mr. Quelch,' he answered. 'On the other hand, I owe him my thanks for having been instrumental in bringing an unscrupulous man to justice! His accusations against Captain Spencer were, after all, well founded!'

'Dr. Locke!'

'That unhappy man, Mr. Quelch, was guilty of what Vernon-Smith alleged against him! There is unfortunately no further doubt!'

'Impossible, sir!'

'It is a blow to me,' said the Head sadly. 'But the matter is now clear. It is plain that Eric Spencer was using his old school simply as a headquarters while he carried on his lawless proceedings. Mr. Quelch, there has been a raid on the bank in Courtfield this afternoon, and, largely owing to Vernon-Smith, the bank robber has been captured.'

'That does not concern Captain Spencer, sir.'

'I have just learned from Inspector Grimes at Courtfield that Captain Spencer is now under arrest.'

'Dr. Locke!'

'He is the man who held up the bank and wounded a bank official who tried to seize him, as well as two constables in the pursuit.'

'Good heavens!' gasped Mr. Quelch.

'That young man has deceived me most unscrupulously, Mr. Quelch. I can scarcely blame myself for having been deceived, for who could have divined his true character? The fact is, however, fully established now, and—and our thanks are due to this boy in your Form who attempted to place us on our guard against him, and to whom we refused to listen.'

Mr. Quelch stood transfixed.

'Is—is this certain, sir?' he almost babbled at last.

'And—and Captain Spencer—'

'He is the bank raider.'

'He may prove—'

'He was caught in the act, Mr. Quelch, and makes no denial.'

'Oh!' gasped Mr. Quelch.

The Bounder smiled.

'May I go now, sir?' he asked demurely.

'You may go, Vernon-Smith,' said the Head. 'I owe you my thanks, and I regret that I did not believe what you stated to me.'

'Thank you, sir!'

Mr. Quelch looked at the Bounder. There was a mocking gleam in Smithy's eyes. The Remove master breathed hard.

'It—it appears that this boy's statement was justified, then, sir?' he asked between his set lips.

'Fully, Mr. Quelch.'

'You have punished me for nothing, sir,' said the Bounder.

'That is not the case, Vernon-Smith,' said Mr. Quelch, in a grinding voice. 'Your statement was incredible, coming from a boy of your character. Had such a statement been made by a boy like Wharton, or Cherry, or Todd, it would have been heeded. It was not heeded, coming from you, because you are well known to be untruthful and unscrupulous. You have only yourself to thank. You appear to have rendered a service to the cause of the law, but that does not alter the fact that you have been disobedient, disrespectful, and disregarding of authority. You may go.'

And the Bounder, with a mocking smile, went. No doubt Mr. Quelch was glad that a man who had deceived his old headmaster, and made use of his old school for nefarious purposes, had been exposed and brought to justice. No doubt he was glad that a member of his Form had been useful in the cause of law and order. But certainly his feelings just then towards that member of his Form seemed more bitter than ever.

But the Bounder cared nothing.

He had beaten Quelch at the finish, as he regarded it, and that was enough for the rebel of Greyfriars.

He strolled along to the Rag with his hands in his pockets and a smile on his face.

There was a crowd in the Rag, discussing the amazing news of the arrest of Captain Spencer. Billy Bunter's fat voice was heard as the Bounder strolled in.

'I say, you fellows, I told you so all along—'

'Then don't tell us again!' suggested Bob Cherry.

'Oh, really, Cherry—'

'Hallo, hallo, hallo! Here's Smithy! Not licked this time, Smithy?'

The Bounder laughed.

'No. I've been thanked by the Head! Rather a new experience for me, and a big improvement on the punishment-room.'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'Was Quelch pleased?' grinned Skinner.

'Well, he may have been; but he didn't look pleased,' grinned the Bounder. 'It seemed rather an unpleasant pill for him to swallow. He didn't seem to like it at all. He wanted to see me safe home this very afternoon. It's rather a disappointment for the poor man. I feel for him!'

'Ha, ha, ha!'

'I dare say he will take it out of me in class,' drawled the Bounder. 'I shall have to be jolly careful with prep this evening, and put up a good con tomorrow. What a life!'

It was a nine-days wonder at Greyfriars. It was a triumph for the Bounder, and he enjoyed it to the full, all the more because it was, to a certain extent, a triumph over his Form-master. He had been proved in the right, and his Form-master in the wrong, which was a very unpleasant position for Mr. Quelch, but pleasant enough to the rebel of the Remove.